Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

and

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

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Official Report
(Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 3 November 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Alex Maskey: South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before we begin today's business, I wish to advise the House that I have received a letter from Mr Alex Maskey giving notice that he intends to resign as a Member for the South Belfast constituency with effect from 12.00 midnight on Monday 3 November. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Public Petition: Rail the Way for Armagh

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Mr Bradley has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member has three minutes in which to speak.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, as deis a thabhairt dom an achainí seo a chur faoi bhráid an Tionóil inniu. Is é atá san achainí seo, iarratas ar an Aire iarnród a athleagan idir cathair Ard Mhacha agus Port an Dúnáin. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to present this petition on behalf of the people of Armagh city and district calling for a rail link to be reinstated between Portadown and Armagh. Many may think that, because of the current economic situation, this is not a good time to call for any new infrastructure. However, I believe that we should give our people hope. The situation will improve, and, when it does, I hope that the link between Armagh and Portadown, which is very badly needed, will be built.

In 2013, when the Minister for Regional Development, Danny Kennedy, launched a consultation on the future of rail across the region, the people of Armagh seized the opportunity and made their voice heard. It was quite clear that they want the link to be established once again. It closed in the 1950s, and the site of the track is still there. I do not believe that that will be an impediment to having a rail line re-established. A new route can be identified. The Minister has expressed his support for the project, and, hopefully, when resources become available, it will be acted on.

Armagh is a centre for tourism, and people come from all over the world to visit the city. At the moment, the principal target of tourism seems to be Belfast. I believe that, if we had this link between Portadown and Armagh, it would encourage tourists who visit Belfast to make the trip to see the historic buildings and culture of Armagh city.

As you know, near Armagh city is the seat, the ancient capital, of Ulster, Eamhain Mhacha — Navan Fort. It is enshrined in our history. Armagh is one of the few cities in Europe that does not have a rail link.

I commend those who initiated the petition, especially Suzan McComb, who has coordinated their efforts. Today, we have a petition of 10,000 names, which calls on the Minister to reinstate the link between Portadown and Armagh.

Mr D Bradley moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I will forward a copy of the petition to the Minister for Regional Development and the Chairman of the Committee for Regional Development.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Education

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle uasail, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh i gcomhlíonadh le halt 52 de Acht 1998 maidir le cruinniú den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas i bhformáid oideachais. Bhí an cruinniú ar siúl in Ard Mhacha ar 22 Deireadh Fómhair 2014. Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998 regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in education format. The meeting was held in Armagh on 22 October 2014. This statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell and is made on behalf of us both. This was Jan O'Sullivan's first NSMC sectoral meeting as Minister for Education and Skills, and I look forward to working with her.

At the NSMC plenary meeting on Friday 3 October 2014, it was agreed that Ministers should consider the EU funding opportunities available within the various NSMC sectors. At our meeting on 22 October 2014, Minister O'Sullivan and I agreed to work together to identify and draw down EU funding where appropriate. The proposed Peace IV allocation for shared education is an obvious example of an area in which a joint approach may be pursued.

We noted the further work being undertaken through the North/South future sectoral work programme since the NSMC meeting in April 2014. We received a presentation from officials, which provided an update on the work programme. That included the outcomes from a workshop on 8 October between DE and Department of Education and Skills (DES) officials. The workshop addressed the theme of school planning and self-evaluation. We agreed that, at a practical level, work should be taken forward to establish a means by which the experience of schools across the island in delivering against specific challenges and identifying effective interventions can be shared to support improvements in addressing educational disadvantage.

Since the last NSMC meeting in April 2014, officials in DE and DES have been working on the development of a cross-border pilot to support leadership development; work that has involved groupings of head teachers from schools in both jurisdictions. The intention is to identify areas of common interest in the field of leadership development, identify means of mutual support and share best practice.

The Youth Council and the National Youth Council for Ireland gave an interesting and informative presentation on a range of youth sectoral issues on which they are collaborating. They are, for example, involved in work on measuring the impact of youth work, such as on the educational outcomes for young people. They are also promoting the more cost-effective use of ICT in the youth sector. The Council welcomed their plans to explore a range of funding opportunities to facilitate continued cooperation.

I recognise the continuing work of both inspectorates to extend cooperation during 2014. This cooperation included work on literacy and numeracy and continued programmes of inspection exchanges. The DES inspectorate has been invited to evaluate the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) work on promoting improvement in English and mathematics.

Turning to special educational needs, I am pleased to report continuing progress in relation to the expansion of services delivered by the Middletown Centre for Autism. It was reported to the NSMC that the programme of expansion had thus far delivered a range of service improvements, including an increased number of children with complex autism in the North receiving specialist multidisciplinary support; the commencement of a pilot offering similar support to children in the South; the recruitment of additional staff and provision of suitable office accommodation; the continuing delivery of training to educational professionals and parents; and the provision of online information and training materials for parents and professionals. Details were also given about the Middletown centre's forthcoming two-day conference in January 2015 on the theme of enabling education. It is targeted at educational professionals and parents of children with autism. At the meeting, I reiterated my ongoing support for the work of the centre in supporting some of our most vulnerable children.

Turning to teacher mobility, I welcome the continued commitment of both Education Departments, through the North/South teacher qualifications working group (NSTQWG), to continue to work with the teacher councils, North and South, to remove outstanding obstacles to teacher mobility on the island. The increased use of an in-house desk assessment of applications for registration with the Teaching Council Ireland (TCI) continues to yield benefits. Further work on simplifying the assessment of the qualifications process with the TCI will follow on from the completion of work on the review and redesign of teacher education programmes in the South, which is expected to finish in the first quarter of 2015.

Progress continues to be made in relation to the Irish language requirement. The Teaching Council Ireland is progressing the development of outcomes-based criteria for the Irish language requirement registration condition, with a view to securing TCI's approval in December 2014 and to making them available to St Mary's University College and other higher education institution providers.

Work on the implementation of an extension of the North/South collaborative programme of work in the Irish-medium sector for the 2013-14 academic year has now been completed, and I am pleased to report that the NSTQWG has decided to extend the programme into 2014-15. A programme plan for 2014-15 developed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers in the South and the Curriculum Advisory Support Service in the North has recently been approved by both Departments. I am pleased to report that an independent evaluation of the programme, looking at its work up to the end of 2013-14, has been commissioned. This will provide an opportunity to review how we have done to this point and what lessons we can learn and will help to inform future work in the sector.

The twelfth annual standing conference on teacher education North and South (SCoTENS) on the theme of 'Always learning, always teaching: Making the journey' took place in Enniskillen on 21 and 22 October 2014.

The Council welcomed the work of the North/South education and training standards committee for youth work. We learned of the work being taken forward to raise

standards of youth work practice and improve outcomes for young people and to increase workforce mobility across the island of Ireland. We also learned of aspirations to develop quality standards for youth work education and training and continuous development plans to develop a formal mechanism for the recognition of youth work training programmes at all levels on the island of Ireland.

Finally, we approved the appointment of Mr Tarlach Ó Crosáin to the board of the trade and business development body from 22 October 2014 to 12 December 2015, and, on behalf of Waterways Ireland, we approved the sale of the freehold interest in property at 9 Hanover Quay, Dublin 2 to Mrs Rita Crosby.

Mar fhocal scoir, d'aontaigh na hAirí teacht le cheile arís i mí an Mhárta 2015. Ministers agreed that the North/South Ministerial Council in education format should meet again in March 2015.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): According to the 2013 annual report of the Middletown Centre for Autism, this body receives roughly equal levels of funding, £673,000 from DE and £690,000 from DES. Can the Minister advise whether he plans to address what appears to be a disparity in the provision of services to parents and, indeed, professionals by Middletown?

I refer to the 6,410 parents from the Irish Republic who are receiving help in 2013-14, compared with around only 895 parents from Northern Ireland. Does the Minister believe that the current arrangements at Middletown provide good value for money for Northern Ireland taxpayers?

12.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for her question. She may or may not be aware that different services are provided to different jurisdictions by the Middletown centre. They were agreed as part of the expansion work of the Middletown centre. That may explain the difference in the numbers of parents and pupils receiving support in specific areas of the services provided by the Middletown centre. During my address, I pointed out that the southern Administration are looking at services that are currently being provided to pupils in the North solely, and they may wish to expand that service. I will give the Member more details in writing.

Mr Dallat: I have had the honour and privilege of teaching in both parts of Ireland. Does the Minister agree that it is totally unacceptable in this day and age to have impediments placed in the way of the free movement of teachers between the Republic and Northern Ireland? Can he assure us that, by spring of next year, teachers, North and South, will be free to move?

Mr O'Dowd: I accept the sentiment behind the Member's point: there should be free movement of teachers across the island of Ireland. The reality is that 90 years of partition have thrown up different regulations and governance arrangements in the jurisdictions that need to be overcome. I welcome the work that is being carried out by the Teaching Council in the South and, indeed, by our General Teaching Council here in removing those impediments.

Steps have already been taken that have eased the flow of teachers, and a review of teacher training and provision is taking place in the South, which is required to be taken into account before any further steps are taken. However, I believe that progress is being made. I am confident that, when I report to the Assembly after our March 2015 meeting, further progress will have been made in the removal of impediments to teachers travelling across the island to teach and work.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement. The third paragraph refers to shared education. Given that we seem to have slightly different definitions of shared education, what are we looking at here in shared education? Is it talking about controlled, maintained or integrated with a capital "I" or with a small "i"? Is it Irish-medium? What are we looking at for shared education and what is it all about? Obviously, I am keen to see it there and see it funded.

Mr O'Dowd: The current proposal is being looked at under the funding mechanism. It is a follow-on from the plenary session of the North/South Ministerial Council of 3 October, when both Administrations urged their Ministers to explore options for accessing European funding coming forward. One of the options that my Department is looking at is shared education under our current definition of shared education. We will work with our counterparts in the South to discuss whether we can make a joint bid in relation to shared education. I would like to see it across all sectors. Obviously, if we are working with our partners in the South, it will involve cross-border work. We wish to move forward with an all-inclusive shared education programme, but discussions will continue with our Southern counterparts on the full detail of it.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his statement. There are references to teacher mobility, collaborative programmes in the work of the Irish-medium sector and school youth and teacher exchanges. In the context of cross-border cooperation and even though it is not in the statement, has any progress been made in respect of the border corridor and the possibility of cooperation between schools on either side of the border? He can safely assume that I am talking about St Mary's, Brollagh.

Mr O'Dowd: The answer to that question is "Yes. Discussions are ongoing". I have had discussions with Minister O'Sullivan. In fairness, she was only into post and was not familiar with all aspects of the programme at that time. Officials from the Western Board and CCMS have had initial discussions with their counterparts in the South on possibilities for cooperation in relation to St Mary's, Brollagh, and across the board. They are at an early stage, and detail has to be added to those discussions before we can decide what conclusions, if any, they will come to.

In relation to the cross-border sharing of experiences, as I also mentioned in my statement, we are bringing together school principals and leaders from across the border areas to share experiences, expertise and teaching and leadership practice in their schools, which will also benefit the border corridor.

Mr McCausland: I notice in the statement that there is reference to the collaborative work between the Youth Council and the National Youth Council for Ireland and, in particular, exploring funding. One of the ways in which that was done in the past was to help to fund youth exchanges. In the context of cultural diversity, building a shared future and what is sometimes called the totality of relationships, can the Minister assure us that this will not in any way create or perpetuate an imbalance whereby children

in Northern Ireland would only be able to experience exchange with the Irish Republic but not with other regions of the United Kingdom?

Mr O'Dowd: That is not the purpose of the task at all. I am fully supportive of youth exchanges between these groups of islands and have no difficulty about whether they are North/South or east-west. Indeed, I am very supportive of any such exchanges. It broadens the experiences of our young people; they meet new and common cultures as they grow from youth into adulthood. I assure the Member that I will not place any barriers in the way of east-west relationships or, indeed, North/South relationships.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat arís, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagraí go dtí seo. Ba mhaith liom an cheist seo a chur ar an Aire: an dtiocfadh leis a rá cad é mar a chuaigh na hathruithe a ghlac Foras na Gaeilge isteach faoin tsamhail nua maoinithe i bhfeidhm ar an earnáil Gaelscolaíochta, Thuaidh agus Theas? I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. What is the Minister's estimation of how the changes in the Foras na Gaeilge funding regime have affected the delivery of Irish-medium preschool, in particular, on a North/South basis?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I have had discussions with Foras na Gaeilge in relation to moving forward with preschool education. My departmental officials and Foras na Gaeilge will continue those discussions. The Member will be aware that I had to make an intervention earlier this year in relation to two posts that were previously funded but which are under Altram. I have had discussions with Foras na Gaeilge about how long-term that intervention will be. As I said, I will work closely with Foras na Gaeilge as we move forward on cross-border studies and early years Irish-medium education.

Mrs Overend: I note that the Minister refers to teacher mobility. Surely one of the biggest obstacles to teacher mobility, even in Northern Ireland, is that non-Catholic teachers cannot obtain employment in Catholic maintained primary schools because of the religious certificate obstacle. Did the Ministers discuss that issue? Can the Minister tell us what the situation is in the Republic of Ireland? When will we see some positive change on the issue?

Mr O'Dowd: First, it is not accurate to say that non-Catholic teachers cannot obtain posts in Catholic schools: they can and they do. In relation to the equality issues around the Catholic certificate, that is a matter for OFMDFM, as it is responsible for equality legislation. If the Member wishes to know more about teaching practices in the South of Ireland, I respectfully suggest that she sit down with Minister O'Sullivan and have a cordial and informative meeting with her.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that the Minister has referred to engagements with officials in DE and DES in relation to cross-border pilots, and I note the Minister's comments on some questions previously. Given Minister O'Sullivan's indications around a cross-border learning zone in the north-west, can the Minister throw any more light on that in relation to Derry, Letterkenny and Strabane? Indeed, what will a cross-border learning zone mean or entail?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said to other Members, these are at early discussion stage, particularly the Brollagh issue. Sharing expertise across the border is also at quite an early stage of discussion. We have brought school leaders together. My officials and DES officials regularly meet on a wide range of issues, including specific issues of how we cooperate better along the border corridor, and that will include Derry and Letterkenny. We will develop those programmes of work, and we will learn from the practitioners on the ground. They are best placed to tell us what the challenges are and how they can learn from one another across the border corridor. As that programme of work develops, I will report to the Assembly on the matter.

Budget 2015-16: Public Expenditure

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind the House that, with the exception of the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, Members are required to ask one question only. The time for questions is limited to one hour, and over 40 Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I will attempt to facilitate as many Members as possible. Anyone who does not come to their question quickly will be asked to resume their seat so that more Members will have an opportunity. If that is clear, I will call the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to be able to present to the Assembly the Executive's agreed draft Budget for 2015-16. Only a matter of weeks ago, few people thought the Executive capable of agreeing a draft Budget or that we could do so by the end of October; yet, today, I present the Executive's draft Budget to the House. Failure to agree a Budget would have been an abdication of our responsibilities and, whatever the truth, the public would have held us all accountable.

With devolution, it is our duty in good and bad economic times alike to make sure that the Budget reflects the priorities of those who sent us here. It means making the best of what we have been given. It has been said that leadership demands that we make tough choices: this, Mr Deputy Speaker, is a Budget rooted in tough choices.

We are all by now, I hope, well aware of the range of challenges that we faced as we constructed our draft Budget for 2015-16. The tightening UK public spending environment that began in 2010 continues apace, and the pressures placed on services by the public do not abate. However, the resources available to fund those pressures have reduced dramatically. Between 2014-15 and 2015-16 alone, the Executive's resource DEL decreased by 1·6 % in real terms. Compared with 2010-11, when the Assembly last agreed a Budget, the Executive's spending power has been reduced by around £1·5 billion. Looking ahead, Office for Budget Responsibility projections show that we can expect our resource DEL to fall by a further 13% in real terms by 2019. So, in this year and beyond, we will have a wide range of increasing demands placed on our public services while we have fewer and fewer resources with which to meet that growing demand. It is a situation that demands that tough, sometimes even undesirable, choices be made.

Nelson Mandela once said:

> *"May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears."*

Tough as the years ahead will undoubtedly be, it is our job to use the resources at our disposal in ways that fulfil the hopes of the people of Northern Ireland: their hopes for themselves, their families and their community; their hopes for a growing economy, creating opportunities for all; and their hopes for first-rate public services. In spite of the challenges that we face, our draft Budget for 2015-16 is one built on hope, not fear. It is founded on our shared desire to see a vibrant economy driven by private sector investment; to see our region and its people meet their potential; to achieve a Budget that embodies our hopes for the future; and to place our emphasis on key public services that can shape the Northern Ireland we need and want. This draft Budget is an important step towards those aspirations, in spite of the huge challenges that we face.

While much debate and discussion today and in the days ahead will be around how much individual Departments will have to spend next year, our draft Budget is not merely about distributing the money that we have; it is about allocating those resources in a way that will assist us in delivering our priorities as an Executive. The Assembly will be familiar with the fact that the Executive made the economy their top priority. That focus and the investments that followed have borne fruit. During my statement on last year's October monitoring round, I informed the House that key indicators were showing positive trends, and I informed it of my belief that the local economy was showing signs of improvement. This year, I can dispense with the cautious optimism. At long last, I am pleased to report that the Northern Ireland economy has well and truly overcome the considerable challenges of the last number of years and has entered into recovery.

12.30 pm

The evidence that we have exited the worst economic crisis in living memory and have turned the corner into better times is irrefutable. The Northern Ireland composite economic index, published in October, shows an annual rise in the local economy of 1·2% since quarter 2 of 2013. Interestingly, it is our private sector that is driving growth, rather than the public sector. The services and production sectors drove the 1·2% annual increase, with 1·1% and 1% rises respectively, while the public sector was down by 0·4%.

The positive direction in our economy is backed up by the estimates of growth made by independent forecasters like the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy and by survey evidence from Ulster Bank's purchasing managers' index. Unemployment levels are now heading in the right direction, with the claimant count going down for 21 consecutive months. There were almost 10,000 fewer claimants in September 2014 compared with a year before. Unemployment now stands at 6·1%, a little above the UK average. While that is still higher than we would like it to be, it is considerably lower than that of our neighbours in the Irish Republic, who have an unemployment rate of 11·5%, and the EU average, which is 10.2%. The latest figures show that the number of people in employment increased by 21,000 compared with the same time last year. Our employment rate, which stands at 68·3%, while still below the UK average, increased by 1·6 percentage points over the year.

The House will know just how central the collapse in the local property market was to the economic crisis in Northern Ireland. I am pleased to report that property prices are also recovering, with the latest Northern Ireland residential property price index recording an increase in residential property prices of 10% over the year to quarter 2 of 2014. Over 4,800 properties were sold during quarter 2 of 2014, which represented a 25% increase compared with a year before. Those are clear signs of growing confidence in our economy.

The structural economic constraints that Northern Ireland faces are well known. Gross value added per capita, which is a measure of the whole economy and is widely recognised as an indicator of relative living standards, stands at just above 75% of the UK average. In 2011-12 — the most recent figures we have — total public sector

revenue collected in Northern Ireland was estimated at £14·1 billion. The total public sector expenditure over the same period was estimated at £23·8 billion. That is a fiscal deficit of approximately £9·6 billion.

Although our fiscal position is not as strong as we would like, public spending in Northern Ireland remains high compared with other parts of the UK, even if it has not risen at the rate that we would like. In 2012-13, each person in Northern Ireland had £10,876 spent on them by government, compared with only £8,529 in England. At its starkest, Northern Ireland's citizens get £2,347 more in public spending per head than their counterparts in England. In key public services, we spend more per head of the population than the other devolved regions. HM Treasury's public expenditure statistical analyses for 2014 show how Northern Ireland spends significantly more per person on education and social protection than Scotland or Wales. I do not want to see Northern Ireland subsidised to the extent that it is any more than the next person, but those numbers are a blunt reminder that our economy and therefore our tax base are not strong enough to stand on their own. We face fiscal realities that make our aim of rebalancing the economy an immense challenge, yet, in a range of ways, we can see not just recovery in Northern Ireland but, importantly, how the policies pursued by the Executive are helping to progressively transform our economy.

Members will know how important it is to increase expenditure on research and development, drive up our exports and develop new sectors of the economy where there is potential for growth if we are to change our economy and turn it into the vibrant, dynamic, outward-looking economy that we aspire to. On all those fronts, I can report success for Northern Ireland. The latest official GVA figures for 2012 show that GVA in Northern Ireland increased by 1·2% from 2011. Total R&D expenditure in Northern Ireland in 2012 was £624·1 million. That represents a year-on-year increase of £57 million, driven primarily by the private sector. Our growing expenditure on research and development is marking Northern Ireland out globally as a small but very innovative nation.

The manufacturing sales and exports survey 2012-13 showed that total manufacturing sales by Northern Ireland companies were up annually by 1·9% and that the value of sales outside Northern Ireland was up by £415 million to £13·3 billion. That represents the highest ever level of external manufacturing sales. Not only is the market for our manufacturing businesses growing but, importantly, three quarters of sales are outside Northern Ireland, illustrating how our focus on exports is paying off.

Our agrifood sector has been a real success story, defying the odds during the downturn. Total gross turnover in the food and drink processing sector was up by £285 million — 6·7% — in 2013 to a total of £4·5 billion. Employment in the sector also rose by 2% over the same period to 20,390.

Tourism is a sector that has huge potential for Northern Ireland. Investments by the Executive in infrastructure such as Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway visitor centre, along with attracting world-renowned events such as the Giro d'Italia and the Irish Open, allow us to capitalise on that potential. There were 4·2 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland between July 2013 and June 2014, with a total spend by visitors in the year to June 2014 of £755 million, which represents a 6% annual increase.

The year 2013-14 was also a record one for Invest NI. Nearly 11,000 jobs were promoted across Northern Ireland; over £1 billion in new investment commitments was secured; and almost £250 million in research and development expenditure was encouraged. Invest NI has begun this financial year as it finished last year. In excess of 7,000 jobs have been promoted by Invest NI in the seven months since April. I am sure that the whole House will join me in congratulating my colleague the Enterprise Minister, Arlene Foster MLA, and Invest NI chief executive, Alastair Hamilton, for the work that they have put in to make Northern Ireland a prime destination for investment.

The attraction of major investments this year by the likes of Concentrix, Moy Park, Baker and McKenzie, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Ernst and Young and Deloitte emphasises how Northern Ireland is an increasingly popular place for firms to invest in and to grow and create employment. A recent UK Trade and Investment report highlighted the fact that foreign direct investment (FDI) projects into Northern Ireland for 2013-14 had increased by 32% compared with the previous year, which represented the highest growth of all UK regions. That follows the 2014 Ernst and Young UK attractiveness survey, which showed that Northern Ireland secured 4·5% of all FDI projects into the UK in 2013, considerably higher than our population share. Per capita, Northern Ireland secured almost 40% more new inward investment jobs than the next best region and three times as many as London. Belfast is now the number one destination globally for financial technology investment.

The mosaics that adorn the ceiling of the Senate Chamber just down the corridor reflect the shipbuilding, linen and farming heritage that helped build our nation. We are justifiably proud of our industrial past, but we have much to be proud of in the new Northern Ireland economy. We are the first region in Europe to achieve 100% broadband coverage; one in three of London's famous red buses is built in Ballymena; one in every three business class aircraft seats is made in Kilkeel; one in five computer hard drives contains a part made in Londonderry; and 40% of the world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is made in County Tyrone. Times may have changed, the industries may have changed too, but what remains constant is the ability of Northern Ireland to punch well above its weight in the world economy.

Our economy is beginning to rebalance. The policies that the Executive have pursued, the investments that we have made and the endeavours of colleagues such as the Enterprise Minister, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister — all the Executive's efforts together — have paid dividends. Our plan to rebuild and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy is working, although there is still much work to do. That is why we must maintain our concentration on growing a vibrant and dynamic economy, continue to devise and implement policies that aid industry and, so far as we can, invest as much of our limited resources as possible in areas that will yield economic benefit. The draft Budget builds on our recent economic successes and points to a future of continued economic growth and prosperity.

The House will be aware that the majority of the funding available to the Executive comes via the block grant from the Treasury. That comprises two elements: annually managed expenditure (AME), which funds volatile spending

programmes such as pensions and benefits; and the departmental expenditure limit (DEL), which the Executive may allocate to their specific priorities and programmes. The latter is, of course, the focus of the draft Budget.

The Executive's total resource DEL allocation for 2015-16 is £10·2 billion. Some £550 million of that relates to ring-fenced resource DEL that may be used solely to fund non-cash costs in respect of depreciation and impairments. That leaves £9·7 billion available to the Executive to fund public services. The Executive's total capital DEL budget for 2015-16 is £1·1 billion, up slightly on the 2014-15 level. However, that includes an increasing level of financial transactions capital (FTC) — some £128 million — which may be used only for loans to or equity investment in private sector entities.

One way in which the Executive may increase their spending power is through the revenue raised by the regional rate. In the 2011-15 Budget, the Executive, recognising that householders are still dealing with the impact of the downturn on their incomes, agreed that the domestic and non-domestic regional rates would be increased only in line with inflation. I am pleased to announce that this will continue to be the case for 2015-16. This will result in an estimated 2015-16 regional rate income of £649·8 million.

Members will be aware of the calls by some to raise more revenue by stopping so-called super-parity measures. In my view, those who argue that the answer to our budgetary problems is simply to introduce water charges or to hike rates bills are wrong and misguided. This is a devolved Assembly, and it is up to those of us elected to serve in the House to decide what is in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. If devolution is to mean anything, it is not about slavishly following the policies of other parts of the United Kingdom. It is about tailoring policies to suit the circumstances of Northern Ireland, and that is what we have done.

I am proud of the fact that Northern Ireland has the lowest household taxes in the whole of the United Kingdom. The average household bill in Northern Ireland in 2013-14 was £812 compared with £1,322 in Scotland, £1,433 in England and £1,613 in Wales. I make no apology for keeping local taxes low. There are public spending consequences, but it is the right thing to do. I believe in keeping as much money as possible in people's pockets. Taking it from them might give us some short-term public spending satisfaction, but the impact on consumer confidence and economic recovery should not be dismissed. Keeping local taxes low is the right thing for the people of Northern Ireland. I can also confirm that the draft Budget is predicated on the continuation of a small business rate relief scheme, offering £20 million of support to thousands of Northern Ireland's small businesses.

On the capital side, the Executive also have the ability to borrow up to £200 million each year under the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) to fund capital investment. I propose that we continue to draw down the maximum available RRI borrowing in 2015-16, in part to continue boosting the local economy and construction sector.

I turn to the detail of the draft Budget outcome. In determining this position, a number of Executive commitments required consideration. I am pleased to announce that the Executive have agreed funding for several central issues, which include £5 million allocated to OFMDFM to cover the costs of the historical institutional abuse inquiry and £10·7 million in resource DEL and £8 million in capital DEL for EU match funding, which will be held at the centre for allocation to Departments as part of the final Budget. The £15 million cost of providing a level of support for rates convergence has been factored into the regional rate calculation, and there has been a retention in the DSD baseline of the funding to cover the cost of the 10% cut applied to the housing benefit rates rebate. In recognition of the importance of the Executive's Delivering Social Change agenda, the social investment fund and the commitment to funding the childcare strategy action plan, the draft Budget outcome maintains funding at the 2014-15 level. Some £14 million resource DEL and £15 million capital DEL is held at the centre for disbursement by Executive decision at a later date.

The Executive also face strategic pressures on our resource DEL. Members will recall that, to help to alleviate the significant pressures facing the Executive in 2014-15, the Chancellor agreed access to the national reserve of up to £100 million. That must be repaid from the Executive's 2015-16 Budget. I have approached the Treasury to seek the flexibility to reclassify funding raised from the sale of capital assets to resource to alleviate the additional pressure that this would place on the Executive's resource DEL.

An issue that all Departments will have to address in 2015-16 is the financial impact of the ongoing public sector pension scheme revaluations. That work is likely to result in significant additional employer contribution costs, particularly for the health and education sectors.

My officials are engaging with HM Treasury and the Government Actuary's Department to seek to ameliorate these costs. In the interim, the Executive have agreed to hold £133 million centrally to help to alleviate this pressure on Departments.

12.45 pm

The Executive have agreed to set aside £70 million to fund a package of measures designed to mitigate the impact of welfare reform changes on the most vulnerable.

In determining a draft Budget outcome, an important consideration was the treatment of the Department of Justice. When policing and justice was devolved in 2010, Her Majesty's Government put in place a specific funding package. In order to manage this, the DOJ budget was ring-fenced. With the exception of funding for national security measures, which remain ring-fenced, that specific funding package has come to an end, and it is only appropriate that the ring-fence on the Department of Justice does likewise. This will fully integrate DOJ into the local Budget process and allow effective management of the aggregate financial position.

The starting point for our resource DEL was the 2014-15 opening monitoring position, adjusted to remove time-bound Executive allocations and EU-related funding, which has yet to be distributed. After the baseline was established, a level of reductions was agreed that would provide funding for the central and strategic pressures, along with an amount to be allocated in support of key services. In applying these reductions, elements of the Department of Health's budget relating to front line health and social care pressures have been protected. This

meant that the remaining elements of its budget faced the same level of reductions as other Departments.

In line with the independent role that the Assembly Commission, the Audit Office and the Assembly Ombudsman exercise, savings targets have not been imposed on them. However, I have every expectation that these bodies will have due regard for the overall Budget position in 2015-16, seek to manage their internal pressures from within their overall resource allocations and seek to achieve similar savings, returning any efficiencies to the Executive for redistribution.

In making allocations, I believed that it was crucial that the Executive gave careful consideration to supporting their key priorities, as well as ensuring that legal or contractual inescapable pressures in Departments were met. With this strategic approach in mind, the following resource DEL allocations were made.

In light of the significant and well-publicised pressures facing health, an additional £200 million allocation has been agreed, equating to a real terms increase of 1·7%.

The Department of Education was allocated £145 million to provide it with an element of protection.

DOJ has received £29·5 million of ring-fenced national security funding from Her Majesty's Treasury and an additional £45 million from the Executive in recognition of the pressures facing the PSNI. There is also a capital DEL allocation for national security funding amounting to £1·5 million.

The Invest NI baseline in DETI, which was previously reduced due to the economic downturn, has been reinstated to the tune of £7·7 million. A further £30 million has been provided to DETI to ensure that our recent impressive record in job creation can continue.

DRD has received £20 million for the reinstatement of the Budget 2011-15 decision on income to be generated from Belfast port funding and £9·5 million for concessionary fares. DEL has been provided with a further £15 million to support the further education sector, in particular, for provision for 16- to 18-year-olds. DARD receives £15 million for TB compensation, CAP disallowance and reform. DCAL has received £2.8 million for the wide range of pressures that it faces. DFP has received £3 million towards non-domestic revaluation pressures. DOE is allocated £2 million to offset reductions to local government grants. The PPS has received £2 million for baseline budgetary pressures. Finally, OFMDFM receives £3 million funding for the Victims and Survivors Service.

In addition to these specific allocations, £124·5 million of funding was then provided, pro rata, to Departments facing reductions to help to alleviate the worst impacts.

The result of these various allocations and reductions is an overall cut in resource DEL expenditure by Departments of £213 million, with all Departments, aside from the Health and Enterprise Departments, in a minus position. While this is considerably lower than the 15% that all Departments, with the exception of the Health Department, were planning for just a few weeks ago, I fully appreciate that many will be placed under considerable pressure in delivering savings on this scale. We should not attempt to mask the fact that these reductions will alter the shape and nature of our public sector.

If past performance is any indicator, it is likely that many Ministers will seek to make the savings required by their Departments by way of an identical percentage cut across their services. This, in my view, is the wrong approach in these circumstances. These are not pure efficiencies, the like of which we have become accustomed to in previous Budgets; rather, these savings and this process may involve the cessation of some lower priority services in Departments.

Capital does not have the same uniform spending pattern that applies to resource spend, so an incremental approach is not appropriate. Therefore, a zero-based approach has been taken by my Department. That involved an assessment of contractual and Executive commitments alongside a consideration of PFG targets and existing departmental priorities. As ministerial colleagues will no doubt have their own priorities, the capital position, though founded on specific projects and programmes, will be provided as a capital envelope within which Ministers can allocate as they see fit.

However, I think it is worth highlighting a few of the major projects that will be funded within this position. In health, those include: the new regional children's hospital; the maternity new build and the critical care block at the Royal Victoria Hospital; phase B of the Ulster Hospital; Omagh local hospital phase 1; and Altnagelvin phase 5. The A2 Greenisland, A8 Belfast to Larne, A26 Glarryford and the A31 Magherafelt bypass have all received funding, along with the Belfast rapid transit scheme. Significant funding has also been provided to the Department of Education for various schools schemes, and DSD has received allocations for new-build social housing and co-ownership. Those projects show the Executive's ongoing commitment of investing in infrastructure projects that will improve public services and the Northern Ireland economy.

The capital allocations also include £26·8 million to DE, DEL and DSD in respect of Together: Building a United Community. That is funded by additional RRI borrowing, agreed under the economic pact.

A total of £115·6 million of financial transactions capital has been allocated to Departments for projects involving loans to, or equity investment in, the private sector. A number of those projects require further refinement and that position will be revisited at the final Budget stage.

Investment in infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth. As Members will be aware, we collectively invest directly in large-scale projects, such as roads, public transport, hospitals, schools and water infrastructure, which are all in public sector ownership. However, there are a number of areas where significant infrastructure investment is usually taken forward by the private sector but where we have a particular interest since investment helps to deliver on specific Northern Ireland Executive objectives. Those areas include: social and affordable housing; energy production; energy efficiency and renewable energy; telecommunications; and urban regeneration. I am keen to ensure that project promoters in all those areas have easy access to affordable project finance. I am therefore proposing to establish a Northern Ireland investment fund to support investment in local infrastructure. That fund may utilise some of the financial transactions capital funding available to the Executive in 2015-16. It would also potentially allow large international investors, including the European Investment Bank, to

invest in local projects that would usually be too small in scale to access that type of finance.

As a first step, I have commissioned a study into the feasibility and extent of that fund, and I envisage that taking four to five months to complete. That will inform the scope, scale, design and investment strategy of a potential fund. It will include determining realistic and deliverable investment need and demand, an appropriate investment strategy and delivery options to meet the Northern Ireland Executive's objectives. The feasibility study will also inform the ideal scale of the fund. I anticipate that the creation of this investment fund will, in the first instance, make a further £1 billion available for investment in infrastructure across Northern Ireland. The Executive have agreed that the unallocated £12·1 million FTC should be set aside to provide an initial balance to the fund. We can further review the funding requirements once the feasibility study has concluded.

The House knows of my ongoing focus on the need to reform our public sector. Never has the need to renew, redesign, rethink, restructure and reform government been clearer than in the financial circumstances we now find ourselves in. What we face is not one year of serious budget pressures. This is the new landscape for the remainder of this decade and perhaps even beyond. What Northern Ireland needs is not just adjustments so that we stay within our Budget. It is imperative that, as we face further funding constraints, we continue to develop and enhance our already extensive and ambitious reform programme aimed at delivering savings for the Executive as well as improved public services.

We have now engaged the OECD to undertake its first ever sub-national public governance review. The Executive have agreed to the OECD benchmarking elements of our public sector against international best practice. This groundbreaking work will assist the Northern Ireland Executive in identifying significant reform opportunities that will enhance public service delivery in the years ahead.

Members will also be aware of some of the reform architecture that I have put in place. Initiatives like the public sector innovation laboratory and our open-data challenge have followed on from our existing successful reforms such as our world-class shared services, digital transformation programme and asset management strategy. This draft Budget builds on that good start.

Making reform a reality can often require upfront investment that will garner long-term benefits. With that in mind, the Executive have agreed to allocate £30 million to a change fund. The fund is tailored specifically towards reform-orientated projects that are innovative, involve collaboration between Departments and agencies, or focus on prevention. Departments have been asked to submit bids to my Department, and those that are successful will be outlined in the final Budget.

While we would all prefer to be initiating reforms that are purely about improving public services, the starkness of our situation dictates that urgent action is needed to place our Budget on a long-term sustainable foundation. To that end, officials in my Department have, with the agreement of the Executive, been developing a workforce restructuring plan. This will embrace all possible personnel interventions, including a recruitment freeze, suppressing vacancies, the use of temporary staff, pay restraint and a voluntary exit mechanism, to reduce workforce numbers.

I will bring a paper to the Executive within the next fortnight that will detail plans for addressing these issues. Elements of the restructuring, such as any voluntary exit scheme, will require setting aside upfront funding. Funding of the scheme will be vital to ensure we can deliver the restructuring our public sector requires to enable it to live within the ever more constrained resource DEL position.

I have begun negotiations with Her Majesty's Treasury to approve the use of £100 million of RRI borrowing to capitalise the cost of the workforce restructuring. That flexibility, alongside the reclassification of funding to cover the repayment of the reserve claim, will be vital in allowing the Executive to manage the difficult public expenditure environment that lies ahead.

In his 1962 State of the Union address, President John F Kennedy said:

> *"We sometimes chafe at the burden of our obligations, the complexity of our decisions, the agony of our choices. But there is no comfort or security for us in evasion, no solution in abdication, no relief in irresponsibility."*

I do not underestimate the burden, complexity or indeed agony of the challenges we face next year and into the future. However, in this draft Budget, we begin to show that we are able to take the tough choices; not evading, and not abdicating our responsibilities. In the sort of situation we face, where the money we have at our disposal is falling, where the pressure on key public services like health rises year on year, and where costs like public sector pensions revaluation are considerable, it is impossible to construct a draft Budget where everyone is a winner.

I am sure that every Finance Minister everywhere would always prefer to be announcing a Budget where they were able to spread largesse around every Department with no one losing out. Unfortunately, that is not the hand I have to play. We must play the hand as it has been dealt. That means difficult decisions and tough choices.

Given the inevitable impact of Budget adjustments of this scale, perhaps the easy option was to oppose this draft Budget. That would have been the irresponsible choice. Rejection of the draft Budget last week would have plunged us into an immediate crisis. Not only would Northern Ireland have been without a Budget for next year, and all the problems that that would entail, but we would have lost access to the £100 million loan facility that helped us with our in-year budgetary problems. Opposition or abstention might seem like an easy option, especially when you know that there are others who have the courage to do the heavy lifting that you are not prepared to do. Those who failed to support this draft Budget must explain not just why but what their credible alternative is —

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hamilton: — and what they would have done when the £100 million loan disappeared.

This draft Budget has been constructed in the most challenging financial circumstances to face any Administration in the history of Northern Ireland. However, despite the multitude of challenges the Executive face, we have agreed a draft Budget that prioritises what is important to the people of Northern Ireland.

When I began working on this draft Budget, I was deeply concerned that the scale of the pressures facing the Executive were so severe that the adjustments to public spending would be devastating. Cuts of 15% were on the cards for the vast majority of Departments. Instead, we have worked hard to stave off the worst, find imaginative ways to deal with our financial difficulties and still make significant allocations to priority areas.

We have produced a balanced Budget with no overcommitment. We are building on the economic recovery by funding job creation, investing in infrastructure and creating a £1 billion investment fund. We have focused on reform and restructuring our public sector in readiness for the undoubted challenges that the years ahead will bring, and we have backed the public services that our people want to see prioritised, with a significant increase for Health and support for Education and policing.

1.00 pm

This draft Budget offers the best way through what was always going to be a difficult year and starts to prepare us for the tough times ahead. It deals with our difficult circumstances in a way that is right for Northern Ireland's economy, for our public services, for our infrastructure and, most importantly, for our people.

This is not a draft Budget that is narrow, partisan or party political: it is about dealing competently and compassionately with the circumstances that we are in. We have faced tough choices, and, by backing health, education, jobs and investment in infrastructure, we have made the right ones and chosen the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

The first duty of an Administration is to set a Budget. At a time of reductions in public expenditure, that is no easy task for any Government. In a five-party coalition, the level of difficulty is multiplied. It is an acid test for any Administration, and last week the Executive passed that test. It is probably not a draft Budget that any party alone would have set, but it is a product of negotiation and of compromise with decisions taken for the greater good.

Last week, the Executive faced up to tough choices and made difficult decisions. In short, we did what we were elected to do. The Executive have agreed a draft Budget, and now, through the consultation process, the public can have its say too. I hope that this draft Budget will mark the Executive turning a corner: a new start after some difficult times.

Facing up to reality, being prepared to compromise for the greater good and protecting and prioritising what really matters to the people of Northern Ireland are the principles that have informed this draft Budget, and I commend it to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The sound system is picking up some distortion, so I ask Members to make sure that their mobile phones are not causing interference.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his speech. My concern is about the impact that the Budget will have on front line services in Departments. In this financial year, the Health Department got some £80 million that was protected, yet, in Ballycastle and in the Downe, beds are being closed, and in north Antrim a hospital is being closed. There has been no real attempt to deal with the fat that we all know exists in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I welcome that the Executive have agreed to give an extra £200 million to health, and that money needs to go to the front line. Given that the Minister's party is leaning towards privatising public services and, as we heard on the radio this morning, cutting public sector jobs, what guarantees has he had from his party's Departments, such as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, that money will be spent wisely and on front line services?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Chairman — I think I thank him, anyway — for his question. Somewhere in his comments, he welcomed the additional £200 million allocation to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, which represents a 1·7% real-terms increase in funding, which is well above the rate of inflation. It is well documented, though, and I am sure that the Health Minister will concur with this, that there are 6% annual inflationary pressures on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

We watch across the water as the NHS in England grapples with the £8 billion pressure that it has to deal with before the end of the year, and the same is true in Scotland and in the Republic of Ireland, where health requires much more than any Administration are able to give it. I am sure that the Health Minister would have liked more money to deal with the pressures that his budget is facing, but, in the constrained financial circumstances that we are in, the £200 million — that 1·7% real-terms increase — represents a good deal for health in very difficult and challenging circumstances.

The Member well knows, and, if he does not, he can talk to his party colleagues in the Executive, the extent of the difficulties that the Executive and Assembly face, not just in this upcoming financial year but moving forward as well. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Hamilton: That necessitates the tough choices and difficult decisions that I talked about. There are pressures, not just on Health but on every Department. There is less money, with £213 million being taken out of Departments' resource budgets. That will require reductions in service delivery, which is an unfortunate reality.

When you have £213 million less next year and will have more than that taken out in years to come, you do not need the same number of public servants to deliver those services. That is something that we are trying to move forward on, and that has been agreed by the Executive and certainly by the Member's party colleagues in the Executive. There will be a need to reduce the headcount right across not just the Civil Service but the whole of the public sector. I am bringing forward proposals in respect of that, and I think there is a well- accepted acknowledgement by his party colleagues in the Executive that we are going to have to do something in that regard.

We should not lose sight of the fact that it is, I thought, the aim of every party in the House to rebalance our economy. Certainly, what we are seeing with the growth of our private sector and the movement of the public sector to a lesser role in economic growth is that rebalancing happening. That is something that we all should welcome.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House and the presentation of the draft Budget. What impact has the policy of austerity pursued by the coalition Government in London had on Northern Ireland's public spending and what does he anticipate it will be like over the next few years?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. There are some in the House who are probably better placed to talk about the impact that the reductions in spending and, particularly, the policy of austerity pursued in London, have had not just on Northern Ireland but on other devolved regions and regions of England.

We entered into this Budget facing a 1·6% real-terms reduction in our spending power, and that meant a small reduction in our block grant. So, instead of holding firm or going up slightly and keeping pace with inflation, our block grant has gone down. We started at the position where we had less money to spend. If we go back a little further to 2010, when the current Government in London came into power, our public spending in Northern Ireland has not kept pace with inflation in the way that we would have expected. In fact, our public spending power is down by £1·5 billion, which is a sizeable amount of money.

If we project that forward using the Office of Budget Responsibility's figures to the end of this decade, it is anticipated that a further 13% in real-terms reductions will come off our public spending power. That is a decade of austerity that we have the Administration in London to thank for. They have made a difficult decision even more difficult because of the constrained economic times that we are facing. Therefore, we have to deal with the hand that we have been dealt. It is not the hand that we would want to play and, therefore, it necessitates those difficult decisions and tough choices that this Budget epitomises.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. Considering the fact that there is quite a degree of public anxiety about the proposed pay freeze, could he indicate how many public servants will be affected in this way?

Mr Hamilton: I thought it was clear in the statement that work is ongoing on an overall workforce restructuring plan, which will, of course, look at headcount reductions, recruitment freezes, temporary staff and pay restraint. Let us bear in mind that, in the last fortnight, I have approved the pay remit for the current financial year, which had a 1·5% increase. I want to make that clear again: it is a 1·5% increase for staff who were within their scales and a 1% non-consolidated increase for those at the top of their scales. The last bid by the public sector unions was for a 1·9% increase, so to come in at 1·5% in the difficult position we find ourselves in this year was a reasonable settlement in the circumstances.

We are not actually proposing pay reductions, which the Member was, perhaps, inferring, although that, of course, was a policy that was pursued in the Irish Republic, of all places, where considerable reductions in pay for public servants were made over the past number of years to get that country through the difficult times that it faced. I know that the Member is a great advocate of Irish unity and of us mimicking and mirroring what is happening in the Irish Republic. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Hamilton: I am not hearing the Member saying that we should follow the Irish in regard to that policy.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for his report. There is a lot of detail in there, and a lot of it is not too pleasant. I want to return to financial transactions capital, which will come as no surprise to the Minister or, indeed, his predecessor.

I see that we had some £35 million of FTC that, in fact, has not been accounted for and is likely to be surplus this year. I understand that we can keep only about 10% of that, so over £30 million will go back to Treasury, and that is money that is not part of our block grant. I see that in the Budget, Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member come to his question quickly?

Mr Cree: Yes. I was just trying to set the scene, Mr Deputy Speaker.

There is £115·6 million in the Budget, but it needs refinement. That is 11·7% of capital. When will we have a proper process that will utilise all the available resource for us so that, in fact, we will not have money going back? I know that this is something near to your own heart. In particular, how will it work with the Northern Ireland investment fund?

Mr Hamilton: The Member has frequently raised FTC in the House, and he and I have had conversations in the Chamber before about it and about concerns that he and I have had about the Executive's ability to spend this new device. I think that the fact that it is new has caused teething problems for Departments, and I think that there is also an issue with the ambition of many Departments. I am disappointed, for example, by the Department for Regional Development, where I had discussions with the Minister about a year ago about trying to take forward the Belfast transport hub using financial transactions capital. It is the perfect scheme for using FTC, because, whilst it has a public sector origin — it is developing a rail and bus centre in the centre of Belfast — it has commercial opportunity and therefore has a revenue stream that allows the FTC to be repaid. Unfortunately, it appears that Translink has got its claws into the project and would rather have, as I suspect is the case with a lot of other Departments, conventional capital, because it is easier to deal with, they understand it much better and this is something new and they are not prepared to work with it. The reality, of course, of DRD not moving forward on the Belfast transport hub with FTC is that the likelihood of getting conventional capital for that project is diminished. This was an opportunity to bring that scheme forward, and, in the bilaterals that I will have with Ministers about the Budget, I intend to raise the issue with the Regional Development Minister to see whether we can actually use FTC to advance that project.

The Member is right about the current in-year position, where we have, at this stage, approximately £35 million unallocated in FTC. He is right that we can roll forward about £5 million of that. That still leaves a lot of money to be allocated, and I suppose this was the origin of the investment fund, which the Member mentioned and which was mentioned in my speech. It became clear to me some time ago that there was a need to find a vehicle into which we could put FTC. That would be somewhere that was off the public sector balance sheet but could still invest in

significant infrastructure projects. This is the vehicle that, I think, certainly in the next financial year and beyond, we will be able to deposit significant amounts of cash into and, in the process, give cheap money for infrastructure projects in social housing or renewable energy. That is certainly a possibility for next year, and I think that we can put large amounts in then. If we have advanced the feasibility study to a sufficient point in this financial year, it is possible that we may be able to use some of the unspent £35 million of FTC and deposit it with the European Investment Bank for the investment fund in advance of it starting to work next year.

Mrs Cochrane: The Minister repeatedly states that the draft Budget prioritises the economy, but the figures show that there is still an emphasis on protecting areas where efficiencies could and should be made. As a result, there are fewer resources for the Department for Employment and Learning, for instance, and that will reduce our ability to ensure a strong skills pipeline. Will the Minister therefore consider reallocating more resources to this area from, perhaps, the social investment fund, which to date has shown very poor delivery, and, by doing so, truly meet the objective of prioritising our economy?

Mr Hamilton: The Member has mentioned only one area that money could be moved from. I at least welcome that the Member is offering one area. There will be lots of people, I am sure, who will say in this debate that they want more money here or there but will not actually offer any reason. However, I do not think that the reason that the Member offered is a particularly good source for funding. The total amount allocated to the social investment fund would do little or nothing to improve the DEL figure and would actually only take away much-needed investment from communities that are disadvantaged and very much in need of investment across Northern Ireland. I see the Member to the Member's right scoffing at the social investment fund; perhaps he is scoffing at disadvantaged areas, the people who live therein and the help that they need. It is unfortunate — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Hamilton: It is unfortunate that, of all the areas that could be targeted, this is the area that the Alliance Party seems to be targeting.

The Member mentioned the settlement for the Department for Employment and Learning. It is fair to say that, in part because of the way in which the Minister for Employment and Learning constructed his bids, putting forward no legal, contractual or inescapable bid, it was difficult to prioritise allocations to his Department and to do so on the basis of any methodology. We worked with the Minister. I met him on two occasions last week, and, as a result of those discussions, a further £15 million was allocated to the Department. That was primarily to ensure that 16- to 18-year-olds in our colleges got the same protection as 16- to 18-year-olds in school get. I also got a further £3 million for what the Minister would describe as narrow STEM subjects, which are the IT courses in universities and further education colleges that are the pipeline that Invest NI uses to bring jobs into Northern Ireland.

1.15 pm

It is important that, when we have the consultation period, I listen to Ministers and discuss options with them. I have to admit that, if money is available during the consultation process, I am keen that we direct it towards DEL in the final Budget process. That is something that most parties in the Executive agree on. It is one thing for me to have a sympathetic view about that but another for me to find the money during the Budget consultation period. I encourage Members and Ministers, when they come forward with the special pleading that they all inevitably will make, to offer ways in which we can find that money. The Member mentioned prioritising areas in which efficiencies could and should be made, without elaborating on what exactly that means. It is easy to throw things around without proving where money can come from. Clearly, a lot of work has to be done in developing that economic plan on behalf of the Alliance Party.

Mr McQuillan: I welcome the statement by the Finance Minister. Minister, what sort of schemes do you envisage will be supported through the £30 million change fund?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The change fund is a small amount of money — some £30 million — in the grand scheme of the Budget. I hope that it will be a catalyst for the reform that we clearly need in our public sector if we are not just to live within our means next year in a very constrained and challenging position but to prepare ourselves for at least another three years, if not four or five years, of austerity coming from London.

The fund is being held at the centre for distribution in the final Budget to Departments that come forward with innovative schemes that focus primarily on collaboration between Departments or between Departments and their agencies and on schemes that focus on early intervention and prevention. It is about allocating money to reform-orientated projects that can, in one sense, develop savings but also improve public services. There are no specific schemes in mind at this stage. It has been left very much to Departments to work away over the draft Budget period, spending the next eight weeks working with counterparts in other Departments to develop schemes that might avail themselves of that funding. Those will then be put into the baseline of Departments at final Budget.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement today. I welcome the additional £200 million for health, which represents a 1·7% increase in real terms. However, given your own Minister's comments in the previous two monitoring rounds on the management of the health budget, what additional oversight mechanisms will there be, including the instruction that full equality impact assessments be carried out, to protect front line services across the trusts?

Mr Hamilton: At the end of the last financial year, when there was a small overspend in the Department of Health, and before the allocation of £80 million to it in this financial year, it was requested that, before the first tranche of that — the £20 million allocated in June monitoring — work be undertaken to ensure that the overspend did not happen this year or in future years. I am pleased with the work that has gone on. Significant improvements have been made in the management of health budgets, to the extent that I am confident that there will be no overspend this year. Obviously, the Minister has had to make difficult decisions over the past days about where those in-year savings will come from, and I know that there is much concern across the community about that.

The question about equality impact assessments is probably better directed to the Minister of Health himself. The draft Budget is predicated on some work being done on the strategic long-term view at the Department of Health and to ensure that the £200 million allocated in the draft Budget goes to front line services. The head of the Civil Service has been charged with undertaking that work. I know that the previous Health Minister was keen that the OECD review that I mentioned in my statement should focus on his Department. That may be able to provide some independent scrutiny of the Department, where it is spending its money and how improvements can be made in the long term.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's lengthy statement. He referred to the Northern Ireland investment fund. Will he elaborate on that? What finances will be available, and what sort of projects could be funded? If the Minister has the opportunity, will he comment on the DOJ budget in respect of Desertcreat?

Mr Hamilton: I will take the Member's second point about Desertcreat first. There is a line of roughly £53 million of funding to develop the Northern Ireland Community Safety College at Desertcreat in the Member's constituency. That was put in, and the Minister of Justice was well aware that that was put in, so I am a little disappointed at that, although probably not as disappointed as the Member and his constituents will be if the project does not go forward, as the indications are today. I am also disappointed that the project board met on, I think, 29 October, before the Budget was agreed, yet no communication was made to me or to any other Minister that the project was unlikely to proceed. We could have adjusted the Budget accordingly. I am sure that my disappointment about the accounting treatment of that money is nothing compared with the people in mid-Ulster who will, I am sure, be annoyed about the project not moving forward.

The investment fund should be welcomed by all sides of the House. It will encourage and be a catalyst for significant private sector investment in infrastructure across Northern Ireland. Again, whilst we do not have specific projects in mind, the European Investment Bank, which we anticipate will act as our fund manager, has told us that, if we deposit about £100 million of FTC in the fund, it will leverage in roughly £1 billion of investment from the EIB alone. Thus, on top of the £1 billion that we invest annually as an Administration, that will be £1 billion that can be invested in projects such as social and affordable housing, renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy production and, potentially, telecommunications and urban regeneration. I am sure that everybody will welcome a further fillip of £1 billion for our infrastructure investment.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his detailed statement to the House. Minister, in Britain, 80% of the budget cuts as a result of the economic crisis have been borne by the most vulnerable in our society. What steps have been taken to ensure that there is a more balanced approach to delivering economic recovery here so that it will protect the most vulnerable here?

Mr Hamilton: The first thing that we should all welcome is that the economy is clearly starting to recover. I accept that that is not uniform and that areas of our economy, such as retail and the construction sector, are still having difficulties. However, the good news is that, across the board and in the overall picture, the economy is starting to move in the right direction. We see that with the growth in the economy in the last year of over 1%, in the unemployment claimant count falling for 21 consecutive months and in an unemployment rate of 6·1%, which is almost half that in the Irish Republic, for example. We also see employment rising and economic inactivity falling. Every indicator that has been moving in the wrong direction over the previous five years is now starting to move in the right direction. Independent economic forecasters such as the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy project that there will be further growth in the economy this year and next year. That is backed up by survey evidence from the likes of the Ulster Bank's purchasing managers' index, which show growth in the economy and confidence coming back into our firms across the country.

I understand the Member's point about trying to ensure that the recovery is felt by everybody. However, it is incredibly challenging, even in a small region like ours, to ensure that every area or every person feels the same degree of recovery. That is why we have tried to concentrate the allocations that we have made. In a situation in which we have £213 million less to spend this year than we had last year, we have tried to make sure that the money goes where the people of Northern Ireland would wish us to put it. I think that, if we were to walk out of Stormont and ask people walking up the Newtownards Road where they wanted us to spend our money, they would say that they wanted us to prioritise health and try to ensure some protection for education and policing. They would also want us to continue to invest in job creation so that the unemployment numbers, which are, thankfully, falling, continue to fall and people right across the Province can get back into work and start providing for their families.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his statement. Given the apathy and anger in the north-west, the feeling that the Executive are not working for them and the sense, particularly in my constituency, that they are second-class citizens, what can the Minister say to my constituents and others living in the north-west about the regional economic imbalance? Can he say that this is a good Budget for them, particularly in relation to the extension to the Magee campus in the city? I have asked him that previously.

Mr Hamilton: I have said to the Member before in the House that, instead of talking down his city, he would better serve the people of Londonderry if he were to come to the House or go on radio and television and start talking up what is a wonderful city, a wonderful region and a wonderful part of Northern Ireland. The Executive have invested significantly in the north-west. Everybody on all sides of the House welcomed the City of Culture and appreciated the benefits that it brought to Londonderry. We can all be proud of the North West Regional Science Park, recently opened by the deputy First Minister and developed using and leveraging in EU funding. There are also the developments, through Ilex, of the Ebrington site and of Fort George. All sides of the House should be proud of the investment that we have made in our second city.

Obviously, it is a matter for individual Ministers where they invest the money in their new baseline for the next financial year, but the Executive have a record of taking Londonderry and the north-west seriously, putting our money where our mouth is and investing in that part of

Northern Ireland. The people there are starting to see the benefits of that, with the spin-offs from the City of Culture. The Member shakes his head, but I reiterate the point that he does the people of Londonderry a disservice by talking his city down all the time in the House and in the media. Investments have been made in Londonderry and the north-west of Northern Ireland that constituencies all over Northern Ireland would very much welcome. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Hamilton: The First Minister has reminded me of the investment in the private sector, with jobs coming to Fujitsu. I remember meeting the global president of Fujitsu last year, who talked very highly of the skills of the people of Londonderry who were working for his company. He brought another investment into the area as a result of that. There was the £35 million investment by Seagate in research and development, creating 35 high-paid and high-skilled jobs in that city. There is a record of investment in the north-west — in public services, infrastructure, jobs and culture — that the Member should welcome instead of criticising. If there were that sort of investment in other parts of Northern Ireland, there would be a lot of happy Members in the Assembly.

Mr Nesbitt: Can the Minister update the House on the input into the negotiations on the draft Budget of politicians who are not Members of the Assembly? I am thinking in particular of the reported input of the president of Sinn Féin.

Mr Hamilton: I certainly had no meeting with the president of Sinn Féin. He may well have been busy last week with a few well-publicised issues. I suggest that the Member is probably referring also to other politicians outside Northern Ireland, including, perhaps, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I listened to Mr Nesbitt's comments to the media at the tail end of last week. He reminded me, of course, that George Osborne was his candidate for Chancellor in the 2010 general election. I went through my extensive archives at home and found this document, which Mr Nesbitt will, I am sure, remember: 'Invitation to Join the Government of the United Kingdom'. It is a joint manifesto by the Conservative Party and the Ulster Unionist Party. I do not think that too many people took you up on your invitation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

1.30 pm

Mr Hamilton: This document is the blueprint — the bluest of Tory blueprints — for reducing public expenditure in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the regions of the United Kingdom. The document talks about —

Mr Nesbitt: I did not ask you about that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Hamilton: The Member does not want to hear this, of course; he does not want to be reminded, because there are fingerprints all over the document, and the fingerprints are his. The manifesto, which, of course, is Mr Nesbitt's manifesto, talks about immediate action to cut £6 billion from Departments' expenditure and further savings in future years. Of course, had the people of Strangford not seen sense and had not voted for Jim Shannon and returned him as their Member of Parliament in 2010, these would have been the cuts that the Member would have been voting for in Westminster. When the First Minister warned people in Northern Ireland that that was what a vote for the Ulster Unionist Party meant in the 2010 election, he was told that he was guilty of irresponsible scaremongering.

These are our cuts. When we are facing reductions in our spending power of £1·5 billion, and when we have hundreds of millions of pounds less, this year, to spend on public services to try to bring in jobs, encourage growth in our economy or deliver first-rate services across Northern Ireland, we must remember that it is those cuts that have been delivered by the Conservative-led Administration in London, which the Member would have been trooping through the Lobbies to vote for, as he would have done for other policies, such as welfare reform, that have brought us here. It is the Member and his party who, more than anyone else, are guilty of causing the problems in public spending in Northern Ireland that we find ourselves in today.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his detailed remarks today. The education budget has been reduced by nearly 5%, and I appreciate that there has been some resource DEL allocation. What is the Minister's justification for lifting the protection which was previously afforded to the Department of Education?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her question. There had not been blanket protection for the Department of Education in the 2011-15 Budget, but protection had been afforded to that Department in-year by way of the 4·4% reductions that were made in the June and October monitoring rounds. Following on from my predecessor, I have been consistent in saying that the Department of Education should not be afforded blanket protection and that there was scope for efficiencies within its system, as there is in any other Department. It was never a matter of me locking horns with the Minister; it was not a DUP v Sinn Féin point. If, when we started our work on the draft Budget, we had wanted to offer considerable protection to the Department of Health, which, I think, everybody in the House wanted to do, and offered the same degree of protection to the Department of Education, there would have been 22% reductions to all other Departments. When we hear the concern, pain and anguish that is expressed about cuts of in and around 10%, we will, I think, agree that 20% cuts would have been unmanageable and intolerable for all Departments.

My party and I still value education. It is a bedrock of society; it is the first staging post in developing a vibrant and dynamic economy. That said, in the first instance, we cannot say that no efficiencies can be made in the system. I believe that the Education Department, like other Departments, should be making its contribution to the reductions that we all have to face in a very difficult and challenging financial year.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, it is clear from the report that the Executive have clearly signalled support for the agrifood sector by signing off on the rural development programme and the Going for Growth strategy. Will the Finance Minister, today, in the House, reaffirm his commitment to supporting the agrifood sector in the context of this and future Budget rounds?

Mr Hamilton: I can, in so far as I can offer continued support with a constrained financial position. Whilst the reduction of 5·2% that the Department of Agriculture is taking is still a reduction, and one that will require the

Minister to make savings within her Department, it is one of the better settlements that the Departments face. In part, that is in recognition of the importance that we all place upon our agrifood industry. During my statement, I mentioned the significant growth in the agrifood sector, with a £4·5 billion of turnover in the past financial year. That is something that we all welcome. It is a sector that has bucked the trend over the past number of years, and one in which there is still plenty of room for growth. That is why Minister O'Neill and Minister Foster have come to the Executive with their agreed paper in respect of the 'Going for Growth' document. That is an area that, resources permitting, I, and I am sure Executive colleagues, would be keen to support in the years ahead so that we can maximise the potential in that growing sector.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive statement. I knew that it would be comprehensive when Nelson Mandela and John F Kennedy were quoted in the same statement. In the very challenging environment that we are in, we have had a number of occasions when Ministers indicated that they did not have sufficient time to implement the reductions to their budget. Does the Minister believe that the statement he has delivered today, if adopted by the Assembly, will provide such time?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for providing those quotes to me. It is much appreciated. It is a typical complaint from Ministers who do not want to vote for something or want to vote against it, for party political reasons, that they did not have enough time to study the document. I appreciate that it was a fairly comprehensive speech, but the Budget document was smaller than the speech I gave. Members of the Executive had 72 hours to read the document. If you cannot read, study and understand the implications of a document in 72 hours, I do not know whether you should be in the Executive.

I might understand the difficulties that people had about comprehending the document if they had just 72 hours to consider it, but officials from my Department made a presentation to the Executive six weeks or more ago about the likely implications for 2015-16 for their Departments. A pretty stark picture was painted by DFP officials. At that time, we had not hollowed out all the pressures and had not thought about any imaginative solutions, and it looked like we were going to have 15% reductions for every Department but Health.

The Member and the House will see that no Department is now facing a reduction of 15%. So, every Department is in a better position. I accept that some Departments are in tough positions, and some are still in double digits, but the majority are not and some are in a positive position. So, the time that elapsed from that presentation six weeks ago to the Executive last week actually improved the position for Ministers. Indeed, last week, the position for some of the Ministers who abstained or voted against it improved again. So, DEL, DCAL and DOE got allocations between Monday of last week, when the first paper issued, and Thursday, when the Executive agreed it.

One conclusion you could draw from that is that, no matter how much money the Departments had, and no matter how much complaining they made about the impact on their Departments, they would never have voted for the paper come what may. There is a history and a pattern of behaviour. Some parties in the Executive are happy to be in the Executive and take ministerial positions in the Executive but have not voted for a Budget since 2007.

In respect of Departments grappling with these matters, I accept that many of them will have to make significant savings, which will have an impact on public services. We have tried, in so far as we can, to limit the impact on key front line services, but there will be an impact on our public services and, therefore, the shape and nature of our public sector. While the £100 million loan facility focused our minds last week, and knowing full well that we would have significant savings to make in the next financial year, we needed to get a draft Budget out so that Departments had as much time as possible to try to implement those savings so that they would not hit front line services, and so that Departments could try to make the savings in other non-front line areas of their business. So, while you would always have liked a bit more time, I think that Departments have sufficient time, particularly over the next eight weeks of the consultation period to try to make sure that the worst impact of the cuts is not felt by citizens through diminishing services.

Mr Givan: With regard to how other parties responded to the draft Budget, the Alliance Party indicated that it was abstaining because water charges have not been introduced and rates have not increased. What are the Minister's views on raising rates and introducing water charges to Northern Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: As Sir Humphrey said, it was probably the most "courageous" reason put forward for not voting for the draft Budget. I take a very straightforward view in respect of raising revenue through water charges or hiking our rates. I do not think that it is the right way to go about solving our short-term financial problems. Maybe the topic comes up at Green Party or Alliance Party wine and cheese evenings — *[Laughter.]* — and people are quite content to pay water charges or pay significant increases in their rates bills.

Maybe this is the equivalent of the Lib Dems' 1p on income tax. Whatever the motivation for it, when you hear various spokespeople talk about introducing water charges or significantly increasing our rates bill to solve our problems, let us bear in mind that for every 1% we increase our regional rate, we raise about £5 million. Therefore, to solve this problem, we would have to increase it by a considerable number of percentage points to get any sort of money that we could do anything with. Whenever I hear them talk about that, I think that they think that that money is not paid by real people. The people who would pay the water charges — on average, around £500 a year — or who would pay an increase in their rates bill are real people living and working in Northern Ireland today.

Whilst I accept that economic recovery is starting to happen in Northern Ireland, and we welcome that, the last place where people are feeling confident of recovery is in their own household income. That would be another £500, £600, maybe £700, including rates, that they would have to find in their household income. I suggest that the impact on confidence in those households would be much more than £500, £600 or £700, and you would see spending on other items go down by much more than that. You would sap the confidence that is starting to come back into our economy, and you would impact negatively on economic recovery. Whenever people come forward with suggestions for water charges or increasing rates bills — from the Alliance Party to the Green Party — just bear in mind the fact that real

people in Northern Ireland have to pay those rates bills and those water charges, and there will be an impact on the economy as a result.

Mr A Maginness: I am normally a very courteous person, but I cannot thank the Minister for the introduction of this savage Budget. I remind the Minister that, by introducing the Budget — I refer to the remarks of Mr Nesbitt — he has reduced himself to being a message boy for George Osborne —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Could we have your question, please?

Mr A Maginness: Further to that, there is intense outrage out there on this, particularly amongst the trade unions —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Come to your question, please.

Mr A Maginness: I ask the Minister whether it is sufficient for him to allow a period of eight weeks for consultation instead of 12 weeks, which would allow people to sufficiently answer the savagery of the Budget?

Mr Hamilton: If the Member wants to offer thanks to anybody in the House for the reductions in public expenditure in Northern Ireland that flow from the Budget, I thought that I made it pretty clear that all thanks should be directed to Mike Nesbitt and the Ulster Unionist Party.

There is an eight-week period of consultation, and that does not happen in every part of the United Kingdom. Our Members of Parliament at Westminster will be able to testify that 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. Therefore, the fact that we go out for consultation at all in Northern Ireland means that we are in not a bad position. Eight weeks is less than the 12 weeks that is seen to be the normal period of consultation. However, the delay in agreeing a draft Budget — I welcome the fact that, even with the delay, we have a draft Budget and that we have removed the uncertainly not just round this institution but ensured that a Budget was in place — meant that we could not afford a 12-week consultation period. Mr Wilson — the Finance Minister who introduced the 2011 Budget — did not get the draft Budget in until 15 December, and it had an eight-week consultation period, which ran over Christmas. Even though this has been characterised as a draft Budget that has been delayed, it is still in place much earlier than the 2011-15 Budget, and it will conclude before the end of the year, rather than going over into the new year.

If we had gone for a 12-week consultation, which would have taken us to the end of January, we would have had the real prospect of having no Budget in place and no Budget Act in place for the start of the next financial year. Obviously, we have some work to do between the end of the consultation and agreeing the final Budget, and then we have to go through the legislative process in the House. If we had waited until the end of January to do any negotiations around further allocations or reductions if required, we would not have had the time to implement the legislation, and we would have had the real possibility that there would be no Budget in place for the start of the financial year. Whilst the Member might warmly welcome consultations or want to have them for 12 weeks, I am sure that, in the circumstances, he will understand that it is simply something that we cannot afford.

1.45 pm

Mr Ross: Unlike the SDLP, I am glad that the Minister has faced up to the difficult economic realities that we face and been able to present a balanced Budget to the House today. I also think it is right that we have continued to support the facilitation of job creation. I think that is good news for people in Northern Ireland. What support will there be for small businesses, particularly through the rating system?

Mr Hamilton: I am glad that predecessors in my post have been able to introduce a range of measures to support small businesses through the worst of the economic downturn. The Member and the House will be aware of the small business rate relief scheme, which has been a great success in all parts of Northern Ireland in helping small businesses. In fact, half of small businesses get at least 20% off their rates bills as we stand. That support can continue because of an allocation of £20 million that has been made in this Budget for a continuation of the small business rate relief scheme.

The scheme is undergoing a review. I am due to make a final decision on its shape and nature in the next couple of weeks, but I am glad that, whatever change in the shape or nature of the scheme that there may be, the Executive have agreed to set aside £20 million for our small businesses, particularly those in retail, that still suffer in many parts of Northern Ireland. That support will still be there, and we will be able to back our small businesses through a small business rate relief scheme.

Mr Clarke: In terms of the response that the Minister gave earlier to Mike Nesbitt, I am sure that he is also surprised by the response from the Regional Development Minister on the Budget. He described the Budget as savage even though he was advocating for the Tories in the last election. I welcome the fact that the Minister has not only minimised the reductions to 4% —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can we have a question?

Mr Clarke: Yes. I welcome the fact that the Minister has minimised it to 4% and also added £10 million to concessionary fares —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Sorry, can we have a question?

Mr Clarke: Can the Minister tell us whether the Regional Development Minister has agreed to access Translink's reserves of £55 million to lessen the pressures on his Department?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I was shocked as well, knowing the figures, which, obviously, we could not publicly reveal, although somebody in the Executive did see fit to take an early draft of the paper and pass it on to parts of the press. Even those early figures that were leaked to the press showed the reduction in the Department for Regional Development, because we allocated £20 million, which had not been there in its baseline because of the inability or unwillingness of the Minister to access £20 million from the Port of Belfast. He has also been allocated £9·5 million to cover concessionary fares, so that, instead of becoming a political football, as it has traditionally become — the Minister usually pointed the finger at me or my predecessor and said that we were going to take the money away from that scheme — it is now for the

Department for Regional Development to ensure that the concessionary fares scheme for over-60s is there.

That £29·5 million allocation, plus a pro rata share of the £124·5 million, meant that, instead of being in the sort of position that my Department is in, for example, where we have to find 11% reductions for next year, the Department for Regional Development is facing reductions of 4%. The Minister for Regional Development might want to characterise a 4% reduction — I accept that it is a reduction and will lead to difficult decisions having to be made by the Minister — in that way, but it is nowhere near as savage a reduction as many other Departments, indeed, the majority of Departments in the Executive, are facing in future years. I think the reason for the Member characterising that as savage was to set himself up for the vote that he made on Thursday. He had no intention of voting for the Budget and wanted to try to characterise it as a deeply difficult Budget for his Department when that was not the case.

In terms of the Translink reserves, the Minister wrote to me last week indicating, much like his inability or unwillingness to seek money from the Port of Belfast, that if he was to pursue Translink's sizeable reserves, which the Member talked about, it would almost empty it of any money and any reserves at all. My understanding is that the figure that the Member talked about was around £50-odd million. The Minister has pointed out that it has a £12 million loss this year and anticipates similar next year. That still leaves a considerable amount of money in the reserves of Translink, which the Minister could pursue if he wanted to, but I fear, based on past behaviour and his record, that the Minister does not have the political courage to pursue those reserves any more than he had to pursue the Port of Belfast for the £20 million that it had.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his very detailed statement. I have to say that I think that Northern Ireland is in a better place today than it was 10 or 12 days ago, and I thank him for all the work that he has done on that. The Minister outlined in his statement the £100 million that has been granted as a loan facility for this year. Will he detail how that might be repaid next year?

Mr Hamilton: The £100 million loan that the First Minister and I secured from the Chancellor a few weeks ago was derided by many in the House as a "payday loan". It is the only payday loan that I have ever seen that involves no interest. However, it clearly produced a pressure on our Budget for next year. Had that £100 million come out of our resource budget, it would have added another reduction of 1%, or maybe close to 2%, for some Departments' budgets. The fact is that we were able to take cuts down from 15% to closer to 10% for the worst-off Departments, but they would have gone back up again if we had to repay that amount of money.

Through some imaginative thinking on our capital receipts, we have already been able to bank £108 million that Departments identified through the sale of surplus land and properties and the repayment of loans, including financial transactions capital loans, that come back in to the Executive. We are seeking, and anticipate getting, permission from the Treasury to switch that £108 million from capital to resource so that there is no additional pressure on our resource budget, which is under the most pressure in the next financial year. There may be those who are concerned that that takes money away from capital, but we have increased the target. As I say, we have banked that £108 million to repay the £100 million, but that does not mean that there are not other assets that can be sold to bring in revenue. So, we have increased the target to £150 million, which will mean a replenishment of at least half that capital receipt, which will go into our capital budget. That budget will, of course, rise next year, never mind the £1 billion investment fund that we will, hopefully, have up and running next year as well.

Mr Dallat: In a unique moment of inspiration during his statement, the Minister told us that our economy can never be:

> *"strong enough to stand on its own".*

Is that a stark reminder that we need to sort out our political differences, North and South, so that we can develop an all-island economy that benefits both parts?

Some Members: There will be water charges there.

Mr Hamilton: I have been —

Mr Wilson: Who is leaning on who?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Hamilton: I am used to being misquoted over the last week, but I will not let the Member misquote my statement. I did not say that we will "never" be able to pay our own way; I said that we are not in a position to be able to pay our own way. That is a fiscal reality that makes rebalancing our economy incredibly challenging in Northern Ireland. It is one of the reasons why we are continuing to pursue the devolution of corporation tax powers as a tool that will allow us to further rebalance our economy beyond that which has taken place over the last number of years.

I welcome that our nearest neighbour's economy is doing much better than in recent times. That clearly benefits the people of Northern Ireland, particularly those in business who trade into that important near market. However, I do not necessarily agree with his characterisation that that economy is standing on its own feet, because it is being bolstered considerably by the troika that includes the IMF and the European Union —

A Member: The British Government.

A Member: The taxpayer.

Mr Hamilton: — and, of course, yes, as colleagues have reminded me, by a £7 billion non-repayable loan from her Majesty's Treasury. So, whilst I welcome that it is doing much better, I do not necessarily agree that it is standing on its own two feet as well.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement and appreciate the work that he has done on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. It is sad that we have parties in the House that are financially and fiscally illiterate, as is continually exemplified by the SDLP —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can the Member ask a question, please?

Mr Humphrey: What does the Minister believe the Executive can do to reduce the number of people working in the public sector if he believes that it is overloaded?

Mr Hamilton: I thought that all in the House had subscribed to rebalancing our economy. I know that our party certainly has, and that is why we have been pursuing corporation tax powers. Whilst that will not in itself

transform our economy and rebalance it from the public to the private sector, it is the single best tool available to us to assist us along that road. Although I think that we are all agreed on the need to rebalance our economy, I do not think that any Finance Minister or Administration would want to reduce the size of our public sector without there being a need to do so.

We are in a position in which we have less money to spend. Cuts of £213 million are being applied to Departments this year. If you look at the projections that the Office for Budget Responsibility is talking about, you will see 13% reductions in real terms. To contextualise that, we face a 1·6% real terms reduction this year, so we are looking at almost seven times more in reductions over the next three financial years. We cannot have a situation like that and be sensible and plan for the long term if we think that we can keep the public sector at the size that it currently is. It stands to reason that, if you have less money, you spend less money on public services and therefore need fewer people to deliver those public services.

I think that this is an opportune moment to bring forward a voluntary exit scheme, which is what my Department will be looking at over the next number of weeks. That will allow those who want to go — no one will be forced — to leave and to do so with a package that will assist them in the short to medium term. We have had a reduction of around 4% in the size of our public sector, which is still large at 212,000 people. That still accounts for around 35% of our total workforce, which is far higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. If we were to have the same degree of reductions as in the rest of the United Kingdom, that would mean not 4% but an average of 10%. If we were to follow that trend, we could save hundreds of millions of pounds on a recurrent basis. That would not only allow us to get us out of the resource expenditure problems that we are facing next year and in future years but help us to fund a reduction in the rate of corporation tax, which has the capacity to transform and rebalance our economy between the public and private sectors.

Mr Moutray: I also thank the Minister. Will he outline what the draft Budget means for welfare reform?

Mr Hamilton: An allocation of some £70 million has been made in the draft Budget to fund a package of welfare reform measures. Those are the sorts of measures that the previous Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland, negotiated successfully, unlike any other part of the United Kingdom, with the Department for Work and Pensions. In that package of measures were ways of ensuring that the bedroom tax would not hit existing customers in Northern Ireland. There were a series of flexibilities around payments, frequency of payments and direct payments to social landlords. As well as all those measures that we negotiated, there is a contingency fund of around £30 million within the package of £70 million. My party and I believe that that fund can be used if members of the Executive or Members of the Assembly want to target specifically areas in which there will be considerable welfare reform impact as we learn from the lessons of the roll-out of welfare reform in Great Britain.

I hope that, now that agreeing a draft Budget has been taken off the agenda, time and space within the talks process has been freed up to address where the issue of welfare reform is and should be. I think that parties can sensibly and maturely discuss the issue, particularly the suggestions that my party has submitted to the talks process, in order to try to find a way through welfare reform that ensures that we can implement it, keep welfare payments happening in Northern Ireland and avoid the worst effects of welfare reform as they have happened across the water.

The draft Budget does not account for any future penalties. The £114 million penalty for next year is not in it, nor is any cover for the development of an IT system for Northern Ireland. The cost of doing both those things would have been around £200 million. Looking at the draft Budget, I think that it is clear to everyone that, if we had to find a further £200 million of reductions, that would have equated to 4%, 5% or even 6% reductions for Departments above and beyond the cuts that they are facing next year. That is a price that this Executive and this country could not afford. The way that we have found through the issue of welfare reform, trying to bring it to a head and focus on a package of measures that will mitigate the worst effects of welfare reform, is the right way to proceed.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his detailed statement to the House. The issue of corporation tax powers has been much talked about inside the Chamber and outside. Has the Minister taken into account in the draft Budget the possible devolution of corporation tax powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Mr Hamilton: The draft Budget does not take into account the devolution of corporation tax, although we are obviously still hopeful of a positive decision by the Prime Minister, and that will be announced no later than when the autumn statement is made by the Chancellor, which is due to be on 3 December. We have made a very robust and good case for the devolution of corporation tax powers and expect a positive decision in that statement.

Even if we get a positive statement, it will be a number of years before we will have to implement a cut in corporation tax, which means that it will be a number of years before it will impact on public spending in Northern Ireland.

2.00 pm

What the draft Budget does, in dealing with current resource pressures and future pressures, which could include corporation tax, is to set us up for reforming and restructuring the public sector in ways that could release savings in years to come that, whilst being applied against the reductions that we face as a result of austerity from London, could also allow us to pay the cost of corporation tax, which would help us to transform and rebalance our economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Claire Sugden. The Minister will have about a minute to reply.

Ms Sugden: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that Belfast is now the number one global destination for financial technology investment. In his draft Budget, how is the Minister mindful of encouraging technology investment on the other side of our country, particularly when we have a huge transatlantic cable coming ashore in my constituency?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her question. I do not represent a Belfast constituency, but I think that we could all welcome the fact that Belfast is doing so well in attracting IT investment from around the world. Belfast is now home to firms like Chicago Mercantile Exchange,

Concentrix and big global brands that, 10 years ago, we would never have thought were likely to invest in somewhere like Belfast or Northern Ireland.

There are, of course, investments in the north-west, particularly in the IT sector. In response to Mr Ramsey's doom-and-gloom prognosis for Londonderry earlier, I mentioned Fujitsu and Seagate's investment in that part of the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Minister must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Hamilton: The Member will know — she and I have spoken before — about the enterprise zone that is being developed in the Coleraine area and the potential that Project Kelvin creates for it and the wider north-west region.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes questions to the Minister on his statement. I ask the House to take its ease for a few moments as we change those at the Table.

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Development Programme: Policy Objectives

1. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how the final rural development programme proposals reflect her departmental policy objectives. *(AQO 6909/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Our proposals for the rural development programme 2014-2020 are designed to help to meet my Department's vision for a thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment to promote social and economic equality. The programme will continue strongly to help the agrifood industry to prepare for future market opportunities and economic challenges, improve the lives of farmers and other rural dwellers by targeting resources where they are most needed and help to deliver improved sustainable environmental outcomes.

I recently announced the publication of the Executive's response to 'Going for Growth', which outlines the actions that Departments and agencies will take to address the recommendations made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board to grow the agrifood sector. One of the key actions for DARD is the delivery of a farm business improvement scheme as part of the next RDP. The scheme will comprise a range of measures aimed at knowledge transfer, innovation and capital investment. It will provide support for increasing farm production sustainably and improving competitiveness through increased efficiency, more integrated supply chains and adapting to market requirements.

The RDP also includes proposals for a range of schemes to support agricultural production methods that help with the protection and improvement of the environment and countryside. Through the programme, we propose to support the planting of new woodlands and the management of existing forests to help to reduce the effects of climate change.

The RDP will focus on developing and improving rural areas by promoting economic growth through the provision of support for rural businesses and rural tourism. We propose to support the renewal of rural villages linked to village and community plans that will be developed by the new councils. There will also be measures to improve the living conditions and welfare of those who live in rural areas.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Minister for her response. She mentioned her vision. Will she outline her plans to provide financial support through the rural development programme or other EU funding schemes to support farmers who live in ASSIs?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said very clearly, we have set out the vision, which is to create sustainable rural communities going into the future. Obviously, that takes into account anybody who lives in an ASSI. Tomorrow, I will meet a group of farmers from that background to discuss the challenges that they have, and I am keen to do that. However, the core of Going for Growth and the rural development programme is supporting farmers right across the board, assisting and enabling them to grow and supporting them, whether that is with capital investment through the farm business improvement scheme, knowledge transfer, innovation or practical support in looking at their production and efficiency. Quite a range of measures will be there to support all farmers, no matter how difficult the conditions that they farm in.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister outline the timings in place for the scheme opening?

Mrs O'Neill: The first important stage is that we receive EU approval for the programme. Once we have clarity on the EU scheme rules, we will be able to design the scheme documentation and guidance in preparation for opening the schemes. On the delivery mechanisms, my officials have been looking at the timelines of the previous programme for establishing the local action groups and the axis 1 delivery agent, and they are factoring those into the delivery plans for the next programme. The date for opening the schemes will then depend on the programme being signed off at European Commission level and getting the necessary business case approval in place. At this stage, I am pretty confident that we will hit the ground running. We have done a lot of preparatory work to be in a state of readiness once we have that EU sign-off. We will have initial correspondence from Europe in January 2015, and we hope to have formal, official sign-off at European level in mid-March, which will allow us to have our strategies in place and open the schemes, in line with the new programme start date, in April/May.

Mrs Dobson: In the light of today's draft Budget announcement and the further tightening of public spending, will the Minister now be upfront about the budget for a key rural development programme proposal: the farm business improvement scheme? You mentioned it, Minister, in answering the previous question. Will you guarantee that the Executive, when requested by the strategy board, will be able to provide the £250 million?

Mrs O'Neill: Clearly, the Executive face very difficult decisions. You and your party probably know more about how the Tory Government carry out their business than I do, but we face this climate because of the onslaught, year on year, from the Tory Government. We must always remember that context when we discuss the Budgets that we in the Executive deal with and the tough decisions that we will have to take in the time ahead.

The Executive have clearly put on record their support for the agrifood industry and the schemes that we have outlined through Going for Growth. I look to the Executive to honour their commitments, and I have no reason to doubt that that will be the case. Will there be challenges in each element of the programme? Absolutely, and I do not have a problem saying that. We may need to look at how we introduce the implementation of elements of it. As I said, it is a quite far-reaching programme, and there are a lot of elements to it. For me, being mindful of all the challenges that my Department, alongside others, will have to address in the time ahead, what is most important is that I take a fair and balanced approach in finding any necessary savings. That will be done in consultation with the industry.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Alex Maskey is not in his place.

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation

3. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the delivery of the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework. *(AQO 6911/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The programme is making a real difference to the lives of many rural dwellers by addressing, through a suite of schemes, issues of poverty, social isolation and disadvantage in rural areas across the North, as identified in the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) framework. I am delighted with the significant outcomes achieved through the delivery to date of the framework, which is on course to meet its £13 million Programme for Government target by 31 March 2015. Schemes being delivered include youth employability and entrepreneurship programmes; the maximising access in rural areas (MARA) project; fuel poverty/energy efficiency work; the assisted rural travel scheme; the rural challenge programme; the connecting elderly rural isolated project; the farm family health checks programme; the rural borewells scheme; support for the Rural Support charity; and support for rural community development work. Many of those initiatives are excellent examples of the benefits of successful partnership working across government and with the statutory sector. I am particularly pleased with the increased access to services in rural areas, which is being achieved through the delivery of these initiatives, and I remain committed to tackling the key challenges facing those living in rural communities in the time ahead.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. What actions are being delivered for young people in rural areas in relation to anti-poverty and social inclusion?

Mrs O'Neill: Through the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework, my Department has been supporting two key rural youth initiatives aimed at increasing employability and promoting entrepreneurship among vulnerable young people in rural areas. Through the youth employability programme, which is marketed as BOOST, unemployed rural young people have an opportunity to develop skills, increase their employability and improve their chances of securing a job. The programme is currently the only employability programme in the North specifically targeted at 16- to 24-year-olds living in rural areas. BOOST, which is also supported by the Department for Employment and Learning, offers a tailored package of intensive support, including face-to-face workshops, CV clinics, an interactive support package, access to a network of employment mentors and the provision of industry-endorsed certification from the Federation of Small Businesses on completion. The programme is targeting almost 1,500 unemployed young people in the age group of 16 to 24 by 31 March 2015. More than 1,000 young people have received their completion certificates to date.

The Department is also supporting the rural youth entrepreneurship programme, which has recently been extended in the North, following the evaluation of an initial 28-month pilot that was delivered through international partnership in Finland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, as well as by two local partners: the Rural Development Council and Advantage Foundation Limited from Carrickfergus. The rural youth entrepreneurship programme remains an awareness-raising and animation programme designed to stimulate 16- to 30-year-olds in disadvantaged rural areas — predominantly rural dwellers in the top 50% of multiple deprivation measures — to consider self-employment and entrepreneurship as a viable career path for young people whilst allowing them to stay in their rural community. The programme also creates the foundations for the development of future rural businesses through a series of interactive workshops, networking events, masterclasses, study visits, seminars and mentoring sessions. Over 500 disadvantaged rural young people participated in the initial pilot, with 100 completing business action plans and progressing to further business development support through the programme's inbuilt referral process. Quite a lot of work is ongoing on tackling rural unemployment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I know that that was a detailed answer, but we should work to the two-minute rule.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that there are considerable numbers of severely disadvantaged people in rural areas. She has had an opportunity to look at the draft Budget: how does she believe it will affect the framework as she has outlined it to date?

Mrs O'Neill: The whole area of tackling poverty and isolation remains my priority; it is a policy priority for me. That, obviously, will be factored into any future budget decisions that are taken. That said, it is a draft Budget. I am committed to making sure that we go out to consultation and talk to rural stakeholders, the farming community and people who live and work in rural communities and that any decisions taken will be taken in that context in the round.

As I said, DARD had a long-standing weakness in the Budget because we traditionally relied on in-year monitoring to secure additional funding. I was delighted to receive an allocation of funding through this Budget process. However, it is a draft process. I intend to go back to the Executive for further discussions as part of that process on the back of the discussions that I will have with stakeholders.

Mr Ramsey: Further to the original question, is the Minister content with the level of collaborative work with other Departments in setting action plans to look at the most vulnerable disabled people in our rural communities?

Mrs O'Neill: I am content that the work that we have done under the TRPSI project has been excellent. The stats stand up for themselves. We are still evaluating the outcomes of some of the pilot programmes, but the outcomes of quite a number of the programmes are clear to be seen. The fact is that so many young people are involved in the employability programmes. The MARA project for maximising access to benefits has helped a large number of people, particularly with access to disability and other benefits. The programme absolutely stands up in terms of merit and taking it forward. It also has, in a way, leveraged other Departments to do things that they might not have done if the pot of funding had not been there. I very much look at it as leverage funding. Whilst the programme was £13 million, the actual overarching value of it was way beyond that. I do not have that figure with me, but it is a significant investment in rural areas.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. In her original answer, she mentioned fuel poverty. Given that the Department for Social Development is a relative failure there, what is her Department specifically doing to help those in rural areas in fuel poverty?

2.15 pm

Mrs O'Neill: My Department, as part of the TRPSI framework, is trying to alleviate that and work with other Departments. As you rightly said, DSD has primary responsibility for tackling fuel poverty, and my Department is represented on the interdepartmental working group on fuel poverty, which was established by DSD to ensure effective coordination of policies and actions across Departments. The warm homes scheme has been the primary tool of DSD and the Government, and, as you said, whilst there have been benefits to that, there have been challenges and things that could be done better. My Department has supported DSD through the extension of the warm homes scheme, particularly when it comes to homes that are very hard to heat due to having old cavity walls and other challenges that the DSD grant would not cover. That has been my focus, and it has been successful.

We are coming to the end of the programme, so we need to look at new proactive ways to help those in rural communities who have additional challenges, maybe because the type of walls in their home is making them hard to heat. I am committed to making sure that I do that. As I said, that work is a policy priority for me.

Flooding: East Antrim

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the measures she is taking to mitigate flooding in East Antrim. *(AQO 6912/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is planning to deliver culvert upgrading works in the East Antrim area, costing over £150,000, over the next 12 months. In addition, Rivers Agency will continue to carry out maintenance to designated watercourses to ensure that they are free-flowing and are performing their drainage function. Designated open watercourses are inspected routinely, with those benefiting rural areas typically being on a six-year rolling inspection programme and urban watercourses being inspected and maintained annually. Where a designated watercourse has been culverted, it is inspected on a three-year cycle. In addition, culvert inlet grilles are inspected and maintained on a frequent basis, many of them weekly. Additional grille inspections are undertaken when heavy rainfall is forecast and after flood events, as debris can often be carried downstream by high river flows, which can cause obstructions. We are also drafting flood risk management plans for the north eastern river basin district, which will set out a range of objectives and measures to reduce the risk of flooding from all significant sources.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. I trust that you subscribe to concerns about climate change, unlike others who do not seem to understand that it is a reality. What actions are you taking to mitigate the worst

excesses of climate change and plan for the future so that flooding can and will be alleviated in those areas that you have responsibility for, not only in East Antrim but across Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency has been very proactive, particularly in working with the Met Office. It signed an agreement recently with the Met Office on forward planning for the impact of climate change. The map systems that we have can always be improved. We are in a better position with the maps, which is the result of a collective effort and will hopefully improve things.

Rivers Agency is obviously very focused on the fact that we have a different climate. We have seen extreme weather, such as the snow in March almost two years ago and the extreme flooding that occurs within an hour's notice. That is obviously factored into the Rivers Agency's work programme and its maintenance work and is part of its business plan.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. How does the Minister prioritise funding for flood alleviation projects?

Mrs O'Neill: Each area is considered on its own merit, and funding for projects across the North is prioritised on the basis of the level of risk posed to people and property, the associated costs and the benefits of the project to the alleviation of flooding. Given the economic climate, we are always trying to look at where we can get the best value for the investment. Rivers Agency takes that forward in a constructive and structured way, but basically it boils down to prioritising on the level of risk to property and the associated costs and benefits that can be derived from that investment.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answers, particularly regarding flooding in East Antrim. What initiatives are being undertaken to deal with the watercourses in south Belfast that lead to persistent flooding in Finaghy, Lisburn Road and across south Belfast in general?

Mrs O'Neill: I have spoken to the Member about this before at Question Time, so he will be aware that there is a cross-departmental working group in place to look at south Belfast. My Department plays a key role in that and knows what it needs to do. I have visited south Belfast and met residents to discuss the problems that we have. In the past, additional members of staff were employed to deal with the issues, and we increased inspections of the grilles because there were problems with debris and so on. Hopefully, that will assure the Member that Rivers Agency is playing its role in tackling the problems faced by people in south Belfast.

DARD HQ: Ballykelly

5. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the plans to relocate her departmental headquarters to Ballykelly. *(AQO 6913/11-15)*

9. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how the establishment of her departmental headquarters in Ballykelly will stimulate both rural development and the local economy in East Londonderry. *(AQO 6917/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 5 and 9 together.

On 26 June, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister conveyed agreement to the relocation of my departmental headquarters to Ballykelly. The project is now proceeding and involves a new build to accommodate 400 workstations to be completed by the end of 2017 and an extension to accommodate a further 200 workstations to be completed by the end of 2020. My officials continue to liaise with OFMDFM, DFP and other Departments and agencies about the design, planning, construction and access arrangements. The current programme plan indicates that the tender for the construction phase will be awarded at the end of 2015.

The relocation of my Department to Ballykelly will stimulate rural development and the local economy through increased local spending, provision of high-quality and high-value public sector jobs and, potentially, jobs associated with the construction and ongoing servicing of the new accommodation. That will be a welcome boost to the construction industry. It will help to share wealth across the economy, contribute to better-balanced economic growth and help to address disparities in the distribution of public sector jobs across the North.

Mr Beggs: The Minister, along with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, appears indifferent to the possible poor use of our limited public funds. Why has a full cost-benefit analysis not been published to ensure good practice? Will she ensure that money is spent in the most efficient way and we minimise the money that has to be spent on buildings and future travel costs? Does she accept that, in getting there, there should be agreement with the Department of Finance and Personnel? Indeed, has her accounting officer agreed with this proposal?

Mrs O'Neill: I will work in reverse. My accounting officer is working to my direction. The Executive have agreed to the movement of DARD to Ballykelly, and I am committed to taking that project forward. We have a programme board in place; it is full speed ahead, and work is ongoing. We are working closely with staff on staff planning and moving forward. We have a business case, which has cleared all DARD's internal assurance processes. Executive approval was given on 26 June. I can say no more; it is as clear as that.

Ms Sugden: Would the Minister consider working with local businesses and community and voluntary groups such as the Shackleton Aviation and Space Museum on the Ballykelly site to maximise use and encourage local people and the local economy?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree. DFP and the Executive, as the owners of the site, are keen to explore that. Once we had made the decision, it was evident that there were a lot more people with an interest in the site. There are massive potential benefits for the north-west, not just because of the public sector jobs that are coming but because of everything else that will flow from it. I am absolutely happy, in planning and moving forward, to work with the local community because the benefits for that community are clear to be seen, particularly around construction and the increased footfall for the area. I am happy for that to be the case.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that the potential jobs boost and economic stimulus through the use of the entire site at Ballykelly, including her Department's headquarters, which my colleague Gregory Campbell and

I strongly lobbied for, will be a vital aspect of the economic recovery of the north-west of Northern Ireland and even further afield?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree that there will be a knock-on impact. The core of this is that we will have a fair distribution of public sector jobs. Those jobs will be a boost to the north-west, to the local construction industry and to Ballykelly itself, where there will be an increased footfall. The potential on that site is fantastic, and it will be a really good news story that will trickle down over the years to come. When DARD moves, the other things will follow. It is absolutely a good news story for the north-west.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her response. Given that this is a major element in the redevelopment of the Shackleton site, has she had any discussions with the Minister for Regional Development about establishing a railway point, which would clearly be of enormous benefit to so many people?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I have met the Regional Development Minister, and we have had discussions. It is a great idea. It is not without its problems or challenges, but that is being explored by the Regional Development Minister and his officials, so we look forward to maybe some positive outcomes from that. It was very evident from the first discussions that we had that there were a number of challenges with timings in the north-west, but it is still under consideration, and maybe we will have something positive from that.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, I am sure you will agree that the benefits of relocation far outstrip the negativity of some of the arguments put against the planned relocation of the headquarters.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. As I said, the economic benefits are clear to be seen: the jobs stimulus; the ongoing servicing of the building; the construction of the building; the knock-on impact for the local economy; and the follow-through with other businesses coming to that site. It is all going to be of tremendous benefit to the north-west. For me, this is about a fairer distribution of public sector jobs, and it is about stimulating that local economy. It is also about bringing DARD closer to its rural roots. For me, the opportunity that we have to be the first Department to move lock, stock and barrel into the north-west is to be welcomed. Maybe it is something that other Ministers will consider in any moves in the future, making sure that they create employment in rural areas and opportunities for those in the public service.

Mr Lyttle: Given the costs involved and the level of objection from Belfast staff to this significant relocation, is this really a proposal with which the Minister should persist? Can she give us reassurances that it is not going to cause utter chaos in the delivery of the functions of her Department?

Mrs O'Neill: On the views of staff, I outlined this before: it was taken forward in a number of phases. The headquarters staff in Dundonald House, given that it has been there for 50 years, is predominantly made up of people who live in the greater Belfast area and it is only natural that, when it comes to change, those people may not want to move. That is why we had a long lead-in time and are phasing it in to allow for those staff changes to happen. That is being done in full consultation with the unions and staff side representatives. That is the only way we are going to be successful.

This is a wider project even than DARD in staff and public sector movement. This is about new ways of working and working right across all Departments. After the initial survey with just DARD staff, we went out to the wider departmental staff and to the wider Civil Service, and there are more than enough people who want to pursue opportunities closer to home to give them a better work/life balance. It is only right that they should also have the opportunity to achieve promotion, and not have to come to the greater Belfast area to be able to get that. So, I am confident that we are able to manage the staff issues, in full consultation with them and their union representatives, in moving forward. The phased process that we have stepped out fairly clearly allows us to do that.

Farm Business Investment Scheme

6. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what preparations are being made to ensure the timely roll-out of the farm business investment scheme. *(AQO 6914/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The farm business improvement scheme, which includes a portfolio of measures to support sustainable growth in the farming sector, is under development as part of the wider rural development programme 2014-2020. On 14 October, I announced the submission of the draft programme to the European Commission. Formal approval and a Commission decision will depend on the nature and extent of the comments on our draft programme. My officials are working to obtain a Commission decision by April 2015.

In conjunction with seeking EU approval on the overall funding package, my officials will continue to work to develop the detail of the farm business improvement scheme and the associated business cases. The date for opening any calls under the scheme will depend on the programme being signed off by the European Commission and on getting the necessary business case approval for funding in place. In rolling out the scheme, the early focus will be on making advice and support available to farmers to help them to clearly identify their needs and to make the right decisions about developing their businesses. Officials are also considering how best to communicate and publicise the scheme once it is ready to open.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that update. Under this scheme, what support will be available for young farmers?

2.30 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Subject to the necessary approvals, the proposed farm business improvement scheme is going to include tiered capital grant support of up to 40% of eligible costs and initiatives to promote the sharing of knowledge, encourage innovation and improve the quality of the land. There is also the potential for additional grant aid of 10%, up to a maximum of 50%, under the capital investment scheme for those defined as young farmers, for innovative projects and for projects that help to improve the environment. So, match funding will be weighted more towards young farmers as we go forward, and I know that the young farmers will obviously welcome that.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister indicate whether she or DARD have had any discussions with the banks to make sure that there will be co-funded finance on the farm business improvement scheme when it comes forward?

Mrs O'Neill: I have regular engagement with the banks. However, as part of the programme, we are still working up the scheme. Once we have more detail of the scheme and its rules, we will, as part of the roll-out of the process, want to engage with the banks. The Member will note that, last week, another bank launched a pot of money for prioritising young farmers. That is to be welcomed. It shows that there is maybe more willingness on behalf of the banks to loan to the farming community. It also talked about extending credit. However, that is just one bank among others, which obviously have all sorts of different offers. Maybe there is a change in the tide in willingness to lend, but, as part of the farm business improvement scheme and what we roll out, we will engage with the bank sector and those who may be involved in financing farmers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Single Farm Payments: Remote Sensing

T1. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, given the fact that, within one month, farmers and producers can expect to receive their single farm payments, she has communicated with them about the areas that will be subject to remote sensing inspections this year and which are the four areas that have been selected. *(AQT 1661/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that, given EU rules, there are certain things that we can and cannot do and can and cannot say at certain times. At this moment, I can say that I have announced the targets, and we are on target to pay 93% of all claimants in December, which I am very much committed to. That includes 500 remote sensing inspections, which is double the number from last year. So, I hope to continue with the positive trend that we have developed over the last number of years. Remote sensing has worked very effectively this year, and most associated field visits will be completed in the next number of weeks. However, farmers cannot be told about the remote sensing at an earlier point in the year because of the controls and the potential of Europe coming down on us. So, the focus this year has been on reducing the time from when an inspection case reaches the Department and when it goes out to payment. We are very much focused on making sure that we pay the majority of those people in December. As I said, that is 500 inspections, which is 250 more than last year. You are right in saying that four areas have been identified this year. However, again, we cannot at this stage inform people. I took on board the commentary that we had last year on where we were at, and we intend to inform people as soon as we possibly can within the confines of the European rules.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answer. However, does the Minister realise that, in no other business world, would this be allowed to happen? People are waiting for and relying on thousands of pounds in December and do not know, at this stage, whether they will be able to get that money. There is nothing positive in coming out with a statement that you will have so-much percentage paid, given that those four areas will be subject to so much pressure. It will affect not only the producer but the whole community, including retailers and suppliers of those businesses.

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of the impact that it has, which is why we now have four control areas as opposed to two, and that will hopefully lessen the impact that we saw last year. My job is to protect the fact that we are paying out over £300 million in single farm payments every year and to show Europe that we are very cautious about the controls that it has dictated. We are being proportionate about that. We are taking every step that we can to inform the farmer as soon as possible, within those rules, that they will receive their money at whatever stage.

My principal aim is to make sure that we get to the stage where, first, everybody is paid by December and, secondly, we have part payments. That is what we are striving towards. We are clearly going in that direction; the trajectory has been set out very clearly. Over the last number of years, there has been improvement, year on year, and I am committed to making sure that we drive forward. That is all in the context of CAP reform, the new payment system and all the other changes that are being made in the Department. Even with all of that, the Department has made improvements, year on year, and will continue to do so. I will make sure, within the rules that are set down, that every farmer who is impacted on by remote sensing is informed of that as soon as possible.

Budget Cuts: Food and Drink Manufacturing Sector

T2. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an assessment of the likely effects and impact that the cuts in the draft Budget will have on the food and drink manufacturing sector. *(AQT 1662/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: As I said earlier, the Executive are clearly facing very difficult decisions as a result of the year-on-year reductions to the block grant because of the Tory Government's cuts to public services. Our block grant has not received an uplift, year on year, so we are facing real-terms cuts. As I also said earlier, DARD has a long-standing weakness in its budget, in that we had to bid in-year in the monitoring round for part of our funding. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the Executive allocated almost £20 million of funding to the Department. However, alongside that, we, like other Departments, are subject to a cut, which is going to be difficult to manage.

What I am very clear about at this stage is that we need full public consultation. This is a draft Budget position. I know that I have policy priorities, but I want to consult very clearly with the industry and stakeholders in taking decisions to make sure that any outcome is balanced, fair and the best approach to finding the necessary savings.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister. Do you not recognise that failed Sinn Féin public sector financial policies have led to the impasse and will lead to students not getting places in universities and colleges to deliver in the food and agriculture sector in Northern Ireland, which is one the of the vital aspects of life in this community that contributes to our economy? Perhaps you can explain to the House why that is.

Mrs O'Neill: I know that the Alliance Party likes to sit on the fence, but we cannot do that. There are difficult decisions to be taken, but you always have to put those in context. Why are we in this position? We are in this position because of the Tory cuts, year on year, to our block grant. Instead of bickering with each other in the Chamber, people would be well served by working together to fight against the British Government and the cuts that they are imposing on us. That is the approach that we should be taking.

In the difficult decisions that have to be taken in the time ahead, let us never lose focus that they are as a result of our block grant being cut, year on year, by the Tories. On top of that, they want to attack those on welfare. I do not believe that this is something that we can stand over, and I do not think that any elected politician should be able to stand over it. I therefore ask you to go away and think about your party's position of sitting on the fence and letting the Tories impose these cuts, year on year. Maybe that is where you should go. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Payment System: IT Bid

T3. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to install a new IT system for basic payments this year, for which she bid for £2·2 million. *(AQT 1663/11-15)*

Mr Elliott: We are back to more mundane, agricultural issues in my question.

Mrs O'Neill: We have to put our new payment system in place because of the changes to CAP reform and the fact that the payment process will be different. We have to take that forward. We were not successful in the bid, but that does not mean that we will not do it. The money is now going to have to be found from within the Department's budget because it is a necessary part of us being able to get payments out to farmers on a timely basis.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the clarification. We are coming close to the start of the payment system for the single farm payment. Will not having the new IT system in place now impact on farmers, particularly those who had inspections this year, and further delay their receipt of the single farm payment?

Mrs O'Neill: I give the Member an assurance that the 93% target that we set will be met. That will not be impacted on by the budget position; it has more to do with the changes post-2015. This year, we are on course to meet the target that I set. My aim is to pay the majority of people in December.

Single Farm Payment: Payment Target

T4. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, having listened with interest to all the issues around the single farm payment and noting that she said that 90% will receive their payment by December, whether that figure is feasible and achievable as, for a number of years, farmers have not received their payments until, in some cases, June. *(AQT 1664/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: Just to be clear: I have set a target of 93%. The situation has improved each year since I have taken up my post, and we have seen year-on-year increases in the number of people who have been paid in December. As I said in answer to a previous question, my aim is for everybody to be paid in December; that is where we want to be. Secondary to that, we want to be in a position to be able to make part payments. Part of getting us to that position has included the use of remote sensing and an increase in the number of people whom we inspect in that manner. Notwithstanding all the difficult challenges I have set out, we are on target to meet the 93% in December.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that answer. Obviously, 7% will not be paid on target. Does she have any idea of the timescales for when they will receive payments or even part payments, as she is trying to indicate?

Mrs O'Neill: Part payments will not be an issue this year; we will make such payments in future years. If we can do better than 93% in December, it will be all well and good. The remainder will be paid as early as possible throughout January, February and March next year.

Rivers Agency: PEDU Recommendations

T5. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made on the PEDU recommendations to move the Rivers Agency to the Department for Regional Development and whether any work has been done to establish a flood alert and forecast service for Northern Ireland. *(AQT 1665/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I have always said that I am very open to the PEDU recommendations but that they have to be in the context of wider discussions about Departments and the roles of each Department. I am not opposed to the idea, but it has to be considered in the round. Perhaps that will be part of the discussions that we hope to enter into over the next couple of weeks in the talks process. The other work is ongoing. We recently signed an agreement with the Met Office, which will get things moving. That is the first stage of taking that issue forward.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for her response. What other measures has she taken to prepare for possible adverse weather conditions over the winter months?

Mrs O'Neill: We are working on that and will go out to the press for the farming community over the next number of weeks to discuss preparations for a state of readiness in case we find ourselves in situations of adverse weather. We are giving out advice and signposting to our advisory service in CAFRE. Our advisers are available on the phone or in person to meet the farming community to talk about the challenges. Those are our attempts to try to assist the industry to be in a state of readiness.

Farm Diversification Projects: Income

T6. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much farm income in Northern Ireland comes from farm diversification projects. *(AQT 1666/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have those figures on me, but I am happy to provide them to the Member in writing.

Mr Gardiner: If the Minister does not have the figures with her, she will not be able to answer the other part of my question. I will just wait on those.

Brucellosis-free Status: Progress

T7. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress is being made in achieving brucellosis-free status in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to bovine brucellosis. *(AQT 1667/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: We have made great progress, and I am pleased that we are continuing on that trajectory. The last confirmed case of brucellosis was on 28 February 2012, and, as a result, we recently consulted on proposals to relax our pre-movement testing controls proportionally. That would mean a pre-movement testing saving to the industry of £7 million, which we have been working very hard to achieve. We are on target to receive brucellosis-free status in 2015.

Mr Poots: On the basis of receiving brucellosis-free status, is it the intention to relax further some of the standards that have been set as part of the quite tight regulations over the last number of years?

Mrs O'Neill: Under the revised arrangements, the age of the animals that are to be pre-movement tested will increase from 12 to 24 months, and the validity of tests will be extended from 30 days to 60 days for a single movement. Those changes came into effect today, 3 November. Providing there is no reversal in the trend, and we continue in the same direction, we are, as I said, on target to have brucellosis-free status for the North in March 2015. That will obviously create a brucellosis-free status across the island.

2.45 pm

Agricultural Land-use Strategy

T8. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has had any discussions with ministerial colleagues, particularly the Minister of the Environment, about an overall strategic land-use strategy, following her recent publication of the agricultural land-use strategy. *(AQT 1668/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I have not had any recent discussions with the Minister. However, officials regularly engage in taking forward the issues. In particular, there has been a lot of work recently on the Nitrates Action Programme (NAP), of which the Member will be aware. That work is ongoing. Standing items of discussion at official level are land use, the Nitrates Action Programme, the water framework directive and all the other environmental issues in which the two Departments have a common interest.

Ms Lo: It is very useful for all Departments. What other Departments do you think should be involved in overall strategic land-use discussions?

Mrs O'Neill: The main partners for discussion are obviously DARD and DRD, but perhaps we would benefit from a lot more discussion. Land use and protecting our future are in everybody's interest, so I am very keen that, if the discussions were to be widened, my officials and I play a role in taking that forward.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. There is a lot of noisy chatter on the Back Benches. Members should give the questioners and the Minister the opportunity to be heard.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Irish Language Strategy

1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funds have been identified to implement the Irish language strategy. *(AQO 6924/11-15)*

12. **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): With your permission, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, I will take questions 1 and 12 together.

The strategies are being finalised, and I hope to publish them by the end of January 2015. My officials will then establish the structures for their implementation, working closely with other Departments, all of which will have a role to play in delivering them. The strategies set out road maps for the Irish language and for Ulster Scots over the next 20 years in a wide range of areas such as education, public services and community and the media, to name but a few. I 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 their proper implementation. As I said at the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee on 9 October, I will continue to be a strong advocate to ensure that funding for these strategies is forthcoming. There is much expectation in the communities following the public consultations, when people put forward proposals based on evidence from their experience on the ground. I believe that Ministers have a duty to fulfil these commitments.

Mr D Bradley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Is é an cheist atá agam ar an Aire, i bhfianaise an bhuiséid a d'fhógair an tAire Airgeadais inár láthair inniu, cad é mar is féidir a bheith cinnte go mbeidh airgead ann leis an straitéis seo a chur i bhfeidhm? I thank the Minister for her answer. In light of the draft Budget that the Finance Minister revealed today, what hope is there that there will be funding in any Department to implement the strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. As the Minister of Finance and Personnel outlined today and previously in other debates, he will, after putting the draft Budget out for consultation in the Assembly, engage in a series of bilateral meetings with Ministers. I do not think that people can shirk their responsibility and use lack of affordability as a reason for not doing it. It is in that vein that I will continue to pursue the full funding of these strategies.

Ms McCorley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. An dtig liom fiafraí den Aire cá huair a fhoilseofar an dá straitéis, agus an dtig léi a rá cé acu a chuirfidh a cuid comhghleacaithe sa Choiste Feidhmiúcháin i bhfeidhm iad? When will the two strategies be published? Will there be full implementation of the two strategies by the Minister's Executive colleagues?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. I am sure that she picked up on the primary response that I gave to Dominic Bradley in relation to the strategies for the Irish language and Ulster Scots. I intend

to publish the strategies at the end of January 2015. There is a duty placed on the Executive, through the 1998 Act, to adopt strategies in relation to the enhancement and protection of the Irish language and, indeed, Ulster Scots. I intend to make as sure as possible that every aspect of the strategies is adopted, particularly since we went out on a robust consultation. It was a very good consultation in terms of responses. The responses were realistic, and they reflected the work that is going on on the ground. It is important that other Ministers and Departments factor them into and make them a feature of future Budgets.

Mr Campbell: Curry my yogurt can coca coal yer. The Minister has outlined what she is talking about with the Irish language strategy and an Ulster-Scots strategy. Would it not be more inclusive to have a minority languages strategy so that nobody would feel left out?

Ms Ní Chuilín: If what you have just done is anything to go by, we do not need a strategy for pure ignorance. Pure ignorance. Your conduct is not befitting a Member of this Chamber, and it does not warrant an answer.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister detail her Department's mainstream projects that have an Ulster-Scots, Irish language or other cultural activity that remain unspent at this time and are unlikely to be spent in 2014-15?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that the Member, who is new to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, will appreciate that the North/South arrangements for work around Ulster Scots and the Irish language have experienced difficulties. There were difficulties for the Irish Government in particular in relation to their contribution to the budget, but I have been led to believe that that has been corrected. That is good, because the work that the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge are doing, not just independently but collectively, is very good. That in itself will lead to the third part of your question by building good and better relations across the island, particularly through the conduit of languages. I anticipate not only the money being spent but a demand for an increase in their budgets.

Mr B McCrea: Would the Minister care to comment on whether she regrets the loss of Ultach in the past couple of days?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do. I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I heard part of Aodán's contribution on Radio Ulster the other night. It is with regret that he has had to close his doors, and it is with regret that he and a few other groups did not participate fully in the reconfiguration around core funding. I am delighted that his fears around the deficit that it may create for the Protestant, unionist and loyalist community around the Irish language will not be realised. I believe that Linda Ervine, through the East Belfast Mission, is fulfilling that role. It is with regret that Iontaobhas Ultach is now closed.

Ulster Orchestra

2. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with other Executive colleagues about a rescue plan for the Ulster Orchestra. *(AQO 6925/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The Ulster Orchestra needs to develop a long-term, sustainable approach to address its current financial difficulties. My officials, together with the Arts Council, have been liaising with the orchestra and its management to discuss potential future operating models and alternative funding mechanisms. In addition, I recently met representatives of the orchestra to explore the nature of some of those problems, the problems that it faces and the work it is undertaking to identify possible solutions. Further work will be undertaken by the orchestra over the next few weeks to identify potential options and associated costs for the future.

If the orchestra identifies 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 we might support it.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Minister's comments. She will be aware that many other major cities across these islands have been able to retain their orchestras. Have you explored how those orchestras are supported by their town authorities or central government? What time frame are you working to in relation to a rescue plan?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. I have done some research and have been on the computer looking at Glasgow, London, which has a few symphony orchestras, Dublin and Australia. Indeed, my officials, along with the Arts Council, are preparing additional research. From what I have seen, all orchestras across the world are struggling to fully publicly fund themselves. Because of the financial situation over the past few years, orchestras have had great difficulty in getting corporate sponsorship and, when they get it, it is not over a long time. So, sustainability is a problem.

The deadline for the management of the Ulster Orchestra to come up with a rescue package is 15 December. I am sure that the Member will appreciate that it is called the Ulster Orchestra, but, with respect to local government, Belfast has done a lot of the heavy lifting. I have spoken to the management team, and I think that it is going to talk to other local government bodies, but it knows that, by 15 December, it needs to have some short-term interim funding or the Ulster Orchestra will be in serious difficulties.

Mr Humphrey: Can the Minister correct what the questioner asked in relation to the Ulster Orchestra? Will she confirm that it is a regional orchestra that belongs not to Belfast but to Northern Ireland? Can she also confirm that, quite rightly, Belfast's council has supported the Ulster Orchestra? Has she met other councils to try to secure funding and a joined-up approach to secure the future of the Ulster Orchestra for this region? Given her initial reply about the management, how much will her Department put forward if her concerns are addressed?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Mrs Kelly acknowledged the fact that Belfast has done a lot of the heavy lifting. It is not my job to go round all the councils on behalf of the orchestra to drum up support — pardon the pun — it is the orchestra's job. It has been very sensitive, thankful and grateful for the support it has received from Belfast City Council over the years and has acknowledged some small support that it has received from other councils.

The 15 December date is looming large for the orchestra. The Member will appreciate the fact that, unless there is some long-term sustainability in new proposals brought forward by the orchestra, we could be here in a couple of months having the same discussion. None of us wants

that. We want to make sure that the proposals, hopefully, on new models and new ways forward, will be sustainable and robust and will attract additional sources of funding.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. How much money has been invested in the Ulster Orchestra by the Department in recent years?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I stand to be corrected, but, since 2010, approximately £10·9 million has been invested in the Ulster Orchestra. Recently, on top of what the Arts Council put in, DCAL invested just over £48,000. Since 2010, the Arts Council has invested £10,573,490. As well as that, the Ulster Orchestra received over £190,000 from the lottery fund, notwithstanding the fact that Belfast City Council also put substantial money in. It is substantial money. It is expensive to run orchestras. Those are ballpark figures.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister referred to research benchmarking the Ulster Orchestra against similar orchestras elsewhere. Has she reached an opinion on the balance of performance between formal recitals on a Friday night in the Ulster Hall and initiatives like the paper orchestra and the outreach educational programme? Has the Ulster Orchestra got it right?

3.00 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín: Just to correct the Member, I did not do research into the Ulster Orchestra to benchmark it against others; I just wanted to find out through my own research what other orchestras were experiencing in respect of financial sustainability.

The paper orchestra is an initiative that came from DCAL in conjunction with the Ulster Orchestra, and it happened in the Shankill and the Colin. If additional investment were to come forward as a rescue package or if there was a continuation of support from DCAL through the Arts Council, those initiatives would be conditional to that funding. Young people who have never experienced an orchestra need to have that opportunity, and they need to be inspired. They have a good conductor with a new approach, and it is regrettable that we are looking at rescue packages. However, if something were brought forward, initiatives that have outreach and the ability to bring what the orchestra has to offer to communities that would never have thought of going to see an orchestra will be right in the centre of what we hope to do in the future.

Mr McCallister: The Minister will be aware that she replied to my question for written answer about her involvement in the efficiency reform process. To date, her Department has not delivered any efficiency savings. How does that sit with her call and demand for the orchestra to set out a new programme and efficiencies to make sure that it saves itself, which I hope we all support?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Efficiency drives across all Departments are certainly more acute now. However, the Member will be aware that, if the Ulster Orchestra were to receive some short-term funding from whomever, it should be before 15 December. Thereafter, there could be a longer-term support package based on a new approach, but efficiencies will dictate what that support will be. We live in very stringent economic times, but that is not to say that the Ulster Orchestra, just like any other service, is not entitled to receive support. Certainly, efficiencies will dictate the level of support. Even for the orchestra, efficiencies will dictate what new models it will bring forward to make it more sustainable in the future.

Commonwealth Fly Fishing Championships

3. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the assistance her Department provided to competitors representing Northern Ireland in the Commonwealth Fly Fishing Championships. *(AQO 6926/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: The 2014 Commonwealth Fly Fishing Championships were held in the south-west of England in June. I congratulate the local team entered by the Ulster Provincial Council of the Trout Anglers Federation of Ireland (TAFI) on winning the bronze medal and Kenneth Ferguson on winning the individual silver medal.

DCAL did not receive a specific request for assistance in relation to the 2014 championships. DCAL has been approached by various angling associations in the past for support to participate in similar events. I met representatives of TAFI and indicated that I would support a future championship being hosted here in the North.

I am pleased to advise that the National Coarse Fishing Federation of Ireland, in partnership with Craigavon Borough Council and DCAL, has been successful in its bid to host the 2015 World Lure Championships at Craigavon Park Lakes.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for her reply. I congratulate the members of the Northern Ireland team; I know that some of them are from my home borough of Newtownabbey. The Minister is also aware that fly fishing is truly an inclusive sport, no matter what age you are, what culture you come from or whether you are an urban or a city dweller. Will the Minister look at how funding is allocated for that type of sport? As I said, it is very inclusive. There are no barriers when it comes to fly fishing; it is there for everybody.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question and her supplementary question. She has rightly pointed out what I was going to say: fly fishing and angling across the board is a sport that, fortunately in recent years, has received a bit more prominence. In our constituency, there are a few angling projects, particularly for children and young people who would never have had any access, other than through family members, scouts or local clubs. They can now go to our lakes and waterways and even to our local parks for fishing. I am looking at the future of angling. Sport NI conducted a review, and I look forward to seeing how we can roll that out in future. It is important, not just for young fellas but for young girls. As we can see from the 2014-15 bid, young girls are now involved in angling, and I am sure that the Member will agree that that is a good trend and a good way to go forward in future.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her presentation. Can she outline to the House what international angling competitions and events DCAL has supported?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In 2013, DCAL supported the World Youth Fly Fishing Championship and the World Lure Fishing for Predators from Boats Championship. The World Police and Fire Games had game angling competitions as well, and the Department was involved in the Erne Coarse

Classic and the Erne Pike Classic. A number of those competitions involved DCAL working in partnership with the IFI and Loughs Agency, certainly in the marketing and promotion of those events. I am delighted to say that that experience has actually helped us to secure the bid for next year for the World Lure Championships in Craigavon.

Tourism Events Fund

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the cultural impact of the decision by Northern Ireland Tourist Board to withdraw funding from the tourism events fund. *(AQO 6927/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The fund in question has been a key source of support for some of our highest-profile festivals and events, and I recognise that many of those will be significantly impacted by its potential withdrawal. Events such as Féile an Phobail, the North West 200, the Milk Cup and Foyle Cup and the Walled City Tattoo, just to mention a few, will potentially be affected by the decision of the Tourist Board. Those events are about much more than simply showcasing what we have to offer here in terms of money; they also help to break down barriers within our local communities and develop mutual respect amongst our increasingly diverse population.

While I recognise the value that those larger events bring in economic and social benefits, I think it is important that the whole impact of small community events also has to be acknowledged. I understand that those events remain a priority for the Tourist Board and that it will endeavour to source budgets for those events in future years.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your answer so far. Can you explain to the House what actions you intend to take to ensure that that range of significant cultural and sporting activities that have been taking place will not be lost to the economy and to Northern Ireland as a result of changes in the budget?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member might be surprised, but I learned about the withdrawal of the funding through the media. Again, it is still speculation as to which events will be supported and which will not. I am trying to find out exactly what the Tourist Board will support, but, as I said to other Members who have raised it with me — I want to be totally clear on this — the Tourist Board made a decision not to bring forward events funding. That does not mean to say that the responsibility for that gets passed to DCAL. It is not my responsibility to be the first source of funding for those events. I am certainly loath, because one department has made a decision, to pick the ball up and run. That is not happening.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answers. In relation to the Milk Cup, which was mentioned as part of the question, can I ask the Minister why, after the evidence given by the Milk Cup organisers only a few weeks ago at the CAL Committee, her Department did not give any funding to the Milk Cup? It is internationally renowned, attracting thousands of spectators each year, with hundreds of players coming from across the world, and DCAL was unable to sponsor that event. Why is that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am confused about why the Member thinks I have never invested any money in the Milk Cup and Foyle Cup: I have. In the October monitoring round, for the Milk Cup and the Foyle Cup — the Milk Cup for this year — we were advised by the organisers that they could not spend the money before the end of this financial year. Obviously, that information has not been fed back to the Member, in fairness to him.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. Does the Minister agree that it is vital that sports and cultural events are supported, as they are vital to the local economy and a key factor in attracting tourism?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, I agree. It is vital that that cultural package for events or the events support for a cultural package in sports and even some of the bigger events is supported as best as possible in future years. The Member will know better than I, coming from a rural background, that events, particularly in small rural areas or communities, are sometimes the only opportunity for regenerating some of the local economy. Local and small businesses have come to rely on those benefits on an annual basis. It is with regret that I say that they are now in the situation of wondering what will happen this year. It is important that the Tourist Board has indicated that, where possible, it will try to focus on those events as a priority. However, like many others, those groups are still waiting for funding to become available.

Mr Dallat: I do not intend to chastise the Minister for the gross errors of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, but will she accept that she now has a responsibility to give leadership and guidance to the organisers of events such as the Milk Cup, the North West 200, the Foyle Cup and so on, who have clearly been grossly let down by the Tourist Board, which apparently does not see beyond the Titanic centre?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to forward a copy of the Hansard report of these questions to the ETI Minister so that she can forward it to the Tourist Board. I know that some of our officials have engaged with some of the events' organisers, and I am sure that the Member will not be surprised that they have come to DCAL seeking support and assistance. The Member will also be aware that, for reasons that will become known in the future, what small support and assistance we gave to the events was transferred from DCAL in 2010. It is regrettable that these people are now in the situation of not knowing whether they can plan events at all. It is important, particularly for areas like the north-west, that such events have more security and sustainability in the future.

Anglers: Licensing Regime

5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she intends to simplify the licensing regime for anglers. *(AQO 6928/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The range of angling licences in the North reflects the different types of fishing available. They offer choice and value for money to anglers, particularly concessionary licences for senior citizens, those with disabilities and, indeed, visiting groups. I recognise, however, that there is scope to simplify the current regime, and we are making good progress on that.

My officials have been working with NI Direct in identifying an e-commerce solution to simplify the existing licensing system. In an initial step, the layout of these licences

has been changed, which has reduced the number of different licence books held by distributors. We have also centralised the administration of licences and permits to my Department's Portadown office.

In April 2014, the NI Direct-led project was prioritised as a Programme for Government commitment to improve citizen services. A project board has been established to advance that work, and NI Direct has this week commenced an exercise to scope the business and IT requirements for developing e-commerce solutions for a new licensing and permit system.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister update us on the development of an all-Ireland e-licensing system?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) commissioned a scoping study in conjunction with the Loughs Agency, DCAL and inland fisheries with the purpose of exploring the possibility of implementing e-licensing projects to meet needs. A future product to arise from this work could be the provision of all-Ireland e-licensing for salmon and sea trout angling and other angling. The study makes recommendations for an all-Ireland e-licensing system online marketing platform that will increase the efficiency of current sales and management. The report makes a series of recommendations and cost projections to advance the project. The business case is being commissioned and will examine those issues in detail and take into account the opportunity to integrate the inland fisheries group's current NI Direct project, with the purpose of achieving an all-Ireland solution.

Mr Kinahan: It is good to hear that the Minister supports anglers so much. When it comes to councils, has she had discussions with that Minister and that Department about the future use of reservoirs that have been made redundant and been sold, given that they, too, affect anglers?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Not just with councils but with your colleague the Minister for Regional Development. I hope to have discussions with him in the future. I know that officials have been working across the board in looking at some of the reservoirs that NI Water has found to be surplus to requirements. We are certainly looking at the management arrangements for those. It is about affordability, but, particularly when angling has been and is currently available on those reservoirs, there is an expectation that that service and that access will be continued, regardless of whether they are surplus to requirements for NI Water. We are considering what, if any, arrangements we can make for the future, but I am very supportive, as hopefully other Ministers will be, because there will be a cost implication. Rather than get on with the work, I am waiting to find out what the cost will be.

3.15 pm

Mr Lyttle: Does the Minister have any update on the regulation of inshore sea angling, which is similar to freshwater angling?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have any responsibility for sea angling, although the fish do not know that. However, the Member will be aware that we brought forward a consultation on salmon and trout conservation in inland waterways and that there is now mandatory catch-and-release. Through working with colleagues in DARD and the Loughs Agency through the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), we are looking at inland waterways and sea fishing, but I am afraid that the Member's question will be have to be asked of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Casement Park: Legal Challenge

T1. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of Casement Park in light of the legal challenge from residents. *(AQT 1671/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given his legal background, the Member should be aware that the fact that the challenge is still within the courts means that it is not appropriate for me to comment.

Mr Weir: Notwithstanding the legal challenge, does the Department have a target for the start date of actual works at Casement Park?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I anticipate a response from the judicial review hearing some time this month, if that is what the Member is trying to extract from me. That will hopefully be in the next few weeks. If that decision is favourable to the Department, work will commence almost immediately.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Weir for a supplementary.

Mr Weir: I think that you will find that I have already asked it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I beg your pardon. I call Michaela Boyle.

Creative Industries: Strabane

T2. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to ensure that Strabane is included in the creative industries, given that she will be aware from previous questions from Ms Boyle to her Department of Ms Boyle's particular interest in the creative industries. *(AQT 1672/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question and for her ongoing interest in the creative industries. I am aware that she, along with other representatives of the area, met DCAL officials to discuss how such services can be extended as part of the legacy of the City of Culture. I assume that those discussions will be ongoing with her, other representatives and community representatives. The Member should be assured that Strabane and other areas surrounding the city of Derry will be included in any future plans.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the demand for creative learning centre support, can the Minister advise whether any community planning by her north-west team will factor in specific outreach of areas of funding to Strabane and surrounding areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to give the Member an assurance that Strabane and other areas will be factored into that. If you look at the work of the Nerve Centre in Derry, you will see the plans that it has to bring that work out to surrounding areas. The areas in question will be part of any consultation on what that service should look like. It is important that elected representatives work closely with my

Department to bring that forward, because a lot of people have been looking very thankfully to the city of Derry, and they want some of that in their community. I will ensure that DCAL will be consistent in its approach to ensuring that services in the city are spread throughout the area.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call the Member who is listed for question 3 for reasons that have already been outlined to the House. I call Mr Gordon Dunne.

Hamas Flag: Cliftonville Match

T4. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her views are on the display of an illegal Hamas flag during a Cliftonville football match at Windsor Park on Saturday 18 October, when, as Mr Dunne understands it, the flag was displayed for over an hour. *(AQT 1674/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will know that I am a Cliftonville supporter, but I was not at the match in question. I have absolutely no information about the displaying of that flag or any other flag for over one hour at that match. I imagine that it is a position that the IFA and UEFA will take up with the club.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister give us an assurance today that she will be in contact with Cliftonville Football Club about the issue and give us a further assurance that this will not reoccur?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is a bit naive to think that I have any control over Cliftonville or any other soccer club.

Mr Dunne: You are a supporter.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am a supporter. Like the Member, who is a supporter of his local clubs, I condemn any behaviour that is not in keeping with the guiding principles of the football club. I will happily forward his comments through my Department to the IFA and — pardon the pun — pass the ball to it.

UK City of Culture: Legacy

T5. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the make-up of the capital bid for the UK City of Culture legacy. *(AQT 1675/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to write to the Member on the details of that. Certainly, it is in keeping with the announcement that I made in the city last November. I did not receive all the funding that I would have hoped for. In every monitoring round, I have consistently made a bid to fulfil the legacy of the City of Culture. I was very lucky to receive some capital money in October. I will continue that trend throughout the monitoring rounds.

Mrs Dobson: Is the Minister satisfied that this budget will be spent during the year? What are her plans for 2015-16 for the legacy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no doubt that the money will be spent because, as the Member will be aware through her work in her constituency, when groups are waiting for funding to become available, not only do they have their projects ready and good to go but they have the money spent in their heads before they get it. I have not yet met a group in the city or the surrounding areas that is sitting swinging its legs. They are all busy getting themselves ready. The money will be spent. Certainly, for 2015-16 and even through the duration of the next mandate, I anticipate that the legacy of the City of Culture and the legacy that we need to fulfil in the north-west area will continue from one mandate to another.

Football Clubs: Funding

T6. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether any finance will be made available to upgrade Irish league football clubs, such as Coleraine. *(AQT 1676/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: What has become known as the subregional programme for soccer will become available in the next CSR period. I will soon make a bid to my Executive colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel for those funds, which are substantial, for the IFA for new facilities. Notwithstanding the fact that the Member mentioned Coleraine in particular and despite some speculation in the media, no decisions have been made on any areas where that funding will be invested.

Mr G Robinson: Will that include B division clubs such as Limavady United? *[Laughter.]*

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is a matter for the IFA to present a facilities management strategy. Certainly, it is for me to make the decision on what investment the strategy will receive, notwithstanding the fact that the Member has a right to ensure that smaller clubs are not forgotten in any potential investment. I am sure that he will lobby, along with his colleagues from that area, to ensure that his constituency is not ignored when it comes to future investment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sure that any centre forward would be pleased with that opportunism.

Mr Ross Hussey is not in his place, so I call Mr Trevor Lunn.

Fish Kills: DCAL Involvement

T8. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the extent of her Department's involvement in the aftermath of all-too-frequent fish kills, including the one at Glenavy and, more recently, the kill in the Sixmilewater. *(AQT 1678/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I join the Member in saying that these fish kills are very worrying. There has been a lot of speculation about their cause. One potential cause is pollution, another is the effect of global warming on the environment and a third is the biosecurity of lakes and waterways. The Member gave the example of the Sixmilewater. Although that is a private waterway, it is regrettable. Many local anglers have privately stocked these lakes from their own pocket. My Department is working with the Department of the Environment and AFBI to ascertain the causes of the fish kills. We need to learn the lessons and identify, if possible, the sources of the fish kills and try to eradicate them.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. However, these fish kills have been going on since time immemorial. One expects a succession of them at this time of year because of the run-off from slurry tanks into rivers. It seems to me that, when you try to sort out what is going on and who is to blame, at least four Departments are involved — your Department, DETI, DARD and the Department of the Environment — but nobody ever seems to get the blame. Will the Minister commit to working with

the other Departments to put together something that might produce a more cohesive approach to the problem and a better outcome?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is right in saying that several Departments are involved, but none should be blamed for the pollution of the waterways. We are left to pick up the pieces, frankly. If the cause is pollution, we should identify the source and prosecute, applying the maximum fine to ensure that there is a deterrent. I know of one case that was in the media, but there have been other cases of several fines being levied on one person. These people seem to pay their fine and get on with it. The environment, including the fish and the local flowers and fauna, has been experiencing pollution not just for the here and now but for generations to come. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that we tackle this problem as best we can. I give the Member a commitment that I will try to find the source of this latest pollution and go for prosecution with the maximum penalties.

Arts: Funding

T9. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she can be definitive, given today's Budget announcement, about when she will be able to tell the Arts Council and all the other funding bodies about their budget line for next year, especially as he had the great joy of attending the last night of the Belfast Festival in the form of 'The Gloaming' at the weekend and Anna Lo attended an event that saw the recreation of the great tradition of Irish traditional music in an image of something different from the past. *(AQT 1679/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question, and I congratulate the Ulster Bank Festival at Queen's and other festivals for the wonderful gift that they give, particularly the activities in the city of Belfast. I had the pleasure of attending one performance — the internationally renowned show 'Guide Gods', which was shown on television.

I have meetings scheduled for within the next fortnight on the budget lines. My officials are meeting arm's-length bodies this week to outline the percentages of the budget that they will have. It is important that we get those indications sooner rather than later so that planning can occur.

Mr Attwood: I welcome that answer, as far as it went. I welcome the fact that there will be meetings, but when will you be able to say what the Arts Council and all the other funding bodies will have in hard cash as their budget line or baseline for next year? Will it be in a month? Will it be in two months? I note, of course, that it is all subject to the approval of the Budget by the House in March.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is being a bit silly. He will know, from his experience as Minister, that the indicative figures are already there. The ALBs have them, so they have an indicative spend.

We will be meeting again this week, so they will know exactly what they have, particularly from today. The ALBs will work out the figures for what they have, as the Member put it, in cold cash.

3.30 pm

Ballynure Angling Club: DCAL Support

T10. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department will provide to Ballynure Angling Club following last week's fish kill. *(AQT 1680/11-15)*

Mrs Cameron: I apologise if my question is similar to Mr Lunn's. I did not quite pick up what he said about the fish kill in the Sixmilewater.

Ms Ní Chuilín: We are working with the angling clubs and, as I mentioned to Mr Lunn, other Departments to try to identify the causes of the fish kill and to try to look at ways in which we can eradicate some of the difficulties. The Sixmilewater, as the Member knows, is a private estate and club. Certainly, the expense of restocking lakes, rivers and waterways is more acutely felt when it comes out of members' pockets. We need to identify the causes. If the cause is pollution, we need to identify the people responsible for that and prosecute them.

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will take points of order after the conclusion of Question Time.

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Multiple Sclerosis Respite Unit: Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their place. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision will be made for multiple sclerosis (MS) respite when services at Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle are closed.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): In my statement of 30 October 2014, I said that my priorities are to ensure that services provided by Health and Social Care (HSC) are safe and effective, and to ensure that my Department achieves financial balance, which is required of all Ministers. To achieve those aims, trusts have provided a range of contingency proposals. Each trust has provided assurances that its services will remain safe and effective.

As part of its contingency plans, the Northern Trust has proposed the temporary closure of respite beds in the Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle for sufferers of multiple sclerosis. I regret that the trust has had to take that action. As a consequence of the Budget pressures, it would simply not be possible to maintain the current levels of service provision in the absence of the entire required funding of £130 million right across HSC. However, I assure Mr McKay that the trust will endeavour to minimise the impact on front line patient care. Key workers are therefore arranging to meet service users and families over the coming days to ascertain their specific needs and identify the providers that would provide the best alternative to Dalriada Hospital. That will include the consideration of individual and group bed-based provision. Where service users would prefer to have direct payments made so that they can make their own arrangements, that will also be an option.

Respite services to MS patients will still be provided, and everyone who requires respite will receive it. The trust will be working with everyone involved to ensure that service users' assessed needs are central to the process moving forward. The trust has also assured me that respite care for anyone who has been booked in for November will be honoured and that there will be no change to the booking. My Department will monitor the situation closely over the coming months to ensure that the service provided to MS sufferers in the Northern Trust continues to meet the needs of the local population.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I find that answer utterly pathetic. MS patients, their families and the patients of the entire Dalriada Hospital are devastated at having been given only four weeks' notice to move out before the hospital closes. Providing many of those MS patients with the option of going into a care home is absolutely pathetic because it does not meet their needs.

The Minister and the trust have outlined that it is a temporary closure. The people in Ballycastle and north Antrim are not fools. This is not a temporary closure: it is the closure of the Dalriada Hospital. As far as all the patients are concerned, they are being tossed out into the street.

I went to a protest on Friday night outside the hospital, and it was powerful and very moving, Minister. I find it utterly disappointing that you are standing four-square behind the trust in its long-running agenda to run down the Dalriada Hospital and run down referrals to it. Stop hiding behind the Northern Trust, and stop hiding behind the trusts and all their decisions that affect our community.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I need a question.

Mr McKay: Will you postpone the closure of the Dalriada? Will you do the decent thing and meet the patients concerned, the MS Society and the people in Ballycastle about this devastating news that you and the trust have thrust upon us?

Mr Wells: The answer to the last question is, "Yes". This morning, I met the MP for the area, Ian Paisley Jnr, Mr Mervyn Story, an MLA for North Antrim, Dr Mary McLister and Dr Martin O'Kane, who made very articulate points about the future of the Dalriada Hospital. I have undertaken to interrogate the Northern Trust on the points raised with me this morning. They put those points much more politely than the Member just did, but apart from that they were very similar.

Mr McKay: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: Certainly, very valid concerns have been raised about the whole issue, and I intend to make absolutely certain that the Northern Trust, on this occasion, has made the right decision.

I also need to emphasise the fact that I have to balance the books by the end of this financial year. We are £70 million short of doing that, and therefore each of the five trusts, not just the Northern Trust, has had to make very difficult decisions. I have received representations from Bangor, Whiteabbey, Armagh and from throughout Northern Ireland on similar difficult decisions, but this is where we find ourselves as far as budgets are concerned.

Mr Frew: I ask the Minister to assure the House that he will scrutinise the decision by the trust vigorously to satisfy himself that it is the right one. Even though the trusts say that these decisions are being made to save money, the patients in this case — not only MS sufferers but those who are in the hospital for respite care and rehabilitation — will have to go somewhere else. Will he assure the House that he will scrutinise the decision and make sure that, in the long run, when those people have to go somewhere else, such as A&E and other care homes, that that will not burden the trust and cost more?

Mr Wells: The temporary closure of respite beds and intermediate care beds in the Dalriada Hospital will save £0·6 million in this financial year. The difficulty I have with this decision and many others is that, if by chance I listen to the comments made by the Members for Northern

Antrim and reverse the decision, I will have to ask the Northern Trust to come up with another saving of £0·6 million. No one from North Antrim in the Assembly has given me any indication of where they would like that cut to be made.

Mr Frew: Middle management.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member for North Antrim makes a very valid point about middle management. The problem is that over 90% of the cost of management comes from staff costs. Even if I decide to save that money in staffing immediately, it would mean redundancies and you would not save any money for three years. That is the difficulty we have: 63% of our budget in Health and Social Care comprises wages, pensions and National Insurance, and we have no flexibility whatsoever to save money there. So it sounds like a good argument until you analyse it.

Mr Frew has also made some very good points to me about this decision. Mr Storey, Mr Paisley and Mr Frew have been very articulate in putting their views across on this issue. I will make absolutely certain that this decision stacks up, because new information has been made available to me by the GPs, and I have to interrogate the Northern Trust on that.

Mr McKinney: Perhaps the Minister could outline in some detail how this plan and indeed others that he has outlined here this afternoon are in any way consistent with Transforming Your Care. Does this decision and the others not represent a further series of nails in the coffin of Transforming Your Care, which is underfunded and failing?

Mr Wells: The honourable Member for South Belfast would like to be the undertaker for Transforming Your Care: he takes every opportunity to knock that fundamental review of healthcare provision.

The reality is that, if we were starting with a blank sheet of paper, we would not make these decisions because we are in a firefighting situation. Seven months of the financial year have gone, and we have five months in which to save £7 million. *[Interruption.]* The decisions that I have to take are not long term and strategic; they are firefighting decisions to try to get the books to balance. The one option that I do not have this year is to over-run or overspend; it has been made very clear to me that that cannot happen.

I agree with the Member that such decisions make it more difficult to implement Transforming Your Care, but we have very little room in which to manoeuvre in making cutbacks when we are seven months into the financial year.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his answers. I also commend him for saying that he thought that the MP's contributions were articulate in his meeting today. I did not hear those, but I did see the comments in the press where the MP for the area said that this plan was a total disgrace, and I agreed with him.

When the Minister looks at the balance of the privatisation of MS respite in the Northern Trust area in the long term, which is basically what this is when we move people out of hospitals into private homes, will that balance the books? This closure is temporary; over how long is he going to do this calculation? How long will he take before he reverses the temporary nature of this closure?

Mr Wells: I welcomed the extra £60 million that we achieved in the monitoring round and the £20 million in June, but I do not think that he understands the fundamental difficulty that I am having in making the books balance. The trust faced an almost impossible situation, and it had to go forward with a policy that was the least-worst option in reducing its outgoings from now to the end of March. Therefore, if we had not made a move, we were destined to over-run.

As far as privatisation is concerned, I have no difficulty with private provision; it is less than 2% of the entire Health and Social Care budget. I personally prefer the provision that is best for the patient or the client; I am not hung up on where that is provided. However, this is not part of any ongoing privatisation policy. This is simply trying to find out where we can find £7 million in the Northern Trust in five months, nothing more, nothing less, and in a way that does not affect front line acute care. This is what the trust has said to me, and I have to respect its judgement because it is at the coalface. Am I going to question trusts on these proposals? Absolutely.

Mr McMullan: To close the MS centre in Ballycastle is to close the only regional MS centre that we have in the Six Counties. It is not that long ago that I was contacting the Minister's predecessor about another sustained attack on the MS centre in Ballycastle when its respite hours were cut down. This has been a sustained attack to get rid of the MS centre that has been going on for years.

The Minister says that he has to make a saving of £0·6 million in this Budget. As he said himself, this is a temporary arrangement and we have to save £0·6 million. The majority of that is in staff costs, but, if you are going to move the staff, you still have to pay them, and that payment is still there in the Northern Trust. You are not saving that money by moving the staff if it is only temporary. It does not make sense in a financial set-up to do that. Moving young people with MS —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to come to his question, please.

Mr McMullan: — into private sector nursing homes is not the way to go. The MS authorities will tell you that. I ask the Minister to reverse this decision on those grounds and to listen to the public.

Mr Wells: The Member for East Antrim is slightly mistaken. It has been termed the regional centre, but 80% of the patients who go there are from the Northern Trust, with the remainder coming from the Western Trust and only two from Belfast. The South Eastern Trust and the Southern Trust do not provide any patients whatsoever to it. Technically, while it is a centre that provides for a wide part of Northern Ireland, it is not an official regional centre.

I can only go by the professional judgement of those who have been at the coalface in the Northern Trust for many years. They tell me that they can save £600,000 through this particular change in service provision. *[Interruption.]* I can assure you that that will happen, because they will not have the £600,000 to spend; it will be taken from the budget. Therefore, on that basis, I have to accept that what they are telling me is true.

Mr McMullan: How can they do that on a temporary basis?

3.45 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: The staff will be moved elsewhere, but, of course, the costs associated with running the service will cease: the heat, the light, the electricity etc. That will stop for the next five months, and then the decision will be reviewed. I can only go on the information that is given to me by those who should know their facts.

Mrs Dobson: The Minister will be aware that we discussed this vital issue at our meeting first thing this morning. I am aware from my constituents of the increase in MS sufferers and their absolute anger at this decision. Minister, what impact will the additional budget oversight by the head of the Civil Service have on your Department? Was this particular move subject to additional oversight or accountability?

Mr Wells: As the Member knows, we have experienced a 6% increase in demand for health service provision over this last four years, and a 2% increase in income. Therefore, we should not be surprised that we are in this very difficult situation. Something had to give, and we are at that point. Demand is exceeding resources by a very considerable margin. This was not forced upon me other than for one simple reason: if I did not take action now, we were heading towards a very significant overspend on the budget for 2014-15. I had to take action, and the later we left the decision, the more difficult it was going to become.

I am not unique within this Assembly; other Ministers are facing exactly the same pressures. Indeed, in the rest of the United Kingdom, we are told, they need £8 billion to balance the books on health. Well, the Barnett consequential of £8 billion, as the honourable Member knows, is £240 million. If I had £240 million today from the Finance Department, I would be absolutely delighted and could deliver all the services I have promised. This is not unique to my situation. It is UK-wide and, indeed, it affects the Irish Republic as well.

Ms Sugden: I think the decision is regrettable, to say the least, and it has created a significant shortfall in care for people suffering from multiple sclerosis. I am concerned about the shock of staff and patients at how this information was received. Will the Minister detail his understanding of when and how this information was given to the relevant people?

Mr Wells: My understanding is that in most trusts — I do not know specifically about the Northern Trust — MLAs and MPs were called together for a briefing prior to the decision. Certainly I know that that happened in the South Eastern Trust. Then, there was a written statement, which I issued, providing details of the decision, and there was also a media briefing by the chief executive of the Health and Social Care Board. These decisions came about very suddenly, because we did not know where we stood until the October monitoring round was concluded, where we got the extra £60 million. I say to Mrs Sugden that, if we had not got that extra £60 million, we would be having a very different conversation indeed and the cuts would be much more severe.

The trusts were under considerable pressure to act quickly, and I hope that we have tried to be as open and transparent as we can be. My door is open. If she has concerns about this, she can come and see me. Other representatives have asked to do so, and I will speak to them and try to explain the decision. Also if the honourable Member for Londonderry East has an alternative way of saving £600,000 in the Northern Trust, please let me know.

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

Resolved:

> *That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 3 November 2014 be extended to no later than 9.00 pm. — [Mr Swann.]*

Assembly Business

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. A Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, I apologise to the House and to the Agriculture Minister for not being in my place when I was called for a question for oral answer this afternoon.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you for coming in personally to make that apology. It is a matter of regret when Members, having taken the trouble to submit questions, find for one reason or another that they cannot attend. I do appreciate the fact that you came in this afternoon personally to apologise.

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I ask you to rule on why the sports Minister did not find the time, given that she had three quarters of an hour, to congratulate the Portaferry hurlers on winning the Ulster senior championship yesterday for the first time in their history. *[Laughter.]* The first time in their history.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am glad to see that Mr Robinson is not the only opportunist in the House. However, you know as well as anybody else that that is not a point of order.

Ministerial Statement

Coleraine to Londonderry Rail Track: Phase 2 Project

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister for Regional Development wishes to make a statement.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. With your permission, I wish to make a statement on the Londonderry to Coleraine rail track, specifically phase 2 of the project. I set out in a previous statement on 10 October 2011 my continuing support for the key Programme for Government commitment to improve the rail link between the two main cities in Northern Ireland. Phase 2 is one part of that.

Members will recall that this key project is being taken forward in three phases. Phase 1 involved the relaying of the end sections of the rail line at Coleraine and Londonderry, completing essential bridge works in those locations. That was completed in March 2013 within budget and ahead of time. That ensured that, having addressed the immediate safety concerns, Translink continued to run services in and out of Londonderry every week. Phase 2 involves the completion of resignalling works and the construction of a new passing loop. Progress on that phase is the key focus of the statement. The passing loop creates the infrastructure for a more frequent hourly service. Phase 3 involves a full relay of the middle sections of the track between Coleraine and Londonderry and the potential introduction of a half-hourly train service.

There are always risks attached to major capital projects, including procurement risks. I referred to that previously, in my statement in 2011. Whereas phase 1 has been delivered smoothly, on time and within budget, that has not been the case with phase 2. In September 2013, I explained in response to a question for oral answer that Translink had encountered difficulties in connection with the procurement on phase 2. Translink took the decision last summer to abandon the planned combined design-and-build procurement and to start again. That meant that the project would be delayed for around one year. At that time, I made clear my disappointment with Translink, specifically at the way that the decision was communicated and its impact upon the timetable for the project. Therefore, I mandated Translink to make the delivery of the project an absolute priority going forward. On top of that, Translink took the procurement forward on the basis of a separated design-and-build approach for the signalling works.

However, in the light of this detailed design work, it has become clear that the projected cost of between £20 million and £22 million for phase 2, prepared by Translink in September 2011, was a gross underestimate. The detailed design work now suggests that overall costs could be of the order of £40 million. Translink made my Department aware of that development earlier this summer. Given the gravity of the issue, I immediately commissioned an external review of the project management and the updated cost estimate. The review was in the form of a project assessment review (PAR) commissioned through the Major Projects Authority of the Cabinet Office, which is a process normally reserved for projects seen as central to the UK economy, such as high-speed rail.

The review took place in mid-September, and a final report was presented to me at the end of September. Because the report deals with commercially sensitive information, I do not intend to make it available at this stage. The key conclusions are that the original cost projection was a high-level estimate not backed up by any detailed planning or design work, which Translink did not make clear at the time; that the original projection was underestimated at least partly due to failure to build in contingency at an appropriate level for a complex signalling project of this kind; and that relying on a single source of cost estimation, even if it is independent and specialist, in the original appraisal and currently, represents a potential vulnerability.

That remains an issue, and the review recommends that a further review of the latest cost estimate be undertaken.

Other key conclusions are that a figure of £40 million, including an appropriate level of contingency is more realistic for the overall project; that, although this is a significant project in Northern Ireland terms, it is relatively small in national terms and thus may not be seen as particularly attractive by suppliers; and that, based on the information provided to the review team, the Translink decision not to proceed with the single bidder last year was justified.

The review makes a number of recommendations on how to take the project forward, including an immediate engagement with the supplier market to generate interest; a further check on the cost estimate to inform a pre-tender estimate; applying a higher level of contingency to a cost estimate for an updated economic appraisal using guidance in use in the Department for Transport; and reviewing the content of the contract for the signalling element of the project to ensure that it is clear that contractor payments have an upper limit.

I have accepted the project assessment review and its recommendations. My officials have engaged with Translink to draw up an implementation action plan. Progress will be subject to a further external review in December before a decision is made to enter into a contract. One of the key review recommendations is a lessons-learned plan, to which I attach particular importance. I expect the Translink board to address that urgently and for the new group chief executive to grasp the issue. I will not tolerate anything like this happening again. I will also commission a review of how my Department assesses and reviews all major capital projects, not just those in Translink, and review reporting arrangements to me on particularly important projects.

The findings of the report disappoint me. Translink continued to plan using figures that were not based on fact. The original estimate was frankly little more than a guesstimate. Unfortunately, as a result of the review and the resolution of the issues arising, there may now be a further minor delay to the project. Needless to say, I am very disappointed and let down by that. Translink has had custodianship of this key Programme for Government commitment and has singularly failed to discharge it effectively. Nevertheless, I remain committed to the project and to improving transport links between the two cities.

My priority now is to move to procurement. We are at an important point in the project. Translink must begin the procurement process for the signalling part of the project soon if we are to get close to the revised timetable of the end of 2016. As I said, I remain fully committed to the completion of phase 2. There are two pressing priorities to enable the signalling procurement to proceed. First, an updated economic appraisal must be produced to validate phase 2 remaining value for money. That is already in hand and will be supplemented by a further independent review of costs before the procurement. The revised appraisal will require DFP approval. Secondly, I will engage with Translink and look again at capital plans in my Department over the next two years to establish how the project will be funded.

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

I realise that this is not a pretty picture after the aborted procurement last year. It is clear that the project cost was underestimated from the start, but there have been no cost overruns and no taxpayer money has been wasted. Members will no doubt ask why more problems have arisen on phase 2, when phase 1 was delivered on time and on budget. Translink started the process by combining both elements in one overarching design and build procurement. That appears to have been based on a template that is more relevant to a straightforward construction project than this project. The cost of the signalling element has clearly escalated, partly because splitting the project between permanent way construction and signalling involves two contractors being brought in at different times and, to avoid a line closure, overnight and weekend costs may increase. When that is combined with the fact that specialist staff rates have increased since 2011 because of market conditions, it means that the overall projected cost of phase 2 is higher.

4.00 pm

The decision last summer to separate the signalling and passing loop elements and the design of the signalling from its construction led to some delay. However, it was the detailed design work that laid bare the inadequacy of the previous estimate.

I am disappointed with the way in which Translink has managed this important project, given the particular importance that I attach to it and its Programme for Government status. I expect the Translink board and the new chief executive to review the organisation's failings comprehensively. As I said, I expect a comprehensive lessons-learned exercise and follow-up actions before too long.

My focus now is on sorting out a practicable and affordable way forward. I must be candid with Members and say that risks remain with the project, notably land purchases around the Bellarena passing loop and a potential lack of interest from suppliers. I will, however, expect my officials and the Translink board and senior executive team to manage those risks proactively and keep me fully informed.

Members will recall that I inherited a situation in 2011 in which there was a very real risk that the rail line between Coleraine and Londonderry would be closed for safety reasons because no budget had been set aside to carry out the essential track work that was needed. I took immediate action to ensure that the line remained open, and the completion of the first phase of the project in early 2013 demonstrates my commitment. I have made the newly installed Translink chief executive aware that the next stage of the project must be a priority for him, and I assure Members that I will deal with any further failings. However, let us be clear: if I had not intervened in the first

place, a service would not be operating on the line. I am committed to delivering an improved rail service on the line, and my actions demonstrate that.

My record on delivering improved rail services is also clear. We had a record number of 13 million passenger journeys last year, and there has been growth on all lines, including Coleraine to Londonderry. We have also had record customer satisfaction levels and fares that compare very favourably with other parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I thank the Minister for affording me an opportunity to meet him to discuss the statement this morning. Unfortunately, due to business in the House, I was unable to make that meeting.

I listened to the statement, and the Minister repeated the word "disappointed" a few times. Rather than feeling disappointed, I think that he and his officials should feel culpable for the shambles of the way in which the Department handled the project. The Minister has been a cheerleader for the procurement process over the last 12 months and highlighted it as a model in the past, yet, in his statement, he alluded to the shambolic nature of the project and how Translink led it. That is very unfortunate and disappointing. It certainly is unfortunate and disappointing for members of the Committee for Regional Development and the wider public.

Will the Minister explain to the House why he is washing his hands of the procurement process that he and his officials defended over the last 12 months? Will he also explain how he will engage with Translink whilst looking at how the project will be costed within his Department's capital budget? Finally, will he outline whether the relationship between Translink and the Department is a case of the tail wagging the dog?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Chair of the Regional Development Committee. I am sorry that, for reasons of business in the House and meetings, we were unable to engage.

We did, however, take the opportunity to brief the Deputy Chair and the Clerk to the Committee, and I know that it was the Clerk's intention to relay that to the Chairman.

To say that I am disappointed is an understatement. I am very angry indeed that we have arrived at this situation. I remind the Member and the House that, in this operation, the original underestimate is where the fault lies. The cost was woefully underestimated as being in the region of £20 million to £22 million; a more accurate estimate of £40 million has now been arrived at. So, at least we know now the true extent of the work ahead of us. I am glad that the Member indicated the importance of this line and project, not least because it is a key element of the Programme for Government. I give him this assurance: I will pursue it and ensure that it will be pursued. I have made that clear not only to the board of Translink but to its new group chief executive. He is aware of my personal interest in this, and we will pursue it. I am not washing my hands or seeking to put others in the frame; I am simply saying that Translink, at an early stage, got this terribly wrong. It is important now that it recovers the position and that we move forward to progress a project that has, I believe, widespread political support.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí agus as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answer to the first question on it. He talked about his anger and disappointment, which I know that many will share. Obviously, the Committee will delve into this in more detail. Here is another capital project — there are reports just this afternoon about the college at Desertcreat — in which consultants are paid large sums to come up with a project design.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can the Member come to a question, please?

Mr McCartney: The consultants give us a cost, and we discover months later that it was grossly underestimated. Will the Minister give an assurance that he will find out why this went wrong, particularly the first estimate?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. That is why it is so important that we have a lessons-learned review. The new group chief executive appears to be an almost ideal candidate to do that, given that he comes to the company from the private sector and will be able to assess the failings of the original procurement process. I share the anger and the disappointment. I am determined that we move forward, and we will do that at all stages. I have cautioned that there may be reasons for suppliers not showing the necessary interest as we go forward, but let me be absolutely clear that Translink will be expected to deliver this Programme for Government priority on behalf of my Department and me.

Mr Dallat: Let me put on record my acknowledgement of the contribution that the Minister has made to there still being a railway line between Coleraine and Derry. That said, there might be some excuse for botching a procurement procedure once, but surely doing it twice is inexcusable. What has the Minister to say about the future of Translink and its motley board being in charge of an intercity rail service?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question, and I understand the frustration behind it. However, as I said in my previous answer to Mr McCartney, I expect Translink to deliver this project, and I am determined that it will. I am equally determined that, going forward, the lessons from this incident and process will be learned. We will pursue the issues in Translink as well as in my Department.

Mr Swann: I am sure the Minister is frustrated, as are his party colleagues in Coleraine and Londonderry. He has put that frustration across very well today. Given that the Minister brought in the high-level Cabinet review team, which identified that the original cost projection was a high-level estimate and not backed up with detailed plan or design, can he confirm that the new chief executive and his management team are fully aware of his dissatisfaction with the poor performance? Can he give a reassurance that any other projects that are being held by Translink in a similar process will be reviewed?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am sure that there will be anger and frustration among the political representatives in councils and the Members from the area affected. I have already met Translink's new chief executive. He took up position last Monday. He is in no doubt as to the gravity with which I view the issue, and he is aware of the clear level of disappointment that

I have expressed. I fully expect all the recommendations of the Whitehall Cabinet Office review to be implemented by Translink and accountability to be properly accepted, corporately and, may I say, individually.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Minister, thanks for the briefing this morning. I know that this procurement process has lurched from crisis to crisis. You said that the £20 million came about as a result of "guesswork". I think that was the word you used. Guesswork is a very bad tool to use in estimating the cost of a major project like this. What confidence can we have in Translink to deliver the project?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I said that it amounted to "little more than a guesstimate". I believe that that is justified criticism; it is serious criticism levelled on my behalf and on behalf of those who undertook the review. Let me state this again: that review was done at a very high level by the Cabinet Office at Whitehall. So, we cannot be accused of not taking this situation seriously. We have to move the situation on. I have already outlined my intention that the new chief executive of Translink and the Translink board will carry it forward. I will be taking personal interest in it and will not rest until we see substantial progress on the project that is acceptable to me, my Department and Members.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement. I find it absolutely astonishing that, when we are talking about tens of millions of pounds of public money, an organisation like Translink is able to guesstimate the cost to the public purse, end up getting it wrong and the costs, potentially, end up being more than double the guesstimated cost. This is an important question, Minister: are any heads going to roll in Translink over this fiasco?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. If he was listening closely to a previous answer, he will have heard that I fully expect the recommendations of the Whitehall Cabinet Office review to be implemented by Translink and accountability to be properly accepted, corporately and individually.

Ms Sugden: I share the disappointment of many Members. I am mindful that we are to welcome the British Open in coming years. Will the infrastructure, including an appropriate Coleraine to Londonderry line, be in place, or will we be constantly facing further delays and significant costs to the public purse in the next few years?

4.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for the question. She will know and, at least, recognise my efforts to restore the line and make it ready for the future so that it can help to host events such as the Open in 2019. Phase 2 should be completed within that time frame, and we will seek to achieve that.

I remind the House that, when I came into office, I inherited the Coleraine to Londonderry line, which was simply in mothballs and being earmarked for closure. We have moved heaven and earth to make sure that it has been rescued and retained. We need to build on that and move to the next stage of the three-phase upgrade. That is a continuing commitment that I give again to the House.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. The Minister's memory of the Derry to Coleraine section being mothballed is slightly different from mine. I will reflect the comments of others. There will be anger and disappointment in the East Derry constituency and in the wider north-west. The Minister said that there was a possibility of suppliers not being interested. Could that further delay the project going ahead and, if so, for how long? The Minister will be cognisant that many other infrastructure projects in the north-west have been delayed.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I simply raised the issue of the contract work ahead because it is specialist, and my understanding is that it is carried out by a limited number of companies, primarily in the rest of the United Kingdom. We will seek to get the procurement process into place as quickly as possible to encourage firms to tender. I am not about to look forward to further failure on the project. I am determined to see the project succeed and will take every reasonable step in my power and under my control to ensure that it does.

Mr G Robinson: Like my colleagues, I am very disappointed to hear the news that the Minister has delivered here today. I have a couple of points. The passing loop at Bellarena was critical, and lots of people living near that section of the track were looking forward to it. Will you, in your capacity as Minister, make sure that that takes place when the project is back on stream again? How many jobs could be affected by what has happened?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his interest and his question. I am aware that there are issues around the passing loop at Bellarena. I will endeavour to write to the Member and give him an updated position on that. Current jobs are not at risk. The important thing is that we move to enhance the service, which will bring benefits as well as increased passenger numbers and will continue to generate public transport availability between Belfast and Londonderry for tourism. For those who work in either destination, it has been an important link and transport benefit, and I want to see it enhanced. That is why I want to see the project succeed as quickly as possible and to overcome any issues that there may be around the passing loop at Bellarena.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes questions to the Minister on his statement. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments as we change staff at the Table.

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

Executive Committee Business

Food Hygiene Rating Bill: First Stage

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to introduce the Food Hygiene Rating Bill, which is a Bill to provide for the operation of a food hygiene rating scheme in Northern Ireland.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Committee Business

Elective Care: Review of Waiting Times

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's review of waiting times for elective care; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to prioritise and tackle this issue.*

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to move this important motion. The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety identified, as did many others in society, the issue of waiting times for elective care as one of our strategic priorities for 2013-14. Long waiting times for elective care have been an issue of concern for the public, the Department and the Assembly for more than a decade.

Elective care is a wide-ranging issue and covers outpatient appointments, surgery for procedures such as hip replacements, treatment of skin diseases and neurological conditions. While those procedures are classified as elective, that does not mean that they are not serious. It is important to point out that many people waiting for elective care endure significant levels of pain, even disability, which impacts on their ability to work and to manage daily tasks, which, of course, then impacts on their mental health.

Since the start of this Assembly mandate in 2011, the Department has submitted bids at nearly every monitoring round for money to reduce waiting times for elective care. Some of that money is to pay for more in-house provision, while some is used to pay private sector providers to treat health service patients. A significant number of bids has been met since 2011, indicating that reducing waiting times is of major importance to both the Department and the Executive. Given that context, the Committee believed that it would be timely and relevant to carry out a review of the Department's approach to managing waiting times for elective care. The terms of reference for the review were to assess the effectiveness of the Department's current approach to reducing waiting times for elective care and to identify effective approaches that have been used in other countries or regions that could be applied here.

In gathering evidence to inform the review, the Committee was very outward-looking in its approach. We took evidence from a range of expert witnesses, including academics and government representatives from a number of European countries. In doing so, we learned about the variety of approaches in places such as Portugal, Scotland, England, New Zealand, Scandinavia and the Twenty-six Counties.

The review has produced five recommendations that cover the following issues: how waiting times should be measured; the types of targets that should be put in place; how targets should be enforced; and the use of the private sector. All those issues will be covered by my

Committee colleagues later in the debate. However, I wish to focus the remainder of my remarks on the Committee's first recommendation — probably the most fundamental recommendation — which is that the Department of Health should introduce referral-to-treatment time targets.

At the moment, the North of Ireland does not have a system of referral-to-treatment time targets whereby the complete journey time from GP referral to start of treatment is measured and a target set for that journey time. Rather, our health service measures separate parts of the patient's journey, such as the waiting time for a first outpatient appointment, the waiting time for a diagnostic test and the waiting time for an inpatient admission. However, those parts of the journey are not linked up, and the waiting time for a review appointment is simply not measured at all. That means that currently there is no way to measure the time it takes from when patients are referred by their GP to when they begin treatment. Referral-to-treatment time targets are used in Scotland and England, and the target is that patients should expect to wait 18 weeks — four and a half months — between being referred by a GP for an outpatient appointment and beginning treatment. Denmark also operates that type of target, and Portugal hopes to move towards that system.

The general opinion among the experts who gave evidence to the Committee was that referral-to-treatment time targets are a good idea. They give patients a clear sense of how long they should expect to wait to receive treatment for their condition. For example, an official from the Scottish Government explained that one of the reasons why the referral-to-treatment time targets were introduced in Scotland was that they were popular with medical staff. They understood that it instinctively feels right to measure the patient's journey from the patient's perspective, because what matters to the patient is the time is takes to get their problem sorted out and begin their treatment.

The Committee discussed the possibility of introducing referral-to-treatment time targets with departmental officials during the review. We were pleased that the Department told us that it saw a move to referral-to-treatment time targets as highly desirable. The Department recognised that it would better reflect the patient experience, it is regarded as international best practice and it removes potential perverse incentives for delays at stages of the journey, which are present at the moment with stage-of-treatment targets. However, the Department outlined three main challenges associated with moving to referral-to-treatment time targets: policy, resource and technical feasibility.

The Committee acknowledges that measuring referral-to-treatment time targets is indeed a complex task. However, given that those issues appear to have been overcome in England and Scotland, it would seem reasonable to believe that the Department would be able to learn from the English and Scottish experiences through engaging with their counterparts in the relevant Departments.

In terms of resource, the Department explained that referral-to-treatment time targets would take years to put in place and would involve expenditure. However, the Department was not able to provide us with an estimate of how much it would cost to implement, because such a costing has not yet been undertaken.

Whilst the Committee is fully aware of the financial pressures that the Department faces, it is of the view that investment in referral-to-treatment time targets would ultimately lead to more efficient spend on elective care. It may also lead to less reliance on the private sector to deal with backlogs, which could also lead to cost savings in the long term. It is important to point out that we have to remember that the Department is spending between £55 million and £65 million on private sector elective care every year. Surely, some of that money could be used instead to bring in referral-to-treatment time systems.

4.30 pm

Given the evidence presented by the waiting times experts on the benefits of referral-to-treatment time targets and the Department's position that such a move would be desirable, the Committee recommends that they should be introduced in the North and looks forward to receiving the Minister's response to that recommendation.

Mrs Cameron: As a member of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, I support the motion on the review of waiting times for elective care.

I am sure that I would not be the only one in the Chamber to say that my constituency office regularly deals with members of the public who contact me to request assistance as they have been on a waiting list for elective care for a considerable time after being referred by their GP. In many cases, people have been left in considerable pain and are often left dealing with the distress and anxiety caused by the extended waiting time. In addition, a great number of people that I have spoken to have had to take periods off work as they are unable to work owing to their condition. The situation is far from ideal and can have wider implications for their long-term physical and mental well-being.

We in the UK are blessed with an excellent health service that is free to users at the point of delivery, but the reputation of the NHS is often tarnished by the image conveyed by poor patient experience. With no linked-up method of measuring the patient's journey from GP referral until the start of treatment, it is impossible to provide targets or, indeed, to give patients a clear indication of how long they are likely to wait until their life-improving treatment at specialist level commences. That adds further distress for a patient during what can already be a worrying time.

There appears to be some ambiguity around where the responsibility lies in managing and reducing waiting times in Northern Ireland. In England and Scotland, dedicated teams and departments are tasked with monitoring and managing waiting times. Without similar measures being in place in Northern Ireland, there seems to be an element of passing the buck between the Department, the board and the trusts as to who is ultimately accountable for ensuring that patients do not wait excessive periods for referral. Although it may not be feasible for an entirely new team to manage waiting lists, it is clear that a more joined-up approach between all bodies is required to reduce waiting times.

The Committee has been particularly concerned with the health service trend of using the private sector to manage waiting times. It seems that Northern Ireland has a growing over-reliance on the private sector to treat those who have spent extended periods on a waiting list for NHS treatment. With a relatively small pool of specialists, it is evident

that there are potential conflicts of interest, with doctors treating patients in both a public and private capacity. Although the need to meet patient waiting time targets is of huge importance, it is vital that maintaining long waiting lists is not incentivised, making patients feel that they have no option other than to be treated privately.

The use of the private sector is often seen as a way in which to meet targets and save money. However, it has been shown that that approach does not work in the long term and is usually more expensive than doing additional work in the public sector. Patient treatment needs to be based on clinical need and not simply be an exercise in box ticking to manipulate figures. We must work urgently to reduce the £72 million spent on private sector treatment in 2013-14 and redirect the spending to address baseline capacity and match supply with demand.

There is a groundswell of public opinion that the use of private sector providers, some of which employ doctors who also work in the public sector, is a method of privatisation of the NHS by the back door. I understand that point of view, as the current position is simply one of moving patients around the system among the same groups of clinicians. The NHS is an excellent and equitable system, and it seems unfair for it to become a two-tier system that allows those who can afford it to be treated sooner.

I appreciate that there is a need for the private sector to support the health service and was extremely impressed during a recent visit to a private health care facility. I am concerned that our health service has the ability to perform in exactly the same manner but often underachieves owing to management issues. I suggest that a more businesslike approach should be adopted throughout the health service to maximise its potential and minimise waste. That said, I feel that the private sector should be used only at the very margins of need and not as a way to manipulate waiting list figures. The money saved could be ploughed into long-term planning to fill consultant posts, particularly in areas of recurring need such as joint replacement, ophthalmology and gastrointestinal services.

I particularly support the Committee's recommendation to develop policies that proactively mitigate potential conflicts of interest for doctors who carry out private work as well as working in the health service. In order to understand those potential conflicts of interest more fully, the Department should ask the Patient and Client Council to carry out research to examine the extent to which health service patients are advised about the option of paying for treatment in the private sector.

Mr McKinney: As health spokesperson for the SDLP and a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I welcome the opportunity to speak on such an important issue as waiting times for elective care. I thank the Members who have spoken and endorse their remarks. I also acknowledge the great work done by the Committee in bringing the debate to the House. I will speak on one issue: recommendation 4 on the use of the private sector in providing elective care in the public sector.

The Committee's report on waiting times for elective care notes that, over the past number of years, there has been an increase in the use of the private sector to provide such care. The Committee has received evidence that, since 2009, the amount spent on private sector elective care is between £55 million and £65 million a year, as was mentioned, with spend in 2013-14 being £66 million. That represents a worrying 5% of the total spend on the private sector for elective care. In comparison, the Committee has received expert evidence comparing the approach adopted by other jurisdictions in the UK.

It is important to highlight the fact that England and Scotland provide private sector elective care only to accommodate additional capacity at the margins that is not required all year round. In the Scottish system, that amounts to just over 0·2% of that provision. We must, therefore, ask ourselves why we spend considerably more on the private sector for such care here. How much of that growth is the result of cancelled hospital appointments, when an operation is then provided in the private sector? Last year, we cancelled 185,000 hospital appointments, not all of them directly related to operations. Are we effectively paying twice for the same operations? The unfortunate situation is that, over the last number of years, demand has increased, by 5% to 6% last year, and appropriate action is not being taken to alleviate that, especially in drilling down to why we are cancelling those appointments.

As demand exceeds supply, it results in heavy backlogs and excessive waiting times. The private sector is the main means to alleviate that, and it costs more. There is a further question about whether the Department is getting the best value in negotiating these deals with the private sector and whether the relevant staff have been properly trained to conduct such negotiations. In Professor Normand's evidence to the Committee, he highlighted the fact that, in the Republic of Ireland, civil servants were not properly trained in negotiating good deals with the private sector. One must ask whether that could also be the case for our health system.

The problem is that we have an excessive over-reliance on the private sector, which tells us that the baseline capacity is not aligned to meet increased demand. Using the private sector repeatedly is only a quick fix solution. It does nothing to alleviate the long-term systemic issues that we face. It is not sustainable by any means, and we need to find quickly in-house solutions to these problems that will alleviate the ever-increasing waiting times for elective care. It is imperative that the Minister and the Department take due consideration of the issues raised and take immediate action, not in dealing with the short-term problems but rather in taking a consistent and thoroughly planned approach that is needed over the next three to five years if we are to meet increasing demand and deal with excessive waiting lists. In that sense, the Department must be innovative and proactive.

The Committee welcomed the Department's policy intention to reduce its reliance on the private sector in the future by better matching in-house supply with demand. However, the Committee is of the view that these policy intentions lack a supportive action plan that would clearly set out how this will be achieved. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Department produce an action plan, detailing how it will decrease spend on private sector elective care over the next two to five years by making better use of in-house, service-based solutions. The action plan should include projected costs for spend on private sector elective care for the next three to five years; proposals to develop capacity in the health service sector to better match supply against demand on a long-

term basis; proposals to ensure that any private sector contracts required demonstrate value for money; and a timetable setting out the key milestones in this process.

I would like to add that the SDLP is committed to seeking greater transparency and accountability from DHSSPS on the budget. I further add that these issues are not dissociated from those that we face in the budget: on the one hand, potentially doubling spending to ease a significant pressure; on the other, cutting budgets with, it appears, no consistency with the strategy to put community provision front and centre. We need longer-term strategic thinking with transparency and accountability at its core. Otherwise, we will have an ever-pressurised health budget bouncing between an unexamined demand and a shortage of funds.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr McKinney: It is no way to run a health service.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Committee report. Before I begin, I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues Roy Beggs and Sam Gardiner, who were members of the Committee throughout the many sessions.

Many officials in the Health Department, the Health and Social Care Board and, not least, the trusts may resent the fact that waiting times need to be set and should, in theory, be worked towards. However, in reality, we should consider them as quite an effective barometer of the real state of play in our health service. Of course, targets are not set just to ensure that Health Ministers live up to their responsibilities; they are set because there are sound reasons to ensure that people do not wait for excessive periods.

Patients who wait on a list for what can seem an excruciating period for non-emergency surgery will often end up costing the taxpayer far more through increased GP consultations and prescriptions, but we must never forget the human cost — the worry, pain and concern of family members. This should be to the fore of any discussions on waiting times.

I know that the Minister's priority will be life-saving operations. However, I have to say that I found it frustrating when, only a few weeks ago, he said:

> *"One way to control the budget is to ask people to wait longer."*

Of course, it is easy for often unnamed officials to point to the numbers, look at the balance sheets and emphasise how much could be saved, but, away from the computer screens and balance sheets, in patients' homes, the reality is much more brutal. It means that people wait longer at home for treatment for painful and debilitating conditions. People, young and old alike, and their families wait anxiously for the post every day and have to put up with that pain. No matter how many painkillers they take, nothing seems to dull it completely. That is the true cost of a failing budget.

I hope that the current Minister will be more gracious than his predecessor and accept culpability for the current situation. There can be very little doubt that his predecessor, by leaving it well into the last year of a four-year Budget before speaking out on the financial situation facing Northern Ireland's health service, compromised wide-ranging patient services. I am not sure whether he or his party were to blame for that delay. Either way, Northern Ireland's finances are in an appalling situation, and there is no doubt that patients' safety has been compromised.

Unfortunately, we witnessed the beginning of the impact last week. As we know, elective care is one of the areas singled out for savings. Waiting times here will inevitably rocket. Indeed, the language that the chief executive of the Health and Social Care Board used last week was that they will "go through the roof."

Of course, another important decision taken — maybe too late for this Committee report to consider — was the suspension of using private clinics. Whilst I believe that the costs were becoming too great and trusts were becoming far too dependent on their services, this has unfortunately resulted in patients who had initial appointments finding themselves back to square one, including some who had already undergone pre-ops. I am sure that I am not alone in the Chamber in helping constituents who have been placed in that position.

4.45 pm

I ask the Minister to tell us how many people have found themselves in that situation. Of course, once again, it was through no fault of their own. Despite the constantly moving environment, the Committee's report is timely. Introducing a system of recording referral-to-treatment times, for instance, would at least allow us to make a more informed assessment of what is really going on across our hospitals.

I welcome the publication of the Committee's report, and I look forward to the Department implementing its recommendations without further delay.

Mr McCarthy: As a member of the Assembly's Health Committee, I am delighted, like other members, to contribute to this very important debate. The Health Minister is present for the debate, and we can but hope that he and his officials will take very seriously the contents of this review and implement our recommendations — there are only five of them — at a very early date.

I sincerely thank the Committee staff for the work that they have done to assist us, the members, to compile this report on the problems of waiting times and come up with solutions. We are also grateful to the research staff who provided great assistance, and we thank the individuals who came to the Committee to give evidence of their experience, allowing us to consider the various methods in the different jurisdictions so as to arrive at what we consider to be the best solutions.

I am sure that every elected representative has had contact with constituents who have had to wait for far too long for operations. We do our best, as public representatives, to assist. Unfortunately, for various reasons, solutions are out of the hands of elected people in most cases, and thus the suffering and pain continues for the patients.

In the report, we consider the submissions of a number of experienced people, and we arrive at five recommendations, as the Chairperson and other members have said. The issue of referral-to-treatment times comes top of the list. In its evidence, the Department agreed that the move to referral-to-treatment targets is highly desirable because it better reflects the patient experience and clinical interests. It also removes potential perverse

incentives for delays at stages of the journey, which are present with stage-of-treatment targets.

The Department also acknowledged that RTT was the direction of travel for those who are at the leading edge. The question is whether we in Northern Ireland wish to be at that leading edge. I say that we certainly do; I do not think that there is anybody in the Chamber who would disagree with that. RTT is the direction in which we will have to go. So that is a fairly positive ideal for the Department, even prior to the Committee's recommendation.

The Alliance Party and I fully endorse the introduction of referral-to-treatment time measurement. The whole issue of waiting times goes right to the question of public confidence in our health service and the effectiveness of that service in relation to targets. At times, targets can be limited in effect without enforcement. I am sceptical about punishing health providers, particularly about fining them for poor performance in managing waiting lists. If fines are levied against trusts, or anticipated resources not delivered, the reduction in spending power immediately punishes the very patients whom we are supposed to be helping. In my opinion, it would be better to seek to hold managers, at an individual level, more directly accountable. Fines may be levied on them personally.

Our report refers to the concerns now being expressed regarding the interaction of the National Health Service and the private sector. The private sector has its role, of course, but there are concerns about the sums of money spent in the private sector in an attempt simply to manage waiting lists, the use of the same personnel offering the same treatment, and the potential conflicts of interest and distortions that flow from that.

We all want to see an end result that simply cuts the length of time that our constituents are forced to wait for their operations.

Unfortunately, waiting times have been getting longer despite the fact that, a few years ago, they were reducing. With the budgetary constraints being forced on all of us for the considerable future, our recommendations in this report should, when implemented, go some way to reducing waiting times for all our patients. I plead with the Minister, who was a member of our Committee not so long ago and went along with how we dealt with the business, to do his best to implement the recommendations as early as possible.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, support the motion. I welcome the Minister here today. I reiterate what Mr McCarthy said: I thank the Committee staff for the work they have done in relation to the review.

During the Committee's review, the question of how best to enforce targets set for elective care emerged as a key issue. The Committee learned that, in England, a very strong approach, characterised as "targets and terror", was adopted. Under that system, NHS senior executive's jobs were under threat if their organisation performed poorly. In evidence, Dr Findlay said to the Committee:

> *"In England, they did targets and terror. It achieved the result; there is no denying that. When the coalition Government came in, they experimented with not having centrally enforced targets, and they were promptly rewarded with ... failure".*

Even though the targets-and-terror approach appears to have been successful in the English case, Dr Findlay introduced a word of caution. He said:

> *"There is a risk that the target can be literally something that you try to hit as accurately as possible, but it should be a backstop, a minimum standard, something that the NHS usually comfortably exceeds so that it is rare and unnecessary to enforce it."*

The Committee was advised that the withholding of revenues when targets are not met rather than heavily fining providers is another approach to enforcing targets. We were given evidence by Professor Siciliani, who told us:

> *"you do need enforcement. The current policy in England in which part of the revenues are retained if the target is missed seems to be a compromise. You need enforcement otherwise changes are not going to happen, but what I outlined is not as radical as the extreme fines that had been put in place. So, attaching some serious financial incentives to the maximum waiting times seems to be a reasonable compromise and balance."*

We were also given evidence on how approaches have been tried in Portugal. We were told that the Portuguese Government had produced benchmarks in productivity to identify which hospital or which sector in a hospital is performing badly compared with others. They also measure levels of non-conformity against rules that relate to maximum waiting times. The Portuguese Government operate a system whereby patients automatically receive a voucher when they reach 75% of the maximum waiting time, which is nine months in normal cases. The voucher can be used in a private hospital, and the public hospital must foot the bill. Mr Gomes, in his evidence, explained:

> *"Patient transfers are automatic when the risk exists of exceeding the maximum waiting times guaranteed for surgery. In this case, the original public hospital pays the bill."*

The Committee discussed the issue of enforcing targets with the Department and the HSC Board during the evidence session. We were advised that the HSC Board has legislative responsibility for the performance management of trusts to ensure that ministerial targets are met. That includes targets for elective care. It is led, in the board, by the director of commissioning and the director of performance. Officials from the board told the Committee that, in 2013-14, it had introduced sanctions whereby, if a trust underperforms against its agreed core activity, funding is withdrawn. However, as the evidence session progressed, the board appeared to move away from the idea that the withdrawal of funding was a sanction or punishment for poor performance. The board said that only 25% of the funding is withdrawn and it is largely related to consumables and would not have an impact on patients, which, obviously, is what we are talking about. The impact that the waiting list has on patients should be paramount.

The board further advised that, in the first three quarters in 2013-14, £1·5 million was withdrawn from the trusts for underdelivery. The board advised the Committee that it was in the process of trying to change the nature of

its relationship with the trusts away from a transactional arrangement to one where clinicians are more empowered. The board was quite firm in stating that it did not want to create a blame culture. The board was asked whether, if it did not favour a blame culture, it favoured using incentives. Officials replied that the board was actively looking at what incentives might be put in place. It said that the board had progressed discussions with a small number of provider organisations in the North in recent months around a small number of specialities. That has been a much more open-ended discussion, which is why they can move away from a transaction-based approach whereby the relationship with the board as a provider is to provide three of those. From the evidence presented, the board appears to favour a partnership approach with the trust, and the Committee acknowledges the value of that attitude in some circumstances. However, the Committee was concerned that the board's emphasis on partnership working with the trust was not matched with strong performance management arrangements.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Brady: The Committee recommends that the introduction of referral-to-treatment targets be accompanied by a clearly defined policy on how compliance against targets will be enforced. I ask the Minister to consider that.

Mr McGimpsey: As a new member of the Committee, I was not involved in the drafting of the report, but I support the motion and the recommendations in the report. It is important to reflect on what we are about, which is patient outcomes and giving the best care that we can to patients who present to the health service. Many's the time I stood in the House in Jim Wells's position, he stood in mine, and we discussed these issues. As far as I am concerned, this is a team game. It is not about politics; it is about all of us working together to deliver the very best outcomes for our patients.

In the recommendations, the Committee has rightly looked at elective care and the waiting times in those areas, because they are a good indicator of how well we are addressing patient need. The recommendations will help, but, in my experience — I am sure that the Minister will make this point in due course — it is difficult to do anything without the proper resource to run your health service. The Chair referred to certain things having to happen to get the recommendations in place: policy, resource and technical ability. Policy is delivered and determined by the Minister, and you can create technical ability, but for both you need the resource. The resource is clearly not there as far as the health service is concerned. It has been seriously underfunded over the four years of the current Budget, and, despite large amounts of investment coming through in in-year monitoring — several hundred million, I think — it still has not reached the required level. This is a perfect indication of where we are with the health service. When we look at the target for 80% of people to be seen within nine weeks, the actual figure is down to just over 60%. When we look at the target for nobody to wait more than 15 weeks, the actual figure is around 80%. Clearly, there are issues that need to be addressed, and investment is needed. When we look at the figures, we see, unsurprisingly, that the worst offender is the Belfast Trust. The Belfast Trust is a very big fish in a very small pool, and it is finding it most difficult to address the need. We had a discussion today on the Budget. The Finance Minister said how difficult money was, and everybody said that more money was needed, but there are certain key things that we have to do as a Government and cannot escape from. Upholding the rule of law and protecting life and property may be the number one priority, but, as far as I am concerned, cradle-to-grave health and social care that is free at the point of delivery is the second key thing that we do. It is more important to spend the money there than in many other areas in our Departments.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. There are patients who have been on a waiting list for a considerable time and have eventually got an appointment for treatment and suddenly get a letter in the post to say that, for whatever reason, that appointment has been cancelled. That happens time and time again. Does the Member agree that that is the worst possible scenario and that the Minister and the Department should avoid that at all costs?

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

Mr McGimpsey: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I agree with Kieran McCarthy. I have had patients in my constituency office who have had that experience of going through all the pressure, stress and trauma with their family of going for a procedure only to have the operation cancelled on the morning of the day it is due to take place. That is appalling and, of course, is not down simply to resource. It is also down to how we manage lists.

The fact is that the resource does not exist here at the minute, and Members have to face up to the reality that supply has to meet demand. If you have a certain demand and the supply does not meet it, you have a problem. If supply is less than demand, we have these waits. That point has been made over and over again, and we in the House are inclined not to properly face that reality. Until the health service is properly resourced — I am making some of Jim Wells's arguments for him — and we are not talking about huge extra amounts —

5.00 pm

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for giving way. I ask him to consider that the referral-to-treatment time part of the issue has not yet been costed. Maybe the Member will agree that that should be the first stage. Indeed, the £14 million that was received as part of the monitoring round for elective care should support the process of establishing referral-to-treatment time targets.

Mr McGimpsey: I do not disagree with what the Chair has to say, but I make the point that strategic money coming in, in a budget that you can see several years ahead, is far more valuable to you than money that comes in at the last minute through in-year monitoring or has been announced in the new Budget today. Of course I welcome that £150 million very much, but it is better to know that it is coming so that you can plan to use it.

I understand the position Jim Wells is in. I understand where the Department is, and I believe that there are major improvements that can be made. However, I do not expect that simply introducing all these recommendations will do the trick. Therefore, I look forward to listening to —

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

Mr McGimpsey: — the new Minister giving us his assessment for the first time.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's report on the review of waiting times for elective care and to the views expressed by Members today. As most Members will know, I was a member of the Committee until very recently, and I was party to the discussion and the drafting of the report. Therefore, I understand clearly the Committee's concerns and the challenges we face.

Members will be aware that long waiting lists and the time that patients spend on them are a concern not only in Northern Ireland but in many other countries. While most patients understand that there will be some delays involved in receiving their treatment, their personal concern is about the speed with which the queue moves, rather than the number of people in front of them. The longer they have to wait, the more anxious they become, which can affect their health and well-being. I thought that Mrs Dobson illustrated that very well. In addition, we are aware that delays in diagnosis and treatment can, in some areas, result in poor outcomes for the patient — a situation that we must always seek to avoid. I have to say, as a constituency representative, that this issue crops up time and time again in my inbox, whether by email, post or phone calls. I understand the pressure that Members are under in this situation.

Considerable resources and efforts have been used in recent years and have been directed at reducing waiting times, both here and in the rest of the United Kingdom, as they represent a key indicator of the health service's overall performance. It is acknowledged that focusing efforts on waiting time targets has delivered a substantial improvement in waiting times, although in recent years these have had to be scaled back, in line with available resources and increased demand. Nonetheless, targets continue to be viewed as the best way to maintain and deliver improvements in performance. The targets set in Northern Ireland have largely been informed by similar targets in place elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and it is useful to see how well they have worked elsewhere.

I welcome the report's recommendation in relation to referral-to-treatment targets, known as RTT. It is clear that such targets provide a more transparent view of the patient experience. From the patient's point of view, it lets them know how long they can expect to wait from referral to treatment, rather than how long they will wait for each stage of the patient journey, that is, assessment to diagnosis and treatment. Again, the Chair articulated the point that, really, that is difficult for the patient to understand.

Members will be aware that a 25-week referral-to-treatment target was planned for Northern Ireland in the 2008 Programme for Government, but this was not taken forward at the time due to public sector funding pressures that made it unlikely that the investment required to deliver the target would be available to the HSC in the immediate future. I have to say, Members, that little has changed there. Instead, efforts were refocused on working to ensure that the HSC met existing targets so that, regardless of the measurement adopted, waiting times were minimised for patients.

The Committee's report makes it clear that the introduction of RTT targets in the National Health Service, in conjunction with the necessary investment in services, resources and technology, has delivered further improvements in waiting times for patients in England. However, as the Committee was advised in evidence, changing to an RTT target will not in and of itself deliver improvements in waiting times. The introduction needs to be supported by extra investment, training, technical support and, most critically, positive engagement from clinicians. I have therefore asked the Committee to look at the experience of introducing such targets elsewhere to better understand the scale of investment required, the potential benefits and whether such an investment could be justified in the current financial climate. I will consider that before making any decision on the introduction of a referral-to-treatment target and am extremely grateful to the Committee for the work that it has carried out, providing as it does in its report a substantial contribution to the Department's thinking.

Linked to the introduction of RTT targets, the Committee has made recommendations that new arrangements for managing performance and a clearly defined policy on how compliance with the targets will be enforced should be put in place. As Minister, I am content that the roles and responsibilities of the Department and the Health and Social Care Board in performance management are clearly defined in legislation, and the annual commissioning plan direction sets out formally the key strategic priorities and statutory obligations, together with the associated standards and targets that the sector must meet. Against that framework, I am pleased to report that work was recently commissioned by the permanent secretary to look at how the Department exercises its monitoring of performance management. That is being carried out by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency, along with its direct accountability relationship with the arm's-length bodies, and has resulted in significant changes across the range of governance activities in the Department. The Department is working to develop, strengthen and build the governance framework surrounding the health and social care sector to ensure that, on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, our service delivery is of the best standard possible for all our patients. I therefore recognise the Committee's recommendations as positive and certainly not at odds with the work being taken forward by the permanent secretary. I fully support the Committee's assertion that strong leadership is required from the Department. The Committee's recommendations relating to strong leadership, clearly defined policies and personal accountability will be considered further by my Department within the ongoing development of stronger performance monitoring structures.

Considerable comment was made by Members about the involvement of the private sector. I noticed that that made up a substantial part of Mrs Cameron's speech. It is important to indicate the level of investment that has occurred in the private sector in recent years. In 2009-2010, it was £57·5 million; in 2010-11, it was £24·7 million; in 2011-12, it was £52·6 million; in 2012-13, it was £66 million; and in 2013-14, it was £66·9 million. It is noticeable that there was a very substantial dip during Mr McGimpsey's tenure, which again indicates the pressures that he was under, as I am under, as far as funding is concerned. In 2013-14, that £66·9 million meant that 26,000 surgical

procedures could be carried out. That is hips and knees and all sorts of elective, mostly orthopaedic, operations. That is 26,000 people who had their condition relieved. I have spoken to people who have attended private clinics, and two things are evident. First, they do not care whether they get relief through an operation in a private clinic or a National Health Service hospital. What they want is urgent treatment. Secondly, we know from experience that numerous other outpatient activities are carried out in the private sector and that the treatment outcomes are extremely high. We had 91,000 outpatient activities in 2013-14. I have no great baggage about that. If we can use the private sector to relieve waiting lists and provide a high level of care and provided that that is done at a tariff that is affordable and cost-effective, I think that that is a very good use of public finances.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I do not think that anybody would disagree with what the Minister is saying. However, the real problem is the amount of money that is being taken out of the National Health Service to provide for that. Why can more of the operations that you speak of not be provided within the NHS, thereby making a saving?

Mr Wells: It is worth saying that the Health and Social Care Board provides funding only for procedures or diagnostic investigations in the private sector beyond that which is contracted by the trusts. There is no double funding here; this is additional. It is money being used in a very cost-effective way to reduce the huge numbers of people who require urgent or long-term orthopaedic interventions. I make no apology for using money that is available, either through monitoring rounds or from within the Department's existing resources, to try to relieve the pressure on waiting lists.

I visited these facilities quite recently, and I have to say that all the patients whom I spoke to were very complimentary about the treatment that they had received. I do not think that we should get ourselves into political silos on what we feel about this. This is good news all round. It still represents less than 2% of the entire health budget, excluding social services. We are not getting into an ongoing or rolling programme of privatisation. We use the private sector when required.

In order to deliver improvements in waiting times, there remains in Northern Ireland a need to bridge the gap between the capacity available in the health service and the demand for procedures, which continues to rise. To address this gap, we use the independent sector. The Committee is absolutely right to ask what we are doing to find more efficient ways to deal with increases in demand for in-house procedures, but, in the long term, we will still rely somewhat on the independent sector. That is exactly what the Health and Social Care Board is doing in seeking to develop, in individual specialties across Northern Ireland, long-term strategic approaches so that demand can be managed in-house. However, this will take a considerable time to come to fruition. When money is available, we have to use the private sector.

As Members know, I wrote to the private sector on 1 October and said that no money will be forthcoming for the rest of this financial year for private procedures. The vast majority of those procedures in the system are wending their way through. I believe that all those procedures will have been carried out by Christmas. Apart from some diagnostics, there will be no further private sector involvement this year. I have to say that the situation for next year is not that rosy either.

The report recommends that an action plan be developed to decrease spend on the independent sector over the next three to five years. I am very mindful that the HSC should always have some access to the independent sector to be able to respond to specific demands while ensuring that in-house capacity is well planned and that there are arrangements to access additional in-house work, which is part of the normal planning process. However, I have to say that the figures over recent years from the tenures of Mr McGimpsey and Mr Poots and from my tenure indicate that the only way that we can make substantial inroads into waiting lists is to refer patients to the private sector. I am, therefore, content to ask the Health and Social Care Board to take forward the Committee's recommendation on the issue.

We should never overlook the fact that a very substantial amount of our health and social care is already provided by independent contractors. GPs, dentists and community pharmacists, for instance, are all private practices or individuals carrying out work on behalf of the trusts, the board or the PHA. So, let us not get too hung up on how we deliver. Let us ensure, first, that it is free at the point of delivery and, secondly, that it is of a high quality.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for giving way. I ask him to address the issue of the perverse incentives that exist. The Minister, as a former member of the Committee, will know that evidence was given to the Committee that NHS appointments are sometimes cancelled and that there is often a perverse incentive for the same consultants to do work in a private setting. In some cases, as many as 30 hip operations can be carried out in an independent setting on a single day whereas, on the same day, there will be only five in the health service. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Wells: The Committee dealt with that issue, and I was just about to answer that point. The Chair must have been using her Londonderry crystal ball to try to pre-empt what I was going to say. The Committee recommends that the Department develop policies to mitigate potential conflicts of interest for doctors who work in both the public sector and the private sector. I agree that there is that perception.

5.15 pm

The Committee made this recommendation on the basis of the anecdotal evidence and observations that it received. I have received those as well. However, as Minister, I want to make it clear that my Department has absolutely no evidence that consultants seek to divert patients to private health care or that they underperform in the public sector to maintain long waiting lists.

Northern Ireland's size makes sustaining a private health sector of any significant size that could utilise medical staff from elsewhere more difficult. The Northern Ireland independent sector, therefore, predominately utilises existing medical staff from the health service.

The potential for a conflict of interest has long been recognised and was addressed by the introduction of a code in November 2003. To avoid conflicts of interest between public and private work, ' A Code of Conduct for Private Practice', was agreed between the BMA Northern Ireland and the DHSSPS. The code is for consultants

and includes — this will answer the points made by the honourable lady for Foyle — the requirements that programmed HSC commitments should "take precedence over private work" and that, in the course of their HSC duties and responsibilities, consultants should not:

> *"initiate discussions about providing private services"*

for HSC patients, nor should they ask other HSC staff:

> *"to initiate such discussions on their behalf."*

In addition, the Department's guidance, 'Management of Private Practice in Health Service Hospitals in Northern Ireland', sets out key principles, including that consultants and their employing organisation — the trusts — should work:

> *"to prevent any conflict of interest between private practice and HSC work."*

They should also:

> *"minimise the risk of any perceived conflicts of interest."*

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Committee is concerned about HSC consultants who practise privately. In view of that, I am content to ask my officials to discuss with the Patient and Client Council the feasibility of undertaking research along the lines suggested by the Committee. I will inform the Committee of any outcomes of that in due course.

Ms P Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank all the members of the Committee. I was not on the Committee when it was looking at this issue, although I certainly wish that I had been. I also thank all Members. It certainly has been a very interesting debate.

The National Health Service has, since its inception, always had to manage its resources. From talking to constituents, I know that waiting times for appointments and treatments are one of the biggest issues for service users. For patients, there are four distinct waiting times: to see their GP; between seeing their GP and receiving appropriate tests; for referrals to specialists; and from seeing specialists to receiving treatment. For some conditions, those waiting times can have a negative impact on long-term health outcomes. It is right that we explore ways in which waiting lists can be reduced so that appropriate treatment can commence.

In September 2000, an additional £5 million was made available to reduce waiting lists under four key areas: clinical initiatives, management actions, service planning and efficiency measures. Prior to 2002, cuts in services due to financial reasons had led to an increase in waiting times in three major areas. First, from 1996, there was a 30% reduction in elective procedures. Then, from 2002, there was a decrease of 18% in bed capacity, while an increase of 10% in inpatient surgery and delayed discharges impacted on a bottlenecked system. In 2009, I am happy to report that the PAC commended DHSSPS on the dramatic drop in outpatient waiting times, yet, in 2014, we have bed pressures and extended waiting times.

At this stage, I will turn to what other Members had to say. The Chair, in moving the motion, said that the issue had been a concern for more than a decade. As someone who worked in the health service for many years, I fully understand that, as I understand the pressures that the health service is under. The Chair also said that waiting times are a serious issue and those for elective care are an extremely serious issue. She is absolutely right because there are people in severe pain, and the knock-on effect of that is poor mental health. There are other knock-on effects, too, and Mr McCarthy and Mrs Dobson spoke about the human cost. They said that, sometimes, we are very good at looking at percentages, facts, figures, finances and so on, but we need to come back, at every stage, to the human cost. That is not just for the patient but for the patient's family, the patient's employer and their work colleagues. It has a knock-on effect across the board.

The Chair is absolutely right that it is timely that this review is being carried out. The Committee looked at how other countries and regions handled their elective care, and it came up with five recommendations. The first recommendation that the Chair talked about was that to reduce the referral-to-treatment time targets. As I said earlier, our service measures it all in separate parts of the patient's journey, and, of course, that is no way to measure their journey. Their journey should be measured from beginning to end to give the patient a clear sense of how long they will have to wait for treatment. The Chair also acknowledged that this was a complex task, and the Department said that it would take time and money to implement. The Committee believed that this would lead to cost savings in the long term, and I absolutely agree with that. The Committee also recommended that this should be introduced as soon as possible in our health service here in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cameron brought up the issue that I and many Members did about our constituency offices. Regularly, we have people calling in because they are suffering and are in pain and have come to the end of the road and do not know where else to turn. Quite often, they end up at our offices wanting our help. The Minister mentioned that he also is aware of that because he is also a constituency MLA. He is also aware of the amount of letters that we, as MLAs, send through to his office, asking that waiting times be looked at. A number of Members brought that up, and I do not see that changing any time soon. In fact, a lot of Members said it, and they are absolutely right. I see that increasing as the months and years go on, and that really is a very sad state of affairs.

Mr McCarthy, in an intervention to Mr McGimpsey, mentioned the fact that we have constituents who have been given times and dates for surgery, only to receive notification that it has been cancelled. On a personal level, I have a 79-year-old father who has appeared for surgery twice. He has actually been to the hospital twice at 7.00 am, only to be told at 5.00 pm, "We are not doing your surgery today". That is the state of play that we are in. We have 79-year-old men brought into hospital, and that is the case. It does not always happen the day before or the week before. It is happening to our constituents and our own family members, people who we know and love, daily.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms P Bradley: Yes.

Mr Wells: Since I have become Minister, I have received letters from quite a few MLAs, even those who are in the Chamber, on this issue. Members, if that happens, I really do want to hear from you. I find it a matter of great concern

if someone is caught in that position not once but twice. Indeed, I have a case before me at the moment where it happened on three occasions. I think that we need to get some assessment of how this is going because it causes enormous distress to patients, and I simply cannot understand at times why it is happening.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for that, and I will be speaking to him within the next day or two. This only happened last week for the second time.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, and I am also very grateful for the response from the Minister. There is one aspect of this problem that has to be taken into consideration, and that is that we are all fully supportive and behind suicide prevention and prevention of self-harm etc. Instances like that can result in leading people in that direction, and that is the last thing that we want to see. I am delighted that the Minister has acknowledged that and is prepared to listen and to try to do something about it.

Ms P Bradley: I thank Mr McCarthy for his remarks. He is absolutely right. We all know what it is like to be pain, and we know how much that can bring us down and how that makes us feel. We also know that there is a heightened risk and a great risk of suicide among our elderly population as well. A lot of people waiting for care are older people. There is also the knock-on effect of having to have someone come in and look after you and your loss of dignity. There are so many different things to do with elective waiting times that need to be addressed very soon.

Mrs Cameron also brought up a recent visit to a private healthcare facility. The Minister also brought that up, as did other Members. I also was on that visit, and I saw a very efficient healthcare facility that appeared to be doing things in a much better way than our own health service. So, maybe there are lessons to be learned. Rather than us saying that we need to stop doing something, or that we need to do x, y or z, maybe our National Health Service needs to learn a few lessons about how to run its service more effectively. Mrs Cameron also talked about the ambiguity in our system and how we measure waiting times.

Mr McKinney spoke about recommendation 4, which relates to the use of the private sector for elective care. He said that, in 2009, £55 million to £65 million — 5% of the total spend on elective care — went to the private sector. He talked about other countries where private healthcare is used and told of how the demand in Northern Ireland has increased in the past years. That demand has, of course, exceeded our supply. That needs to be addressed as well. He questioned whether we were getting value for money from the private sector. We all know what the public opinion of private healthcare is, and the Minister has talked about it. We know the public's opinion on consultants who, maybe, are moving or manoeuvring lists, or whatever that might be. From what I saw in the facility that I visited, that certainly did not appear to be case. Many consultants there were purely private consultants.

So, I think we need to look at it on balance. Yes, these things do happen, but, again, there are other people out there who, for ethical reasons, are absolutely against using a system in which they would cancel NHS treatments in order to provide private treatments. Mr McKinney also said that we need to better match supply with demand. That is absolutely right. He also called for greater transparency when we look at the private sector. I think that better transparency would alleviate some of our concerns.

Mrs Dobson brought up the human cost, as I said earlier. That is an excellent point. When we look at how this affects the patient, we see how difficult life becomes. She also spoke about the waiting times and the need for them to be set to ensure that patients do not have to wait for extended periods, as we are seeing at present. I think that all of us agree that those waiting times need to be reduced, regardless of whether we believe in the use of private healthcare or the use of the NHS.

I spoke earlier about what Mr McCarthy said. He talked about constituents, and he said that we need to cut the length of time that our constituents have to wait, because they are suffering and are in pain. You are absolutely right.

Mr Brady talked about "target and terror" in England: I think that that was the term he used. I found that quite interesting; I wonder how it would work. Yes, it might well work. In that approach, management was held to account. That is exactly who needs to be held to account because they should be managing their service more effectively. He also spoke of the need for enforcement and said that changes would not happen if there was no enforcement. That reminded me of being a mother. If you do not follow through with what you say you will do when you are trying to get a child to do something, changes will not happen. So, it is exactly the same across the board in any walk of life, regardless of what we are dealing with.

Mr Brady also talked about Portugal, its benchmarks, and what seemed to be like league tables showing who was performing and who was not. It would not be a bad idea to have that. When I sat on the Health Committee previously, we got various tables relating to elective and other types of surgery. They told us which hospitals and trusts were performing and which were not. He also spoke about incentives. That is another good idea. Recently, I have been looking at the women in politics issue. To try to make it more desirable for political parties, we should maybe look at incentives. It is probably something similar: in order for trusts to perform, and to perform to meet the demand, incentives are maybe a way forward.

Mr McGimpsey brought us back to what we should be remembering: we should be delivering the best care we can and the best outcomes for our patients. He used the words that I used many times in social services, "patient need".

Again, we forget sometimes when we look at all the facts, figures and statistics that patient need is the most important thing. Sometimes, we need to be brought back to that to remember that that is important. The Member also mentioned the Belfast Trust, which is my trust. It was one of the worst offenders, although that is for many reasons. It is the largest trust and has the highest demand. It would be nice to see that changing in some way, but I know that it has a difficult task ahead of it.

The Minister highlighted the number of constituents he has. He is very much aware of all the complaints that we keep hammering on his door about. He welcomed the Committee's recommendations on referral-to-treatment targets, and he agreed that it would be more transparent for the patient. He also said that it would require investment, and that is not just financially, but through other doors, including clinicians, who would have to invest

in it as well. We look forward to seeing what he can do and how it will be taken forward.

We all know that we face great financial pressures, and that is something else that the Minister has to face. However, we also have to face them, as elected representatives and members of the Health Committee. There are challenging times ahead, but I believe that the recommendations set down by the Health Committee are valued and would go more than some way towards alleviating the pressures of elective care.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's review of waiting times for elective care; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to prioritise and tackle this issue.*

5.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): 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 will have five minutes.

Mr Buchanan: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes that November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month and that the disease is the cause of approximately 6% of all cancer deaths across Northern Ireland; regrets that only approximately 10% of pancreatic cancer patients undergo curative surgery as most patients are not diagnosed until the cancer is too far advanced for such treatment; acknowledges that 40% of patients visit their GP three or more times before being referred to hospital and that many patients begin treatment for other illnesses before they are diagnosed correctly; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work with service providers and relevant professional bodies to introduce new, improved and robust pancreatic cancer referral guidelines and to promote training and support for GPs and other health professionals to boost early diagnosis rates, reduce misdiagnosis and to ensure that pancreatic cancer survival rates are improved across Northern Ireland.*

I move the motion in light of Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month this November and to bring this important topic to the Floor of the House. Today, 24 people will die from pancreatic cancer in the UK; that is 24 out of the 8,700 people who will lose their battle against pancreatic cancer this year. Pancreatic cancer is a deadly scourge that is sweeping across the UK at an increasing and alarming rate. It is time that we at government level put measures in place to stop the flood of pain, trauma and death that has been unleashed across the Province.

One of my constituents — Mrs Kerry Irvine, who is just coming into the Gallery — is the reason that I brought this matter to the House. Since losing her husband Noel to pancreatic cancer in 2011, Kerry has fought to raise awareness of this awful disease. I will let you hear what Kerry said about the day her life changed for ever:

> *"April 22nd was the day my life changed. I changed, never to be the same person again after I heard the words, 'Noel, you have cancer. It's pancreatic cancer which has spread to your liver.'"*

Kerry continued:

> *"We quickly learnt that we were living on borrowed time. Six months to live a lifetime, how do you do that?"*

How can anyone put a lifetime into six months? Those haunting words are heart-rending, and, today, in Northern Ireland, too many people are thinking the same thing and asking the same questions. They have so little time left with their loved ones after receiving the diagnosis.

Pancreatic cancer is not a rare disease. The latest available figures show that, in 2012, 244 new cases of pancreatic cancer were diagnosed and, of those, 243 deaths were recorded. That equates to 6% of all deaths from cancer in Northern Ireland. In fact, the most worrying statistic about pancreatic cancer is that, unlike most other cancers, it is going against the trends, and mortality rates are increasing. Recent research from Cancer Research UK has shown that, thankfully, mortality rates for most cancers are declining, yet pancreatic cancer is not following those statistics. It is shocking to note that the five-year survival rates for pancreatic cancer have remained largely unchanged for the past 40 years. Northern Ireland is at the bottom of the pile, faring only slightly better than Bulgaria in the one-year survival rates for pancreatic cancer patients, and trails far behind the rest of the UK, which is already falling behind the European average. Those depressing figures culminate in the fact that pancreatic cancer has the worst survival outcome of any of the 21 most common cancers.

At present, the forecast for pancreatic cancer is bleak. By 2030, it is set to be the fourth largest cancer killer. Despite the enormity and seriousness of those figures, pancreatic cancer receives only 1% of the National Cancer Research Institute's partner spend. If we compare the spend on breast cancer of £3,426 per death per year, we see that pancreatic cancer staggers into oblivion with a measly £625 per death per year. That disparity in funding allocations to different cancers must be addressed. There is a direct link between funding allocation, research and tackling disease, and we cannot have success in fighting pancreatic cancer if research funding does not improve. The lack of funding over the past 40 years has led to pancreatic cancer being the neglected disease, and it is little wonder that pancreatic cancer has been labelled the Cinderella of all cancers in relation to other cancers such as breast cancer and prostate cancer.

I am here to lobby for and to call for an equal allocation of funding for pancreatic cancer. In Northern Ireland, aggressive measures need to be put in place now to develop early detection and treatment tools before incidences of the disease are allowed to dramatically increase. The way in which pancreatic cancer is detected and treated now is not working. Ninety-five per cent of patients who are diagnosed with the disease die from it. During the early stages when the tumour would be traceable, there are usually no specific symptoms, which is why it is so deadly. It tends to be discovered at advanced stages when there may be abdominal pain or jaundice. Presently, there are no screening tools. The average survival time for a pancreatic cancer patient is just two to six months from diagnosis. That is largely due to the fact that, by the time the disease is diagnosed, it is too late for surgery. Around 80% of patients are diagnosed when the disease has advanced.

Related to that is another incredibly worrying statistic on pancreatic cancer: 40% of patients visit their GP three or more times before being referred to hospital, and over 16% of patients have had to visit their GP or hospital seven times or more before getting a correct diagnosis. That is despite research carried out by Pancreatic Cancer UK that has shown that nearly 25% of pancreatic cancer patients experience symptoms for up to 12 months prior to being diagnosed. Clearly, there is a problem, and that problem costs lives. Pancreatic cancer charities have repeatedly told of the pattern of missed opportunities to be diagnosed at GP surgeries or hospitals. Sadly, the speed of diagnosis has a direct impact on the eligibility for surgery or palliative treatment, and if those are consistently too late, lives will be lost needlessly.

It would appear that GPs have a problem when it comes to diagnosing pancreatic cancer. From investigation of GP guidelines it is clear that they are structured around cancer type rather than the symptoms. The GP must think cancer first, then think site and then compare patient symptoms. Surely that is illogical. Why are guidelines not written around presenting symptoms that would rule out a cancer diagnosis first? It would seem that it is difficult to get clinicians to think of cancer first when making a diagnosis. That goes some way to explain why GPs in the UK diagnose a measly 18% of pancreatic cancer cases.

This year, I met a remarkable and inspirational lady called Ali Stunt, who is a survivor of pancreatic cancer. Ali survived the disease and now heads up the charity that tackles pancreatic cancer head on. Rather than simply bemoaning problems surrounding the cancer, the charity has, as its name suggests, taken action and developed an online training module accredited by the Royal College of General Practitioners that is provided free for GPs and can be used for continual professional development. Pancreatic Cancer Action (PCA) is the first charity in the world to provide a practical solution to the problem of late diagnosis of pancreatic cancer patients. I congratulate Ali Stunt from Pancreatic Cancer Action on its very successful cancer awareness advertising campaign. Those controversial campaigns just last week won two highly acclaimed awards from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. I met Ali back in June when she came over here. We had a meeting with the then Health Minister, Edwin Poots, and Ali outlined for him the fully accredited online tool that PCA has made for GP training.

I am pleased to inform the House that, since that meeting, the training module on diagnosing pancreatic cancer in primary care has been fully published in the Royal College of GPs' members' newsletter and is readily available for GPs to access. I now call on all GPs in Northern Ireland to make themselves aware of that invaluable tool, which is freely available to them. I urge Queen's University Belfast, which is the principal medical school in Northern Ireland, to recommend that all its students take that practical module to raise their awareness of the matter. I also call on my colleague the Health Minister to oversee the promotion of the free tool right across Northern Ireland. In addition, I urge the Minister to talk to the Royal College of GPs in Northern Ireland to look for additional ways to promote the tool.

Delving deeper into the system of how pancreatic cancer patients are treated in Northern Ireland shows that it leaves a lot to be desired. At present, there is only one hepato-pancreato-biliary (HPB) nurse for the whole of Northern Ireland. That lady is the only specialist pancreatic cancer nurse for the whole population of our Province. Something more needs to be done on that matter. If we had more specialists in the community —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Buchanan: — they would have access to help and clarity on these issues. I have a lot more here, as you will appreciate, but I thank the House for allowing the issue

to be debated today. I trust that something will be done to move it forward.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the proposer of the motion for bringing what is an important topic to the House today. I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate.

It is appropriate that we do all in our gift to raise public awareness of pancreatic cancer in the first instance. It is important to point out that is not a rare cancer. The proposer of the motion reflected on a number of the statistics. The latest available figures that I have looked at show that there were 244 new cases and 243 deaths recorded in the North in 2012. None of those statistics suggests that it is a rare cancer. The proposer pointed out that it is responsible for almost 6% of cancer deaths in the North. Research by organisations such as Cancer Research suggests, as the proposer said, that it is set to become the fourth biggest cancer killer by 2030. We have survival rates and a lot of ongoing, good, positive work for most forms of cancer, and thankfully those survival rates have been rising, but the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer has simply remained unchanged. That is something that we need to be mindful of when we look at the need for public awareness and much more around that. In effect, it leaves pancreatic cancer with the worst survival outcome of any of the top 21 most common cancers. That is not something that we should be proud of; rather, it is something that we should target for the support, public awareness and resources that are required.

The proposer said that the early stages of pancreatic cancer often exhibit no symptoms, which makes diagnosis quite difficult. Treatment depends on the type, location and stage of the cancer. Surgery is often the only way to cure pancreatic cancer completely. However, the condition is usually so advanced by the time it is diagnosed that surgery, as some cancer charities indicate, is suitable for only around 15% to 20% of people. The cancer has advanced so much that surgery is not an option.

5.45 pm

Mr Buchanan: Will the Member give way?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I will indeed.

Mr Buchanan: Does the Member agree that one of the ways to defeat the spread of pancreatic cancer being caught too late is for GPs and clinicians to think cancer first and to go down the road of treating or looking at it as cancer and then treating all the other symptoms after that?

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I agree with the Member. I will come to that point, because we need to be mindful not only of the facts but of what we do about pancreatic cancer.

I go back to the point — I think that the proposer referred to it — that, according to figures from Cancer Research, 48% of pancreatic cancer diagnoses are made through emergency admissions. Even when a diagnosis is made, the patient experience is often extremely poor, and we need to be mindful of that. There is only one specialist pancreatic cancer nurse in the North. We should not be proud of that statistic and should actively strive to do something about it.

There should be better public awareness as well as better awareness among health professionals, including GPs and clinicians. I am aware of and welcome the fact that the Public Health Agency is discussing a generic cancer awareness campaign, but I ask the Minister to consider running a specific pancreatic cancer awareness campaign. What actions will he take to boost public awareness of pancreatic cancer and its symptoms? It is important to reflect on the evidence that was given to the all-party group on pancreatic cancer. One respondent said:

> *"I went to my GP more times in the previous 12 months prior to my diagnosis, than I had in the previous 12 years."*

That statistic also needs to be taken into consideration.

What needs to be done? We need to develop screening tests. We need to invest a greater proportion of money in research funding. We need to look at better GP training and comprehensive referral guidelines. We need to look at referral pathways, including direct access to patients' CT scans for GPs. We also need to look at how to develop and roll out innovative referral pathways in the North. I welcome the fact that a pancreatic cancer charity has identified two pilot projects, and it has identified the North as one of the locations for a pancreatic specialist nurse and a community involvement coordinator. I met representatives of the charity in June. I commend its work in this area and its continuing lobbying of the Health Minister and the Public Health Agency.

Mr McKinney: As SDLP health spokesperson and a Health Committee member, I welcome the opportunity to speak on such an important issue, which has affected and continues to affect many people here. I thank those who tabled the motion.

As noted by Members who spoke previously, pancreatic cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer death in the UK and has the worst survival rate of all cancers, yet it receives merely 1% of research spend. That comes in at around £5·2 million, which is significantly lower than is spent on other types of cancer. The five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer is 3%. That has not changed in the last 40 years, despite significant advances in the treatment and survival rates of those with other cancers such as breast and prostate.

There are obviously serious problems, which the Assembly and Government can go some way to address. What can we do? Mr Buchanan said it: greater research funding is needed, along with a campaign for more public awareness of symptoms, as was said. GPs also need to be provided with greater support in their diagnoses — for example, through access to CT scanners. As Ms McLaughlin said, GPs must have in place a proper care pathway to fast-track hospital admissions for diagnosis and specialist treatment.

All that could be conducive to increasing overall survival rates. However, almost as deeply worrying is the international, national and regional differentiation of survival rates. According to a Eurocare study in 2009, the UK survival rate after one year is 16%, which is well behind the European average of 20·9%, with countries such as Belgium having almost double the survival rate of the UK. Most startling is that here in Northern Ireland, the survival

rate after one to five years is, at 3%, the lowest of all. As I said, that has not changed. These are obvious failings, which are having a further detrimental effect on sufferers of pancreatic cancer.

The figures speak for themselves, but we must acknowledge the systemic issues and that some of it is our fault. It is without doubt that early diagnosis is paramount to increasing survival rates of patients suffering from pancreatic cancer. I will underscore Mr Buchanan and Mrs McLaughlin's point again: 48% of pancreatic cancer diagnoses are made at emergency admission, when the cancer is at an advanced stage and it is too late for treatment to effect a cure. In those cases, only 9% survive after one year.

It is evident, from what we have heard, that numerous difficulties exist in diagnosing pancreatic cancer at primary care level. The fact that 40% of patients visit a GP three or more times before a diagnosis also speaks for itself. I refer to a point made earlier: if someone has not visited their doctor for 12 years, an alarm bell or red flag must welcome them on their first visit back, and their subsequent appointment should not be delayed. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure greater dialogue between primary and secondary care providers. I echo the call for an efficient and effective care pathway to accommodate that.

Over the last number of years, significant attention has been focused on personalised medicine as a method of delivering treatment for cancer patients. There have been advances by organisations such as Cancer Research UK, which has conducted considerable research into tumours, noting in particular how individuals react differently to treatment. That means that patients can receive personalised medicine, and, of course, scientists are continuing to work on developing new drugs and treatments. There obviously needs to be an integrated approach to the delivery of treatment for cancer patients through personalised medicine.

My appeal is that we fully embrace the new, innovative cancer drugs that are available. The SDLP has spent most of this year highlighting the need for greater access to these specialised cancer drugs and, indeed, many —

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I should point out to the Member that all the drugs available to treat pancreatic cancer in Northern Ireland are available without going through the individual funding request (IFR) mechanism. There is no impediment to their access in the Province.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for his helpful intervention. Will he clarify whether Abraxane is included?

Mr Wells: Yes, it is.

Mr McKinney: Thank you very much. I was just about to refer to that. It is helpful that that drug is available to pancreatic cancer sufferers, but it does not take away from my wider point that, for all cancers, greater access to these drugs would, I think, make a difference.

I would like to underscore the point further: if we embrace the cancer drugs model, we could get them free under the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS). That would also underscore our well-established drug development research at Queen's University. I fully believe, having travelled to San Diego in the summer, that there are real economic benefits to be had from embracing that overall model and in having a cancer centre of excellence here. Some years ago, in San Diego, the need for development in that area was recognised and a £5 billion a year economy was created around that. That would help not only pancreatic cancer sufferers but the wider population of cancer patients.

I am conscious that I am almost out of time, so I conclude by saying that we must move on this because another 40 years cannot pass with the survival rate remaining at 3%.

Mrs Dobson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion this evening. It is a sad fact that pancreatic cancer unfortunately does not have the same profile as many other cancers. There is a general unfamiliarity with the disease. Unfortunately, this runs from patients right up to the medical services. Sadly, as the motion says, too often, people are not diagnosed until it is too late. As has already been said, pancreatic cancer is one of the leading causes of death by cancer in Northern Ireland. In fact, according to Pancreatic Cancer UK, it is the fifth biggest cancer killer.

Unfortunately, as we know, the UK's survival rates are some of the worst in Europe. Whilst there have been some improvements in recent years, on the whole, the overall survival rate has barely budged over the past few decades when compared with those of other cancers. This is further compounded when you consider that, overall, people are now living nearly six times longer after cancer diagnoses than was the case 40 years ago, as Mr McKinney mentioned. While mortality for most common cancers is declining, as has been pointed out this evening, pancreatic cancer is set to become the fourth biggest cancer killer by 2030. I think that we need to ask why. With advances in medical research and medication, this should not be the case.

There is no doubt that one issue is public awareness and, in the case of pancreatic cancer, the lack of it. Early detection is key, but unfortunately its symptoms mirror those of a number of much less critical illnesses. That is why tragically so many people are misdiagnosed and miss out on help when they first go and seek it. This also contributes to its frighteningly short survival period of just two to six months from diagnosis. With a one-in-90 chance of getting the cancer and a 95% chance of dying once diagnosed, you can see why it does not attract the same commercial funding for research as the more treatable forms of cancer. This is proven by the fact that pancreatic cancer is responsible for 5·2% of UK cancer deaths but gets only 1% of the National Cancer Research Institute's partners' research spend.

Just because it might not be financially attractive to the drugs companies should not have to mean that research is neglected. For instance, Queen's University is becoming an increasingly significant global leader in tackling cancers. I would like to pay tribute to the vital work that is done there. I ask the Minister today whether, through the support his Department offers to bodies, including the National Cancer Research Institute, pancreatic and other neglected cancers could be prioritised more. One per cent of funding simply is not enough.

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

Research into innovative pancreatic cancer screening tests should be considered an absolute necessity, especially because of its difficulty to diagnose. The lack of awareness

of the cancer is also putting a massive strain on the health service. Many people, as we know, learn that they have the disease only after being admitted as an emergency to their local hospital. As the Minister no doubt will be well aware, often the costs associated with these are huge. By improving awareness among both the public and medical staff, people could be diagnosed earlier and start receiving vital treatment quicker. Conversations need to be held with general practices about additional training that could be beneficial. We need to create a new screening practice. None of this should be impossible to achieve.

The purpose of this motion is rightly to raise the profile of pancreatic cancer. However, I would make it clear that getting this motion in the Order Paper and debated in the Chamber will do nothing unless it is followed up by tangible action. The measure of the Minister will be the action that he takes after this debate is over.

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

Mrs Dobson: For the sake of pancreatic cancer sufferers and their families, now and in the future, I truly hope that the Minister will act.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate today, which comes before the House at the start of Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.

6.00 pm

Like many similar campaigns for other types of cancer, this campaign provides an opportunity to celebrate with those who have survived, remember those who have been lost to the disease and raise awareness of the illness. It is also an opportunity for the Assembly to assess our current approach to tackling the disease and whether more can be done to prevent or treat it.

My colleague Naomi Long MP, who has often spoken of her concerns about this devastating illness, recently asked the Secretary of State for Health to provide estimates of the variation in survival rates for pancreatic cancer among UK regions, and the response was telling. England currently has a five-year survival rate of 4·7%; Wales, 5·4%; and Northern Ireland, just 3%, which lags far behind the European average of 6·9%. So, it is clear that there is work to be done.

The motion states that pancreatic cancer accounts for 6% of all cancer deaths in Northern Ireland, and we should note that it is predicted that, by 2030, it will have overtaken breast cancer as the fourth most common cancer killer. We must, therefore, understand the reasons behind that in order to try to improve survival rates. Other Members have already spoken about the fact that only 10% of pancreatic cancer patients undergo curative surgery, or perhaps that should be more accurately referred to as "surgery with curative intent". The main reason for this seems to be that, for many, at the time of diagnosis, the cancer is too far advanced for such surgery to have an impact and, therefore, it is the issue of early diagnosis that requires our pressing attention.

I note that the motion acknowledges:

> *"40% of patients visit their GP three or more times"*

before specialist referral, and there is solid data to support that. However, we need to be careful not simply to blame our GPs for being selective about referring patients who present with common and usually benign symptoms. Furthermore, as there is no specific biological marker to indicate the malignant disease, it can be extremely difficult to detect and diagnose pancreatic cancer, especially in its early stages.

In my constituency, East Belfast, patients report high satisfaction with their GPs, despite struggling to access appointments in a context of increasing demand, and I believe that we need to support our GPs in their decision-making and recognise their value as gatekeepers to an overburdened secondary healthcare system. That said, there is an onus on the Minister and his Department to encourage GPs to make use of freely available and validated diagnostic aids; for example, the Macmillan cancer decision support tool, as well as open-learning opportunities that have already been referred to, such as the Royal College of General Practitioners' pancreatic cancer e-learning module. We should also be ensuring that GPs have access to CT scans etc as already mentioned by others in the debate.

Although the motion focuses on boosting early diagnosis to improve survival rates, we should also acknowledge that, even with those improvements, there will still be many who will not reach that five-year survival mark. Therefore, we should also call on the Minister to examine the current practices to ensure that there is optimal support and symptom palliation for those whose illness is terminal.

If we are to reduce the number of deaths due to pancreatic cancer, we must not only work to improve diagnosis but continue to combat the three greatest risk factors: smoking, obesity and excessive alcohol intake. Prevention, as we all know, is better than cure.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate on what is a very serious issue, and something that continues to have an impact on many families across Northern Ireland. Pancreatic cancer is yet another terrible form of cancer that can often have tragic consequences; it is a cancer that must be taken very seriously. Sadly, this cancer is now responsible for around 6% of all cancer deaths across Northern Ireland, which equates to around 200 deaths per year. It is now the fifth leading cause of UK cancer deaths.

One of the most worrying statistics is that the five-year survival rate of 3% has not improved in over 40 years, while survival rates for other cancers have, thankfully, increased. There is a real issue with pancreatic cancer, in that it is difficult to diagnose and its symptoms often mirror those of other, less critical, non-threatening conditions. That is why pancreatic cancer has become known as the "silent killer". The fact that this form of cancer affects men and women equally is further confirmation that improvements need to be made in the fight against this terrible condition.

I fully support the sentiment in the motion, which asks the Minister to continue to work towards improving the diagnosis of the condition. Early diagnosis is vital. We need to reduce misdiagnosis across the health sector. The role of our GPs is vital in ensuring early diagnosis. Patients must be encouraged to report any symptoms at the earliest possible stage. It is important that GPs be fully competent in identifying such symptoms.

We need to do all we can to improve pancreatic cancer survival rates across Northern Ireland; the statistic that the average survival rate for a pancreatic cancer patient is just two to six months from diagnosis is shocking. That is largely due to the fact that, by the time the disease is diagnosed, it is often too late for curative surgical treatment. Sadly, about 80% of patients are diagnosed at a point where the disease has seriously advanced.

I pay tribute to and commend the charities and organisations that work with cancer sufferers and their families daily by providing support at such a difficult time for everyone suffering from that terrible condition. It is worth commending the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund and Pancreatic Cancer UK for the important work that they do in supporting families and patients.

Education is important for improving and better targeting in our communities through public awareness campaigns and outreach programmes to raise awareness of the condition, its symptoms and measures to decrease the risk of pancreatic cancer developing. I recently spoke with a patient who is suffering from that terrible condition and who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer. I urge the Minister to continue to support the funding of drugs for cancer sufferers. That patient is on life-prolonging drugs that are available through the system. We certainly appreciate that. We further urge the Minister to continue with the campaign for drugs in the battle against cancer. It is vital that the Minister focus on that in these difficult times. It is important that that focus remains.

Health promotion and public awareness campaigns that encourage healthier living all have a key role to play in helping to tackle cancer. Encouraging a healthier lifestyle, better diets, more exercise, and reducing smoking and alcohol consumption are all measures that should be worked on and fully encouraged. I support the motion.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I also thank the Member for bringing it forward for debate. Each year in the North of Ireland, pancreatic cancer accounts for around 200 deaths, which is 5·5% of all cancer-related deaths. It is an extremely difficult cancer to diagnose and treat. Symptoms are vague, and they generally appear at an advanced stage of the disease. One of the main concerns is that there is no early diagnostic test available. Three per cent of those diagnosed with pancreatic cancer survive five years or more. Sadly, as Members have stated, that has not changed in 40 years. While this cancer is the fifth leading cause of death and has the worst survival rate of all cancers, survival rates for other cancers have remained steady. Bowel cancer is currently 54%; in 1971, it was 22%. Breast cancer is currently 84%; in 1971, it was 56%. Prostate cancer is currently 88%; in 1971, it was 31%. Those are just some of the survival figures.

What causes pancreatic cancer is not yet fully understood, but certain factors have been identified in the development of the disease. It especially affects people aged between 50 and 80. Smoking is a big one, as are diabetes and stomach ulcers. Although it is the fifth leading cause of cancer deaths and has the worst survival rate of all cancers, it receives only 1% of research spend. Dr Andrew Millar of London Cancer said in September of this year that there has to be a direct link between the lack of funding allocated to pancreatic cancer and the lack of progress in treating the disease.

People have a one in 90 chance of getting this cancer, but they have a 95% chance of dying once diagnosed. Those figures mean that research into pancreatic cancer is less likely to attract commercial funding than the more treatable forms of cancer. The Government need to step up to the plate and give more money to research.

Of the National Cancer Research Institute's 2013 budget, only £5·2 million — just 1% — was spent on pancreatic cancer. Breast cancer got £41 million, bowel cancer got £24·5 million, leukaemia got £32 million and prostate cancer got £21 million. The money spent on pancreatic cancer research here equates to £625 per death per year compared with £3,426 per death per year for breast cancer. In the past 10 years, when the number of deaths from other cancers has been declining, the number of deaths from pancreatic cancer has been increasing.

As someone who has cancer, I understand how people feel. When you are sat in the room with the specialist and he comes out with that word "cancer", you go into a different world. The one thing that has been missing in the debate today — it is not the fault of Members — is the effect on families. I ask the Minister to bear that in mind. I totally agree with everything that Members have said and are going to say, but please do not forget the families, because they are left to pick up the pieces. The family is devastated when their loved one is diagnosed with cancer and is being treated, and they are grief-stricken when that person dies. There is not enough help for the families; they are left on their own. The man of the house could be self-employed and get cancer. What is he supposed to do? He is left with the prospect no income for the house. All those everyday questions have to be answered by the families on their own. There is movement on that through Macmillan and organisations offering advice, but there needs to be more help for families from the Department.

We need to treat cancer patients in a more humane way. If we have not improved the five-year survival rates in 40 years, there is something wrong. We are still supplying the drugs, as the Minister said, which is good, but there has to be something else. For 1% of the national budget to be spent on research into pancreatic cancer is a disgrace. That is not to say that the rest is going to other cancers; it is not. The more money that goes on research the better, but it is not enough for just over £5 million to be spent on research a year, and other Members will agree.

Minister, do everything you can after this debate, but please do not forget the families.

Mrs Cameron: I support today's motion on pancreatic cancer. On many occasions, I have spoken in the Chamber about the need for public awareness, support for our clinicians and an improvement in patient outcomes in the fight against cancer. I thank in particular my colleagues Tom Buchanan and Paula Bradley for bringing the motion before the Assembly this evening.

Pancreatic cancer is equally devastating for sufferers and their families. However, unlike cancers such as bowel, breast and prostate, the five-year survival rates have remained unchanged, as we have heard, for the last 40 years. Contributing to 6% of cancer deaths, pancreatic cancer is the fifth biggest cancer killer in the UK, and it is expected to become the fourth biggest killer by 2030, overtaking breast cancer.

The lack of awareness and the difficulty in diagnosis has no doubt contributed to the poor survival rates, with only 10% of new patients being suitable for curative surgery due to late diagnosis. It is often the case that the patient has had a period of unexpected weight loss and jaundice prior to diagnosis. Unfortunately, by the time those symptoms appear, the tumour has become too advanced to treat surgically. As a result of the early stages of pancreatic cancer being largely asymptomatic, with the initial symptoms often being mistaken for other illnesses, around 40% of patients will visit their GP three or more times before they are referred to a specialist, with a staggering 16% visiting seven times prior to diagnosis. It is an unfortunate reality that 48% of diagnoses come following emergency admissions to hospital — twice the total of other forms of cancer.

6.15 pm

I apologise for using a great number of statistics, but the disparity between the early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and other forms of cancer is astounding and can be properly conveyed only in that manner. The one-year survival rate for patients diagnosed during emergency hospital admission currently stands at 9%. For patients diagnosed following GP referral, it is 26%. That statistic alone speaks loud and clear on the need to provide adequate training and support for health professionals in order to improve patient outcomes and, ultimately, survival rates.

As with most cancers, there is a link to our lifestyle choices that cannot be underestimated, with smoking, obesity and diabetes all being identified as contributory factors in the occurrence of pancreatic cancer. We must also take responsibility for improving our diet and general way of life. That said, there is growing evidence to suggest that a genetic link to predisposition to pancreatic cancer may be identifiable, in the same way as the identification of the BRCA2 gene has been instrumental in improving early diagnosis and survival rates for breast, ovarian and prostate cancer in people with a family history. We must invest resources in further research into the p16 gene, which has been identified as a possible faulty gene linked to pancreatic cancer. In 2013, only 1% of the National Cancer Research Institute budget was invested in pancreatic cancer research. Pancreatic cancer research clearly remains neglected, and more must be done to identify those at risk and to diagnose early to improve outcomes.

It is imperative that our GPs and health professionals receive thorough training and support to identify possible pancreatic cancer. In 2013, Macmillan Cancer Support launched an electronic cancer decision support tool pilot scheme that served to assist in the clinical judgement of patients. The tool works through the existing IT system by identifying patients' symptoms and the demography over the past 12 months. It calculates risk and highlights whether further investigation is warranted. That tool would be particularly useful in the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, as the likelihood is not always immediately apparent and the symptoms can be non-specific. Further to the success of the nine-month pilot, the scheme was rolled out free of charge to all GPs across the UK.

Although the tool does not replace the interaction that a GP will have with his or her patient, it can only serve to enhance the community feel of the GP's surgery, which has to be recommended under Transforming Your Care. It could also lead to earlier diagnosis of difficult-to-identify cancers such as pancreatic cancer, thereby leading to possible surgical intervention and increased survival rates.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Mrs Cameron: I urge all our GPs to give serious consideration to using the tool in their practice to provide an effective and proven backup to their own clinical experience.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht thábhachtach seo inniu. Cuirim fáilte fosta roimh an seans labhairt air. This is a very important debate, and I welcome the opportunity to speak in it. It is timely that we are having the debate during Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, particularly so given the low level of attention given to this fatal illness, which makes up 6% of cancer deaths across the North.

Seo an phríomhcheist sa díospóireacht. The key issue thrown up by the debate is the failure to diagnose pancreatic cancer early enough, which results in around only 10% of sufferers being able to avail themselves of curative surgery. Cad é go díreach atá ag titim amach anseo? What exactly is happening here? Well, patients are going to their GP. They are complaining of symptoms that are vague and can be caused by many different conditions. They are then being sent away, told that they are OK or that they have got something else. The fact is that they are suffering from pancreatic cancer, and it is not being picked up until it is at a very late stage. In fact, patients are sometimes referred to hospital only after three or four visits to their GP, due to misdiagnosis or failure to be diagnosed at all. That means that people who find out that they have pancreatic cancer are often at a very advanced stage — about 90% of patients, we are told — and beyond the possibility of having curative treatment.

The facts are these: pancreatic cancer is the fifth leading type of cancer on these islands; it has the worst survival rate of all cancers; and it receives only 1% of research spend. When compared with other illnesses, survival rates for other cancers have increased significantly over the years. It is good to hear that, and that is no doubt due to increased awareness among health professionals and the public and because of research investment. However, the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer has not changed from 3% since 1971, whereas the picture has changed significantly for other cancers. Since 1971, bowel cancer has seen an increase in survival rate from 22% to 54%. As I say, that is good news. It is also good news that breast cancer survival rates have risen from 56% to 84%. Likewise, the survival rate for prostate cancer has risen from 31% to 81%. It is shameful that, in the same period, survival rates for pancreatic cancer have stayed the same. We can directly relate the increase in survival rates to the funding that has been directed at research. A National Cancer Research Institute graph shows the huge disparity in investment, with breast cancer at one end of the scale receiving £41 million in 2012, and pancreatic cancer at the opposite end receiving a mere £4·5 million.

The situation cannot be allowed to continue. We cannot let people drift to an early death when preventative measures could be taken to help to address the issues. What needs to happen? We need to ensure that appropriate investment

is put in place to encourage the development of diagnostic tools for earlier diagnosis and to ensure that pancreatic cancer is placed on a similar footing to other disease research. We need to ensure that the correct training and support is in place for health professionals and GPs to increase early diagnosis rates. We need to know that an awareness-raising campaign will be put in place so that sufferers of this deadly disease are not destined to be misdiagnosed in the future simply because of ignorance.

I commend the support organisations, which do sterling work to raise awareness of the disease. I commend my colleague Oliver McMullan for his openness and honesty in speaking about the effects of having cancer and how it feels and for raising the issue of family support, which is needed. Mar fhocal scoir — on a final note — I call on the Minister to work with the relevant bodies to introduce measures to ensure that pancreatic cancer survival rates are improved across the North in the future.

Mr McGimpsey: Much of what needs to be said has been said. It has been a sobering debate — bleak at times — as we listened to the information coming forward. We must always remember that this is about individuals. Oliver reminded us that pancreatic cancer diagnosis is almost invariably terminal. The five-year survival rate of 3% has been mentioned. That is an appalling figure. When we see that the survival rates for a number of other cancers have improved, it is clear that a great deal of work and investment is needed.

A couple of points are clear. The survival rate is much improved if pancreatic cancer is caught early. There is a difficulty in diagnosis, but, if it is caught by a GP, survival rates improve dramatically in the short term. If patients wait until they are at the point of pain and go to A&E, their chances are greatly reduced. The GP, as the gatekeeper to the service, has a vital role to play. It is about investment in that service, awareness for GPs and specialist training.

It is clear that age, smoking and family history are factors. Therefore, public awareness plays a very important role. The Public Health Agency has a very important role to play, so we need to look at how it can take forward a public awareness campaign.

There is also the issue of research. One of the key ways of improving survival rates of cancers such as bowel cancer and breast cancer is screening. As I understand it, screening is not available for pancreatic cancer at this time. That is an area for research, and it is vital that we look at the opportunities there. The Minister has confirmed that any applicable drugs are already available through our health service.

Given that the figures are so bleak — the five-year and even the one-year survival rates— it would be a serious dereliction of our duty if we were not looking at what we can do with what is available to us to improve in these areas. It is also about how our health service works and learning from the experience of other parts of the Kingdom, the Republic and internationally in how we go forward to look for some form of screening. We need to find a solution that improves the survival rate and extends life expectancy so that, when individuals get this diagnosis, it is not one that is inevitably terminal in the short term.

Mr G Robinson: As a new member of the Health Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak. I support this very worthwhile motion as it highlights the need for greater public awareness and better diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. The north-west of the Province seems to be harder hit by cancer, and that possibly needs research and investigation.

Even though pancreatic cancer is a particularly aggressive cancer, there are ways to fight it that significantly increase the odds of recovery. Doctors, consultants and other medical staff do their best and must be applauded for the unstinting work that they do, but, sadly, it may not be enough. That shows that there is a need to improve diagnosis techniques and awareness among GPs of the possibility of pancreatic cancer as a diagnosis. Pancreatic cancer does not usually give rise to any symptoms or signs in its early stages. Therefore, GPs have a huge disadvantage when trying to diagnose it. The symptoms can also be a sign of other common illnesses such as pancreatitis, gastritis, gallstones or hepatitis. All this means that patients may end up seeing their GP several times, or being referred for a number and variety of tests, before pancreatic cancer is even considered.

Unlike the majority of cancers, the relative survival rate of pancreatic cancer has improved very little since the early 1970s. Sadly, this can generally be attributed to difficulties in diagnosis. Increasing cancer survival rates must be a major priority. This must start with accurate diagnosis and early treatment to reduce the high death rate. I sincerely hope that the Minister will, as the motion suggests, be able to implement improved and robust guidelines and promote support for our GPs. By doing this, we can reduce the number of misdiagnoses, improve survival rates and have a positive effect on those in Northern Ireland who suffer from pancreatic cancer.

6.30 pm

Mr Wells: First, I pay tribute to Mrs Kerry Irvine, who, by her perseverance, has ensured that the issue has been raised in the Assembly. It is a fitting tribute to her husband Noel that the issue is receiving such serious attention in the Chamber.

I welcome the debate to acknowledge Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month and highlight issues relating to what is, frankly, a dreadful illness. I was shocked when I heard from Mr Buchanan that 24 people pass on every day in the United Kingdom as a result of pancreatic cancer. That is a truly shocking statistic. Each year, around 8,500 people in the United Kingdom are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. According to the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, in 2012, 244 people were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in Northern Ireland. Frankly, even more shocking is that 243 died. Those are very worrying statistics. One of those who died was Adrian Patterson, a church elder in my church and a family friend. He got the terrible news that he had pancreatic cancer, and it was very quickly established that his condition was terminal.

Pancreatic cancer is the fifth most common cause of cancer death, causing 5% of all cancer deaths in the United Kingdom each year. The shocking statistic — there is no other word for it — that has been quoted by almost every Member who has spoken is that, in the 1960s, the rate of those with pancreatic cancer who were alive in five years was 3% and the survival rate now in Northern Ireland is still 3%. That is a truly dreadful statistic.

On my second day in office, I announced in the Assembly that, for the first time ever, Northern Ireland had passed a very important milestone and that there were more people alive with cancer after five years than had passed on. I am delighted to say that I got that wrong. It is not after five years but 10 years that 51% of cancer sufferers are alive. There have been tremendous successes in identifying cures for cancer in many fields. I quoted the example of leukemia. When I was a child, 82% of leukemia sufferers passed on, and now 82% of children with leukemia are alive after 10 years. That is a remarkable achievement. Unfortunately, pancreatic cancer is one of the cancers for which there has been no improvement of any note in the last four decades

I hope that Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month will result in more patients seeking medical advice at an earliest possible stage of the disease. As Members will be aware, the Public Health Agency has an awareness campaign for the signs and symptoms of cancer. We believe that that is a key factor in detecting cancers early and increasing the chances of successful treatment and survival. We are very much where we were with ovarian cancer and exactly the same principles have been established. I was very taken by the comments of the honourable Member for South Antrim Mrs Cameron who mentioned the fact that survivorship is so much better when the diagnosis is made by a GP rather than in a crisis situation during an emergency admission to hospital. By that stage, of course, it is often far too late. The Public Health Agency is working on a new cancer awareness public information campaign, and that work is well advanced.

I take the point that was made by the Chair about having a dedicated campaign for pancreatic cancer. The difficulty is that we have 21 main serious cancers in Northern Ireland, and it would be difficult to justify having 21 separate campaigns. I know that Una Crudden is very keen that we have a specific bespoke ovarian cancer campaign. My mind is not closed on that, but I can certainly see technical difficulties with doing that and doing it in a way that does not cause confusion among the public.

A stakeholder engagement session was held on 8 May and was attended by fifty representatives from the community, voluntary and charity sectors, who looked at the evidence and rationale to support the development of a cancer awareness campaign. The PHA was then tasked to complete qualitative research that aimed to establish the public attitudes, knowledge and awareness of cancer signs and symptoms. I am afraid that the key findings are not encouraging. They highlight that the awareness of cancer signs and symptoms is relatively low among our population in Northern Ireland. They also highlighted that many people put off going to their doctor because they are afraid of what the doctor may find. That seems to be a particular problem for males in Northern Ireland, who are four times less likely to go to their GP than the ladies. I think that that is something that we, as a gender, will have to address because, unfortunately, we can often present ourselves when it is far too late. There was poor awareness of cancer survival rates in general, and most people had little idea of life expectancy after a diagnosis of cancer. These findings have informed a forthcoming cancer awareness public information campaign, the visible signs of which will commence this month.

Most Members who spoke raised the issue that, unfortunately, the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer presents particular difficulties. No reliable screening test has been developed, and the symptoms are often absent at the early stage of the disease. When symptoms do present, they are usually non-specific. In other words, they are common to many illnesses and often present at a late stage. Consequently, outcomes are poor for this form of cancer.

To ensure that the best services exist to meet the needs and preferences of people and are accessible to all regardless of where they live, a service framework for cancer prevention, treatment and care was published in February 2011. The framework sets out 52 standards that are common to all cancers in relation to the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, ongoing care, rehabilitation and palliative/end-of-life care for people who have cancer and those who have a bigger risk of developing cancer. A review of the framework is due to take place in 2015-16, and this will inform the way forward in our fight against cancer.

I fully support the efforts that GPs and other health professionals are making in a challenging situation to boost their awareness of early diagnosis, reduce misdiagnosis and ensure that pancreatic cancer survival rates are improved across Northern Ireland. GPs receive training in pancreatic cancer diagnosis in the GP curriculum. This includes interpreting common symptoms, understanding the indications for urgent referral for pancreatic cancer and understanding the risks associated with various symptoms that may indicate pancreatic cancer.

Most diagnosis of pancreatic cancer occurs in cancer units and in the cancer centre at Belfast City Hospital, and people are then referred to the regional multidisciplinary team as recommended by NICE guidelines. If surgery is deemed appropriate, it is carried out at the Mater Hospital in Belfast. As several Members indicated, only 15% of sufferers actually benefit from surgery because often it is simply too late to do anything at that late stage. Systemic anti-cancer treatments are provided in the Belfast cancer centre, and the decision as to whether surgery is appropriate is entirely clinical. Where surgery is not deemed appropriate and the disease is advanced, the only treatment may be referral to a specialist palliative care nurse. While acknowledging the particular difficulties associated with identifying the early symptoms of pancreatic cancer, which can be non-specific and common to a range of illnesses, I look to researchers and clinicians to advise on how best to improve pancreatic cancer referral guidelines in ways that are practical and evidence-based.

Belfast City Hospital is a major research centre for cancer, and there are close links between the Belfast Trust and the universities, including academics and clinicians. The Northern Ireland cancer trials centre and network enables patients and others from across Northern Ireland to participate in clinical trials of potentially beneficial prevention strategies, diagnostics, treatments and care. Currently, almost one fifth of patients newly diagnosed with cancer in Northern Ireland participate in clinical trials.

Since 2000, Belfast has had a successful pancreatic cancer clinical trials portfolio. The completed trials have led to major publications, thereby adding to the global knowledge available to clinicians who are treating pancreatic cancer. At a wider level, a new health and social care research and development strategy for Northern Ireland is nearing its public consultation stage.

At this point, I will clarify something that I said to Mr McKinney the Member for South Belfast. At the moment, all NICE-approved drugs for pancreatic cancer are available in Northern Ireland, but we anticipated a NICE decision in October of this year on the particular drug he mentioned. That has not happened, so we expect the final guidance on the drug to be published in January 2015. I will write to him and provide full information about that because it is quite a complex situation. I can tell you that the NICE-approved drugs that are there already are available and are not one of the 40 where there has been considerable debate and which come under the IFR process.

I want to clarify the situation, because he raised a very valid point. I will write to him on that important issue.

My Department funds the core staff and facilities of the Northern Ireland Cancer Trials Centre and the Northern Ireland Cancer Network through the regional Health and Social Care research and development fund. That support enables trusts to benefit from research funds provided by cancer charities or industry, for example, but does not specify the types of cancer on which research can be conducted. So, although the predominant cancers studied in Belfast are breast, prostate and colon, which reflects the expertise and experience of Northern Ireland researchers, clinical studies involve many types of cancer.

Many Members raised the issue of the paltry amount of money, in the overall scheme of things, that is dedicated to pancreatic cancer, compared with breast cancer, say, which is not to decry the wonderful efforts being made in that field. It is unfortunate that we are not giving a condition, which, in 20 years' time, will, unfortunately, be very high up the fatalities league table, the attention that it deserves.

The fundamental discovery research led by academics is funded from a wide variety of sources and is relevant to all cancers and their prevention. In February 2014, the previous Health Minister launched the Northern Ireland fundraising group of the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund (PCRF). To date, the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund has supported 27 research projects in the UK, with grants totalling £4 million. All of that was raised through fundraising and donations. Its mission is to defeat pancreatic cancer by funding and promoting innovative, world-class research into the disease — research that will lead to the development of more effective detection, diagnosis and treatment.

A report published recently by the National Cancer Research Institute, which analysed the research funding by UK Health Departments and charities over the 10-year period, 2002-2011, showed that research funding for pancreatic cancer increased significantly over the period from £1·5 million to £5·1 million. However, many Members have said that they do not believe that that is enough.

Several new pancreatic cancer trials are being set up, including funding support from Cancer Research UK. They involve potentially beneficial new drugs to be used alone or in combination with radiotherapy.

It is unfortunate that Oliver McMullan is not here, as I would have paid tribute to him for his very honest and personal account of his journey with cancer. He indicated the importance of support for patients and families. In Northern Ireland, pancreatic cancer patients and their families can access support in several ways, regardless of whether they find themselves in the early stages of the disease or at the latter end of their life. That support applies from diagnosis through treatment and aftercare. The Northern Ireland Cancer Network provides a booklet of cancer services for patients, carers, families and friends that details local charities with support groups and services. As I mentioned, the PHA is developing a cancer awareness campaign that aims to alert the population to key signs and symptoms of cancer. It will also encourage people with symptoms suggestive of cancer to seek medical advice promptly. Further campaigns run by organisations such as Pancreatic Cancer UK are often UK-wide and targeted at specific cancer audiences. The population of Northern Ireland is also able to benefit from those.

I welcome the awareness month and hope that the resulting publicity will lead to more people seeking advice at an earlier stage of the disease. Whilst acknowledging the particular difficulties associated with identifying the early symptoms of pancreatic cancer, which are non-specific and common to a range of illnesses, I look to researchers and clinicians to advise on how best to improve pancreatic cancer referral guidelines in ways that are practical and evidence-based. I fully support the efforts of GPs and other health professionals to boost early diagnosis rates, reduce misdiagnoses and ensure that pancreatic cancer survival rates are improved across Northern Ireland. Frankly, if we are somewhere in the league table just below Bulgaria, a lot certainly needs to be done.

Illnesses such as pancreatic cancer wreak a devastating toll on patients and their families, but, through investing in research and raising public awareness, I hope that progress will be made to improve diagnosis and treatment for this horrendous disease. I congratulate the Member for West Tyrone Tom Buchanan on raising this very serious and important issue. I hope that the publicity attached to the debate will encourage people who have the symptoms to go to their GP and that we can encourage greater investment and research into this terrible condition.

6.45 pm

Ms P Bradley: I thank my colleague Tom Buchanan for bringing the motion forward today. I also thank him for asking me to countersign the motion. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue. I commend Mr McMullan for what he had to say today. He, like some others in the Chamber, knows what it is like to receive a cancer diagnosis and knows how that affects not only the patient but the family of those who receive a diagnosis. We all know that it is a very traumatic time for the individual and the family.

To get a late diagnosis, especially of pancreatic cancer, is extremely bad. It has been evidenced that often patients who receive a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer are already very far advanced in the disease, and, often, palliative care is their only option. That is devastating for the patient and their family. The sad fact is that pancreatic cancer has not had any improvement in long-term health outcomes over five years, and, as has been said here, it still only receives 1% of research funding.

Doctors also tell us that, in regard to any cancer, early detection is key to beating the disease. We have seen how early detection has improved survival rates for breast and prostate cancer. Unfortunately, the way that pancreatic symptoms present means that it is often

missed, while other avenues and causes of the symptoms are investigated. Doctors tell us that the location of the pancreas in the body, the general nature of the symptoms and the lack of diagnostic tools for them to use all play an important part in late diagnosis. We must work hard together to ensure that we reduce these reasons and that people become more educated about the symptoms of this form of cancer.

A late diagnosis means that often potential treatment protocols are no longer a viable option for many sufferers. Only 10% of patients receive curative surgery. That means that 90% of patients do not. Statistics are often very easy to glance over, so let be a little bit more explicit: if all 108 Members of the Assembly were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer today, only 10 would be diagnosed in time for curative surgery to be an option. That shows the hard reality and the stark facts of this deadly disease and how it affects so many people in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

I do not intend to go over all that everyone has said, but I want to make a few points. Some of the statistics that have been voiced here today are very stark. As Mr McGimpsey said, the debate is very sobering when we look at how many people die in our Province from this deadly disease. The interesting fact that the Chair brought up was that 48% of diagnoses were made through emergency admissions. Surely that is not how we should diagnose anyone with cancer. What was even more stark was what Mrs Cameron said, which was that there was only a 9% survival rate from that. There needs to be much more public awareness, much more awareness from our GPs, and those toolkits need to be in place to assist our GPs in making diagnoses.

I remember the many debates that we have had in the Chamber. We have had debates on cervical cancer and the HPV vaccine. We have seen a real increase in the uptake of that by our young women of school age, and I would like to see young men get that also. We have had debates here on ovarian cancer, and the Minister brought up Una: what a difference she has made and what a difference those debates made to the lives of people who were suffering from the various cancers. We have also seen great work in the Public Health Agency when it comes to breast cancer and prostate cancer and how that has made such a difference in people's lives. That goes to prove that, when we work together in the Assembly, we can work together for the better to make differences in people's lives. Mrs Dobson brought up the point that it is all well and good us being here and debating an issue but there has to be follow-through on it. We all believe that it is something that is worth fighting for. Therefore, we want to see follow-through. As members of the Health Committee, which most of us here are, we will be intent on saying that.

I spoke to Mr Buchanan during the debate and asked him exactly how many people in Northern Ireland die from this dreadful disease. He said that, in 2012, there were 244 and 243 the following year. That led me to think about the fact that we have passed Halloween and are heading towards Christmas, and we are doing the countdown — at least I am. I thought about all those empty chairs around the table at Christmas, if we are looking at in and around 240 people dying every year in our wee country. All those families this year will be grieving for their loved ones. Mrs Cochrane said earlier that, when we talk about Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, we are not just talking about diagnostics and treatment but thinking about all those people who have lost their life because of the disease.

I want to make it clear that I believe that we can reduce the number through good work, through work in the Department, through work with GPs and through work with the public. Let us make this Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month worthwhile, and let us get a grip on this cancer in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes that November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month and that the disease is the cause of approximately 6% of all cancer deaths across Northern Ireland; regrets that only approximately 10% of pancreatic cancer patients undergo curative surgery as most patients are not diagnosed until the cancer is too far advanced for such treatment; acknowledges that 40% of patients visit their GP three or more times before being referred to hospital and that many patients begin treatment for other illnesses before they are diagnosed correctly; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work with service providers and relevant professional bodies to introduce new, improved and robust pancreatic cancer referral guidelines and to promote training and support for GPs and other health professionals to boost early diagnosis rates, reduce misdiagnosis and to ensure that pancreatic cancer survival rates are improved across Northern Ireland.*

Adjourned at 6.52 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 November 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Following the dreadful comments yesterday, I wonder whether the Speaker will look at Standing Order 65 in relation to Mr Gregory Campbell's comments, which were disorderly and disrespectful, and disrespectful to a Minister in the House. He also made a slur on the Irish language.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Speakers met this morning on that matter. A number of complaints were received. I was in the Chair myself, and I took exception to the comments. I asked that the relevant Standing Orders, and indeed the Speaker's advice developed over time, be considered.

I would like to return to the remarks made by Mr Gregory Campbell on 3 November. The Deputy Speakers and I have considered the Hansard report of yesterday's plenary sitting and are unanimous in our opinion that Mr Campbell's comments during Question Time to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure were well below the standards expected in the Chamber. It is well established that Members are expected to adhere to the standards of courtesy and respect in the Chamber and to avoid bringing the Assembly into disrepute. Yesterday, Mr Campbell's parody of the Irish language during Question Time to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure fell well short of those standards. The spirit of mockery was blatant and reflects badly on the House.

The Deputy Speakers and I are not prepared to allow such a breach of standards to pass without consequence. Be in no doubt: if humour was in the Member's intention, it failed miserably. Had it been a parody of any other language, there would rightly have been objections from many quarters. In practice, and in the Hansard report, his comments came across as ridiculous and clearly undermined the dignity of the House.

I regret the fact that Mr Campbell is not present. In the absence of an apology, the Deputy Speakers and I are agreed that Mr Campbell will not be called to speak in the Chamber for the rest of the day. That ends the statement. Let us move on.

Alex Maskey: West Belfast

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we commence today's business, I wish to inform the House that I have been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Alex Maskey has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the West Belfast constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of Ms Sue Ramsey. Mr Maskey signed the Roll of Membership in my presence and that of the Clerk to the Assembly this morning — actually, it was in the presence of Mr Roy Beggs — and entered his designation. Mr Maskey has now taken his seat, and I welcome him back to the Assembly as a Member for the West Belfast constituency.

New Assembly Member: Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I wish to also inform the House that I have been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Belfast constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of Mr Alex Maskey. Mr Ó Muilleoir signed the Roll of Membership in the presence of Deputy Speaker Roy Beggs and the Clerk to the Assembly this morning and entered his designation. Mr Ó Muilleoir has now taken his seat. I welcome him to the Assembly and wish him every success.

Committee for Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I also inform the House that, following the return of Mr Alex Maskey as a Member for West Belfast, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin has informed me that Mr Maskey has been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development. Mr Maskey has accepted the nomination. I am satisfied that the requirements of Standing Orders have been met and therefore confirm that the appointment takes effect from 4 November 2014.

Ministerial Statement

Irish-medium Post-primary Education: Advisory Group Report

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar thuarascáil an ghrúpa chomhairligh aireachta ar chun cinn oideachais iarbhunscoile lán-Ghaeilge. Déanfaidh mé cur síos ar an fhreagra s'agam, ar an tuarascáil agus ar na moltaí a théann léi. With your permission Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the report of the ministerial advisory group on advancing post-primary Irish-medium education. I will outline my response to the report and its recommendations.

Members will recall that I established an advisory group in August 2013, led by Helen Ó Murchú, on the strategic development of Irish-medium post-primary education. I asked the group to focus on the development of practical and deliverable solutions to increasing access to Irish-medium post-primary education and address the challenges facing the future development of sustainable provision.

I asked the group to advise me, too, on building capacity at post-primary level, to complement the strengths of early years and primary provision. The group consulted widely and took time to carry out detailed surveys, including questionnaires for parents at all stages of Irish-medium education, and developed approaches based on engagement with Irish-medium education community and stakeholders.

I thank Helen Ó Murchú and the other experts who comprised the group for their work and for producing a very comprehensive and detailed report. The group included Paul O'Doherty, of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); Paul McAlister, of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI); and Micheál Ó Duibh, of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. I extend my thanks also to everyone who engaged with the group for their contributions.

My vision for education is:

> *"to ensure that every learner achieves his or her full potential at each stage of development".*

A healthy, vibrant Irish-medium education sector is an integral part of my overall vision. In adopting an approach called immersion education, Irish-medium schools seek to deliver a full academic programme through the second language.

The approach provides clear advantages to the learner, including opportunities for bilingualism and bi-literacy; the ability to learn a third or fourth language more easily; more creative thinking and greater sensitivity to communication; raised self-esteem; more secure identity, and broader exposure to, and appreciation of, difference. The proven benefits of Irish-medium education are linked closely to my overall vision for education.

I turn now to why I asked the group to focus on post-primary provision. Irish-medium education continues to expand successfully at preschool and primary levels, with almost 3,600 children attending Irish-medium primary schools and units. Yet, there has been a gap in the strategic development of post-primary provision. In the last school census, that provision consisted of one stand-alone school in Belfast and three units in English-medium schools where the curriculum is delivered all or partially through Irish. There are a total of 830 Irish-medium post-primary pupils. These numbers fall well below the level of actual and potential demand. It is likely, too, that the growth in Irish-medium preschool and primary sectors will lead to a demand for additional post-primary places in the future.

I now need to ensure that the conditions are created that will allow more children the opportunity through Irish-medium post-primary education to be confident, capable, successful and bilingual young adults. In doing so, I commend the work and progress made to date by the existing providers. It has been challenging to establish sustainable provision at post-primary level, and I asked the group for practical solutions. I also asked that it pay due attention to the relevant departmental policies and statutory duties. In line with that, it focused on models of best practice, levels of demand and models for delivery in the short, medium and long term. It also considered optimal geographical locations, implications for financing and the common funding scheme.

Today, I accept the report and am satisfied that it can form the basis of a framework for the delivery of quality Irish-medium post-primary provision that is viable and sustainable. The report contains 33 recommendations, most of which I either accept or accept in principle. I reserve my position on the implementation of a number of them pending further work and clarification where they have been superseded. The recommendations allow for systematic approaches to delivering sustainable post-primary provision. Importantly, though, we need to consider the import of some in more detail, which will not slow the overall implementation.

Tugann ráiteas an lae inniu deis domh a leagan amach as an seasamh atá agam ar na moltaí seo, agus beidh mé ag foilsiú freagra ar gach moladh. Today's statement provides an opportunity for me to set out my position on these recommendations. I am publishing a response to each individual recommendation.

I will now turn to the specific recommendations. Generally, post-primary education is a complex area, and even more so in developing a sector. The report details its recommendations in three key areas: a strategic approach to planning, a pathway for development at post-primary level and constructive solutions to factors that have hindered development. In addressing planning, the report identifies the required elements of a strategic approach for Irish-medium education. It includes 10 recommendations, which include mechanisms for measuring demand; planning authority responsibilities; my Department's vision; the principles, models, support systems and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders; and criteria for development proposals and protocols.

Fáiltím roimh an fhócas ar réitigh phraiticiúla inseachadta sa téarma ghearr, sa mheán-téarma agus sa téarma fhada. I welcome the focus on practical and deliverable solutions in the short, medium and long term. I endorse in particular the strategic approach taken to area-based planning for the sector. I support more coherent approaches to deal with current and projected level of demand for Irish-medium post-primary education. The work of the group in relation to the further development of criteria for development proposals and protocols for

schools and units can usefully inform the wider area planning process.

There are 11 recommendations to help frame a viable pathway to a sustainable school. The report proposes optimal geographical locations of present and proposed post-primary provision, taking account of the distribution of Irish-medium preschool and primary provision, which, again, it stresses can feed into the wider area planning process. Additional recommendations relate to models and levels of immersion and intake rates, and some relate to named geographical areas.

The report also highlights the importance of support at all the various planning stages, particularly in advance of the first pupil intake. As Minister, I cannot comment on specific areas and potential development proposals. Let me say, however, that collaborative working in the Irish-medium sector, focused on the provision of quality education for all pupils, must form the cornerstone of progress and development.

Is maith liom gur cuireadh bealach ar fáil thart ar roinnt de na ceisteanna a bhí mar chonstaicí ar fhorbairt an oideachais iarbhunscoile trí mheán na Gaeilge ar an léibheal áitiúil agus réigiúnach.

I commend the fact that a pathway has been provided around some of the issues that have hampered the development of this sector at both local and regional level. The report makes 12 recommendations to remove barriers to progress. These relate to teacher supply in the short term and medium to long term; continuing professional development; North/South cooperation; the use of ICT; and current and future funding approaches. The report recommends incentives as a key driver for the development of most of the areas that I have outlined.

10.45 am

I accept the expert advice of the advisory group that I need to create increased access for pupils in the short to medium term as well as planning for the long term. The group recommends a developmental model of provision that moves in the direction of full immersion and stand-alone Irish-medium schools, but the report recognises also that, for some areas, the best means of achieving that goal is to build incrementally. This means establishing units attached to existing schools in the first instance and providing opportunities for more pupils to access their post-primary education through Irish. I am satisfied, though, that the framework and mechanisms will exist more than ever before to facilitate development towards a successful development proposal for a school outside of Belfast. Of course, such a development proposal must meet robust criteria on future demand and sustainability.

The advisory group has articulated practical steps to move towards stand-alone schools over time. I accept the direction of travel that it proposes. This builds a clear pathway incrementally from smaller units housed in high-quality existing schools towards stand-alone provision. The group has balanced this with the need to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and pupil attainment are not put at risk during this important stage of education. It proposes an incentivised model of moving from different levels of immersion and size in Irish-medium units towards a school. I assure those who would like to move more quickly that my goal includes the development of additional stand-alone schools. I am confident that the report outlines ways in which post-primary education can be developed strategically and working towards additional schools.

I have listened to parents and stakeholders first-hand, and I have considered the report. I believe that the best way of responding to the educational needs of the children and to the commitment of their parents is by focusing on the practical and deliverable solutions outlined in the report. Those solutions take careful account of the need to sustain high-level pupil achievement while capacity is being developed across the sector.

I endorse the report's vision and its alignment to my broader vision for education. I am optimistic that there will be immediate benefits and tangible progress for the sector. I am satisfied with the clear and constructive articulation of the models and support systems that I can put in place to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education in line with my statutory duty and as a valuable part of the education system. In line with the recommendations, my Department will facilitate a separate voluntary coalition of Irish-medium post-primary providers along the lines of the current area learning communities. I also point to the recent review of the common funding scheme, which has helped to address any historical underfunding of the Irish-medium post-primary sector. Its funding needs are being much more fully addressed through the average weighted pupil unit uplift in the common funding formula.

In the short and medium term, the report stresses the importance of engagement with the Irish-medium sector. I accept the recommendation to develop a top-down and bottom-up implementation structure. I accept the common-sense approach of developing supporting communication strategies to ensure parental confidence and improve enrolment trends via higher transfer rates.

Tá dualgas reachtúil ar an Roinn s'agam leis an Ghaeloideachas a spreagadh agus a éascadh, agus tá sin le feiceáil san fhís atá agam don oideachas. Go deimhin, is cuid lárnach den fhís sin é. The statutory duty of my Department to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education is reflected in, and is an integral part of, my vision for education. I understand, respect and applaud the commitment of parents, children and the wider Irish-language community to Irish-medium schools. I accept the advisory group's vision of Irish-medium education and welcome its endorsement of and alignment to my broader vision for education. It will help the ongoing development of Irish-medium education as a valuable part of the overall education system.

Is é an toradh air sin go bhfuil an bonn ann anois le bealach praiticiúil le soláthar iarbhunscoile inmharthana ard-chaighdeáin a chruthú a chuirfeas leis na sochair shuntasacha oideachais atá le fáil cheana féin ó oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge. The result is that there is now the basis of a practical pathway to creating high-quality sustainable post-primary provision that enhances the significant education benefits that are already provided through Irish-medium education.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): Obviously, this is the first that Members have seen of this report and its recommendations. The Committee will obviously want to take some time to study it.

I suppose that what really surprised me about this is the context within which we are currently working. First, according to the recently published primary-school area plans, there are in the region of 500 vacant Irish-medium

education (IME) school places in Belfast alone. That roughly equates to around one third of the total IME primary-school provision in the Belfast Board area.

Secondly, the Department also recently advised the Committee that the permanent secretary initiated the ministerial-direction mechanism as a consequence of concerns in respect of additional funding for transportation for an Irish-medium post-primary school.

Thirdly, I understand that, according to the fourth monitoring report of the assessment of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, although the overall initial teacher-education intake has been reduced by 32% since 2005-06, intake for the IME sector has increased by 109% since 2007-08. That is despite there being only one outstanding permanent teaching post to be filled in the whole of the IME sector in November 2013. Therefore, that is 46 IME teacher-training places and almost no posts available in the Irish-medium sector.

My question is why? Why, given the current budgetary constraints, will the Minister waste yet more money and time on providing school places that are not used and training teachers that are not required for the Irish-medium sector? Would he not be better redirecting what limited resources there are to the existing education system?

Mr O'Dowd: First and foremost, Irish-medium education is part of our existing education system and will continue to be part of it as we move forward. It is not one or the other.

I assume that the figures that the Member quotes refer to primary-school places. The fact remains that in Belfast, there is only one stand-alone post-primary Irish-medium provider. This is despite the fact that there is significant growth in both nursery and primary-school Irish-medium provision. We also have to look beyond Belfast. This is the focus of this report. While I welcome the work that has been carried out and the determination of the board of governors, staff, parents and pupils of Coláiste Feirste to develop and build their school over many, many years, we need to look beyond Belfast. The primary objective of my bringing forward the Irish-medium post-primary review was to see how we could develop sustainable post-primary provision outside Belfast. I believe that the report allows us to do that.

The report also reflects on teacher training. We will have discussions with Minister Farry in that regard. There is clearly still a deficit in the number of qualified teachers that are available to the Irish-medium sector, particularly in the post-primary sector, to carry forward this programme. The report covers all of those elements.

The Chairperson of the Committee refers to the fact that quite obviously the Committee will want time to study the report. My officials and I will be available to engage with the Committee on this matter. There is a statutory duty on my Department to develop Irish-medium education. To do that, we have to move forward with post-primary provision. I believe that this report gives us a firm basis on which to do so.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-Leas Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire, agus cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas seo. Does the Minister believe that the Irish-medium sector will continue to grow and flourish across all communities despite the bigotry and racism of some people towards the Irish language and those who use it?

Mr O'Dowd: There has clearly been resistance from some quarters in this Chamber and elsewhere to the growth of the Irish-medium sector. At times, it was institutionalised discrimination. That has now been removed, both through legislation and the practices and policies of previous Education Ministers and me. It has to be obvious now to everyone that Irish-medium education is here to stay. It is not an add-on to education, to my Department or to our broader society: it is an integral part of our education system. We should be proud of that, and we should recognise the benefits that it will have for our children, our society and our economy. It is quite interesting, given the events of the last 24 hours in the Chamber, to look at the benefits of immersion and Irish-medium education. I read them out during my statement. They include more creative thinking and greater sensitivity to communication, and broader exposure to, and appreciation of, difference. Many people in the Chamber could learn from that.

Mr Rogers: Thanks to the Minister for his statement. Minister, you talked about the strategic approach to area-based planning. That, no doubt, will be a major challenge for us as we move ahead. Do you agree with me that the vision for Irish-medium education, particularly post-primary education, would more easily be achieved by having a legislated seat on the Education Authority for the Irish-medium sector?

Mr O'Dowd: I would welcome an agreement among the parties in relation to seats on the Education Authority, including one for the Irish-medium sector. However, nobody should be under any allusions: whether or not there is a seat for the Irish-medium sector, or the integrated sector, on the new authority, the duty placed on my Department by legislation will apply to that authority as well. There is no doubt about that. I understand that discussions are going on between particular parties in relation to a possible amendment or amendments, but I would welcome a resolution to that matter. The potential and momentum that we have behind the new Education Authority may be diminished if we start excluding people from it.

Mr Kinahan: Minister, I thank you for the report. Like many, I was embarrassed by what happened on 'The Nolan Show' this morning, but I also found the comments referring to bigotry and racism unhelpful. We need to find a way to stop politicising the Irish language.

I note the report, but what really comes to mind is the question about the cost of the strategy. The strategy is very comprehensive, but there are no actions. How does he see the cost coming in? When you look at that cost, where does it fit in to preparing pupils for jobs when we need more money for STEM and getting pupils to their jobs, or on learning Mandarin and other languages? How does he see that fitting in with the priorities? What is the cost of the strategy?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure that "strategy" is exactly the right term. What we have is a plan for the way forward as to how we provide and meet the demand for post-primary Irish-medium education. The report and its terms of reference refer to the constrained financial times in which we are all working. Everyone recognises that, but it is not a reason to do nothing. We have to act. There is clearly a demand for post-primary provision in the Irish-medium sector. I acknowledge the constrained financial times that I am working in, but that is not a reason to do nothing. We

have to move forward in a planned way, and the report allows us to do that.

In regards to how it fits in with our broader strategy in relation to STEM and the economy, let me again refer to the benefits of immersion in bilingualism. One is the ability to learn a third or fourth language more easily; that is a recognised fact. Another is raised self-esteem. Which employer does not want to employ a young person or adult with raised self-esteem? Another benefit is the broader exposure to, and appreciation of, difference. That is a great characteristic in anyone.

The benefits to the economy have been referred to in a number of reports, particularly in relation to the Gaeltacht Quarter being developed in west Belfast. There are economic benefits to the Irish language as well; it can and does bring economic rewards to our society. We need to build on that.

11.00 am

Mr Lunn: For those of us who do not have a natural affinity for the Irish language but who totally respect the right of parents to have their children educated in that particular medium, this is a very welcome report. It sets out the way forward, I think, if it is feasible and affordable.

It says to me that roughly 2,800 pupils are denied the opportunity to move into secondary level Irish-medium education and, in the terms used in the report, to achieve their full potential by becoming fluent in two languages and perhaps more. Does that not point to the fact that the needs model that the Department uses is in need of amendment once again, because, as Judge Treacy identified, it needs to take into account the anticipated demand for secondary places in the Irish-medium and integrated sectors?

Mr O'Dowd: You and I are going to have a debate again on the interpretation of Judge Treacy's ruling on the integrated sector and the needs model.

I am satisfied that both the judgement and my Department's working of the needs model are lawful, practical and allow for the identification of the growth in the Irish-medium sector and the integrated sector. If you follow the argument through, you see that the needs model has identified that there is a need for further provision of post-primary Irish-medium education across the North. This report outlines the practical steps for developing sustainable post-primary provision. So, I do not think that it is a case of one or the other.

When I first launched this report, you asked whether I would consider producing a similar report into the integrated sector. I think that the time is now right to produce a similar report into the integrated sector, and I will take that forward in the time ahead.

Mr Craig: Minister, like others in this room, we are concerned about the cost of rolling out this strategy. Have you any idea of what the cost will be?

Is there any commitment from the Minister to put a working group together on different languages, such as Cobalt, Java and Linux etc, which are programming languages? I listened to representatives of concerned industries this morning talk about that issue, and there will be 22,000 job opportunities in that sector over the next three years, yet there is no strategy whatsoever in education to deal with that.

Mr O'Dowd: When I am asked for my genuine point of view on costs, I fully accept that we have to take them into consideration. Again, I ask Members to look at my terms of reference. Throughout the report, there is reference to the fact that we are working in constrained financial times and that we have to take those matters into account as we plan forward.

This report lays the foundations for development proposals to come forward, and it is a worthy reference document for anyone who is preparing a development proposal for the provision of additional Irish-medium education. Through the development proposal process, we will interrogate very closely financial costs, sustainability, enrolment trends and all the things that would happen on any other occasion. So, we are not ignoring that, but, as I emphasised to other people, it is not a case of doing nothing because we are in constrained financial times. We are going to act on this; we have to develop the provision, and we will.

The Member referred to computer coding as languages. There is a STEM strategy on that. That STEM strategy is well promoted, both in my Department and Minister Farry's Department, and it is central in the Programme for Government. I have had detailed engagements with various sectors, including the ICT sector, on how we improve knowledge, both in primary and post-primary schools, of computer science and computer coding etc. So, it is not a case of one or the other. We are conducting a wide range of strategies through the Department of Education and other Departments, and those strategies will include post-primary Irish-medium provision.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to follow up on comments that have been made, and I offer my congratulations to those who have worked on this very comprehensive report. Will the Minister confirm whether the report now paves the way for stand-alone Irish-medium post-primary schools? Indeed, is there now the potential to bring together various Celtic nations for the promotion of education in their native language?

Mr O'Dowd: The answer to both questions is yes. Let me give you more detail. The report will allow for the provision of stand-alone Irish-medium units. In recent years, a number of well-intentioned development proposals have come forward from highly motivated people in the Irish-medium sector. However, when those proposals were scrutinised against all the policies in my Department for sustainability of numbers, educational outcomes for young people and finance, they did not stack up. I encourage anyone who is bringing forward a development proposal to refer to this document and ensure that the points raised in it are covered. It most certainly allows for the provision of stand-alone schools as we move forward. That is a goal that we wish to reach.

The report refers to the experience of the Celtic nations in the provision of immersion education, and that is one of its recommendations. Interestingly, it refers to using the office of the British-Irish Council to organise conferences on sharing experiences of immersion in native languages. That is a very interesting and worthwhile recommendation, and perhaps it might remove the political fixation that some people may have about the Irish language and open it up to a broader audience.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his statement. I refer to the part of the statement dealing with a strategic approach to planning. He will be aware of the work being done by the Committee on area-based planning and that, in the past, area-based planning has let down schools, pupils and parents. The Minister said:

> *"I endorse in particular the strategic approach taken to area-based planning".*

What he did not indicate was that it will be a holistic approach to area-based planning. He will be aware that Professor Knox, when giving evidence to the Committee, described area-based planning, as it stands, as nothing more than a "cut-and-paste exercise".

Mr O'Dowd: The Member states that area planning has let down parents and pupils. I argue that the absence of area planning has let down parents and pupils over many, many years. It appears that there are some in the Chamber who want an area-planning process that does not involve decisions. Let us have a mechanism whereby everybody sits around a table and maps out what they would like an area to look like, but, for heaven's sake, do not make a decision, because, if you make a decision, you have to stand over it and work out its implications. That is where some Members have their head in relation to area planning.

Over the last number of days, I have listened to talk of budgets. I heard many commentators in the Chamber tell me that I have to restructure education and that there will have to be more school closures and a greater number of schools amalgamating. How does the Member propose that I do that if not through the area-planning process? How does the Member suggest that we move forward to meet the very tight budget that I have if not through an area-planning process that makes decisions? That is what has let down communities, parents and pupils for many, many years. We had a process in place that did not make decisions. As a Minister, I am prepared to make decisions, even if they are unpopular and difficult at times. If, after looking at all the evidence and information, I can stand over it, I will make the decision to close a school, amalgamate a school or keep a school open. I will make those decisions.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin. Tá a fhios ag an Aire go bhfuil suim mhór agam san ábhar seo agus nach bhfuil sé ábalta rud ar bith a rá faoin fhorbairt áitiúil.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I know that he cannot comment on individual development proposals, but he will know of my interest in Irish language development and Irish language education in rural County Derry and that there have been quite advanced development proposals in that field. Can he give any indication of when those development proposals might come forward and be delivered on?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is correct when he states that I cannot comment on an individual development proposal when we are in the process of making a decision on it. A development proposal was published on 24 June by the Western Board on the provision of a post-primary Irish-medium school in the Dungiven area. It is now with my departmental officials, who are sifting through the evidence gathered as part of that development proposal process. They will make a report to me in due course. I hope to be in a position to make a decision as quickly as possible. There are a number of complex and detailed development proposals in my Department that require significant work to be carried out to bring them to a conclusion. However, I can assure the Member that I will make a decision on the matter as quickly as possible.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Gabhaim buíochas fosta le Helen Ó Murchú agus a comhghleachaithe a d'ullmhaigh an tuairisc. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire faoi alt 4.3.4 de fhreagra na Roinne ar an tuairisc. Sé sin faoin chur chuige maoinithe, go háirithe na nithe a eascraíonn as breithiúnas an Bhreithimh Uí Threasaigh agus an neamhfhorbairt agus an neamh-mhaoiniú a luaitear i dtuairisc Salisbury. Sé an cheist atá agam: cad é go díreach atá a dhéanamh ag an Aire le riar ar na heasnaimh sin?

I thank the Minister for his statement. I also thank Helen Ó Murchú and her colleagues, who prepared the report. My question to the Minister is around the Department's response to paragraph 4.3.4 of the report, which deals with funding issues and other issues, such as those arising from the Treacy judgement and the underdevelopment and underfunding of Irish-medium education, as mentioned in the Salisbury report. What exactly is the Minister doing to respond to those issues?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I acknowledge the Member's acknowledgement of the work of Helen Ó Murchú. I wish to, once again, place on the record my thanks and gratitude to them all for the work that they carried out. I have dealt with the funding of the Irish-medium sector as part of the common funding formula. Funding to the Irish-medium sector, particularly post-primary provision, has increased significantly, rising from somewhere in the region of £28 extra per pupil to somewhere in the region of £400 per pupil additional. Therefore, I think that I have dealt with that matter quite robustly. There are other issues in the report to do with funding mechanisms, and progression of funding mechanisms, that require more detailed scrutiny and examination. As I said, that will not stymie the recommendations of the report moving forward. I will deal with them in due course.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to question the Education Minister on the report, although the time that we had before coming to the House this morning was not really enough to digest it in full. I, like others, would like to hear some costings of the proposals. Can the Minister outline something basic? What is the funding per pupil that will be provided at an Irish language post-primary school compared with what is provided to children at other schools? If this is their native language, the amount should be the same and the education outcomes should be comparable.

Mr O'Dowd: Each development proposal will carry its own financial cost and will be scrutinised individually. No school will be able to open or progress without going through the normal procedure of a development proposal. All those issues and questions around cost etc will be dealt with.

11.15 am

The cost per pupil at a post-primary Irish-medium school is based on the needs and requirements of each individual pupil, but the element in relation to the common funding

formula that refers to provision for Irish medium means that each child will receive an additional £400. That was set out in the common funding formula, which was debated at length in the Chamber and elsewhere over a very long period, and is public knowledge since I made my decision on the common funding formula back in, I think, January 2014.

Mr McCausland: The document that was produced — the report itself and then the response from the Minister and the Department — is primarily about language. I notice that the document also refers to culture, and I was interested in the use of the word "identity" and in the use of the word "racism" by Pat Sheehan. It is clear that Sinn Féin sees this as a linguistic, cultural and ethnic issue. That is interesting because the Minister then referred to a political fixation with the Irish language. If that is the case and there is a fixation about the Irish language, many would hold the view that Sinn Féin has contributed to that fixation. Thirty years ago, they set out their position on the Irish language in an official Sinn Féin publication, in which they said that every word spoken in Irish was another bullet in the freedom struggle. Does the Minister agree with that statement?

Mr O'Dowd: I am here to be questioned on the Irish-medium post-primary education report. I will answer questions on that.

There has been a political fixation in the opposition to and discrimination against the Irish language. That is fact. You cannot then turn around and challenge those who opposed the inbuilt discrimination in Government against Irish-medium education and accuse them of politicising the language.

Let me put this on the record for you, and you can question me on this one: the Irish language does not belong to Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the Alliance Party, the DUP, the UUP, the Green Party, UKIP, independents, anyone else I have left out in the Chamber or any other political movement or party out there. The Member opposite is quite interested in his history, or his version of history. I am sure that he is aware that, if it was not for Presbyterians in Belfast, there would be no Irish language in Belfast.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for what I think is a genuine attempt to develop the Irish-medium sector outside Belfast. I welcome that approach.

I know that the Minister cannot deal with individual proposals, but I want to test it a bit. One of the recommendations is about opportunities in Derry city and, particularly, in initiating a process of consultation around the present host options. Will the Minister outline proposals, how that could be advanced or state what his advice is?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware that there have been several attempts to establish Irish-medium post-primary provision in Derry city. Unfortunately, they have not been successful, despite the best efforts of many Irish language activists, teachers, parents and, indeed, the pupils involved. They faced significant challenges and were not able to succeed. That is one of the reasons why I wanted to bring forward the report. I wanted to ensure that any future proposal would have a stable platform and would learn from the mistakes and opportunities of the past.

I encourage anyone in Derry city who is interested in bringing forward a proposal to study the document very carefully and bring forward a development proposal based on the recommendations in the report. It will then go through the normal development proposal process, and we will decide whether it is sustainable.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire, agus cuirim fáilte fosta roimh a ráiteas ar maidin. Mar is eol don Aire, tá tacaíocht mhór ag an Ghaeilge i mBéal Feirste thiar, áit a bhfuil meas agus luach uirthi fosta. Mar sin de, an dtiocfadh liom iarraidh ar an Aire an gcreideann sé go mbeidh rath ann mar thoradh ar an athbhreitheamh seo? As the Minister knows, there is huge support in west Belfast for the Irish language. There is also huge respect and value placed on it. Therefore, does the Minister believe that there will be continued success in Gaeloideachas in west Belfast as a result of the review?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a ceist. I believe that, without doubt. I place on record my appreciation and acknowledgement of the many, many years of hard work of the Irish language community in west Belfast to establish a post-primary school, Coláiste Feirste, in the first instance, and the work and commitment that has been shown over many, many years to keep that school moving forward and to have a successful stand-alone school, despite all the barriers that it faced. In the early stages, many of those barriers were placed in front of them by government and others, but they have moved forward and established themselves as a leading, full-immersion Irish-medium school. They deserve credit for that.

I have no doubt that there will be further growth in west Belfast, and indeed across Belfast, in the Irish language. It has been attractive to many communities down through the years, and, as I said to another Member, without the involvement of the Presbyterian Church, a number of centuries ago, there would be no Irish language movement in Belfast. The history of it needs to be understood by all.

The main focus of this report was to develop a successful Irish-medium post-provision outside Belfast, but its recommendations are relevant to Belfast city and the further development and success of Irish-medium provision in west Belfast and, indeed, across the city of Belfast.

Executive Committee Business

Childcare Payments Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Childcare Payments Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.*

I am delighted to address the House on what is a very important issue for working parents in Northern Ireland. The First Minister and deputy First Minister laid a legislative consent memorandum before the Assembly on 23 June, which sought the support for a legislative consent motion to extend the provisions of the Westminster Childcare Payments Bill to Northern Ireland and to make the operation of the legislation an excepted matter. The legislative consent motion was formally referred to the OFMDFM Committee for consideration and to enable it to make a report to the Assembly. The Committee's report was published on 1 October. I welcome the Committee's decision to support the legislative consent motion. However, the Committee included a specific recommendation in its report, and I want to return to that shortly.

The Childcare Payments Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 5 June 2014. The Bill completed its Committee Stage last week and will now return to the Floor of the Commons for its Report Stage. It is worth reminding Members that the deadline for securing Assembly approval to the legislative consent motion is the last day for the tabling of amendments for Report Stage in the Commons. Report Stage is expected to take place shortly.

Many parents, today, want or indeed need to work. However, finding reliable, quality, affordable childcare is a major concern for working families. I am fully aware of the pressures that there are on family budgets and of the demands that make it hard for parents to decide whether to stay at home or go to work. That decision is very much a personal one, but parents should not be deterred from returning to work by the high cost of childcare.

Members will be aware that the current Programme for Government commits the Executive to publish and implement a childcare strategy to provide integrated and affordable childcare. In September 2013, we launched the first phase of the Bright Start childcare strategy. That phase sets out the strategic direction for the strategy, along with 15 key first actions, some of which are aimed at improving the availability of childcare and building up capacity in the childcare market.

It is worth saying that, in March, we launched a school-age childcare grant scheme to increase the supply of childcare places. The first call for applications resulted in 50 successful applications, representing funding of £1·9 million over a three-year period. That will create 326 new childcare places and sustain around 1,160 existing places. In addition, there are a number of projects being supported under the strategic investment fund, which will increase childcare capacity across the investment zones.

With regard to the affordability of childcare, we said in the Bright Start strategic framework that we would keep a watching brief on the coalition Government's plans to introduce a new tax-free childcare scheme targeted at working families. The Childcare Payments Bill provides the statutory basis for the introduction of tax-free childcare. It will be a new targeted system of support to help working families with the cost of registered childcare and will particularly help parents who wish to take up paid work or increase their working hours.

In essence, tax-free childcare will offer working families 20% support towards their childcare costs. That is the equivalent of basic rate tax relief. Support will be available to children under the age of 12, whose childcare costs are often the highest. Parents of children with disabilities will continue to be eligible for tax-free childcare until their child is 17 years old, in recognition of the fact that childcare costs for that group can remain high in later years.

To be eligible for tax-free childcare, both parents, or a lone parent, must be in paid work, employed or self-employed, and both must meet a minimum income level. It is worth emphasising that working families on lower incomes already receive more generous support towards their childcare costs through the childcare element of working tax credit. As household income increases, support from tax credits is gradually tapered away, meaning that parents could be better off claiming tax-free childcare. However, they cannot claim both.

So, how will tax-free childcare work? Central to the delivery of the new scheme will be childcare accounts. It is a bit like a bank account, but government will top up any money that parents put into that account. Eligible parents will be able to open a childcare account online, pay money towards their childcare costs into that account and have payments automatically topped up by government. Government top-up payments will be at a rate of £2·00 for every £8·00 that the family pays in, subject to a maximum of £2,000 government support per child per year. So, to be clear, that means that the actual amount of the government top-up payment that parents will receive is entirely dependent on how much money they pay into that account.

Parents will then allocate that money to the childcare provider or providers of their choice, with the account provider making the payment direct to the childcare provider.

11.30 am

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

It is worth emphasising that multiple people or parties will be able to pay into those childcare accounts. That will enable all parents to make contributions, as well as giving other family members, or parents' employers, the opportunity to contribute. Parents will be able to withdraw money from their childcare account should they wish to do so, with their contributions returned to them and the Government's top-ups returned to Government.

Tax-free childcare will operate through quarterly entitlement periods. That means that parents will not be required to report changes to their personal circumstances in real time. Once eligible, parents will be entitled to support for three months regardless of any changes in personal circumstances that they may experience. Parents will be required to reconfirm eligibility at the end of the three-month entitlement period.

As I mentioned earlier, childcare accounts will be central to the delivery of the new scheme. Her Majesty's Treasury has appointed National Savings and Investments, an executive agency of Her Majesty's Treasury, as the scheme's account provider. Having a single provider will mean that parents will not need to choose between, negotiate with or pay fees to account providers. Instead, they will engage with government as a single point of contact to register for tax-free childcare, make payments into their account and arrange payments to their childcare providers. Subject to the Childcare Payments Bill receiving Royal Assent, the new tax-free childcare scheme is expected to become available from autumn 2015.

Members may wish to note that there has been a legal challenge from some current childcare voucher providers concerning the decision to appoint National Savings and Investments as the account provider for tax-free childcare. I understand that the coalition Government are still working to their original timetable, but clearly implementation is subject to legal proceedings and the timetable that that dictates.

When tax-free childcare is introduced, the current employer-supported childcare scheme will be closed to new entrants. The coalition Government announced their decision to remove the tax exemption and national insurance contributions disregard associated with employer-supported childcare in the Budget of 2013. As the current scheme is funded through tax and national insurance contribution reliefs, the scheme, therefore, is an excepted matter. As a consequence, the Assembly has no authority over the coalition Government's decision to phase out the scheme. However, I wish to make it clear that those parents who are already in employer-supported childcare will be able to stay in the scheme for as long as they remain with the same employer and the employer continues to offer the scheme. It is expected that employers intend to carry on offering childcare vouchers to existing staff once the exemption is closed to new claims.

It is important that parents make good choices about the right childcare funding for them. Alongside wider guidance and information, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will provide an easy-to-use online tool for parents choosing between different Government schemes. Parents will be able to enter details about their personal circumstances and quickly see what support they may be entitled to and how much they can get. Members will wish to note that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has already published the first tranche of draft guidance for using the tax-free childcare scheme, well ahead of its introduction. The introduction of tax-free childcare will extend financial support to working parents on a fairer, more equal basis than the current employer-supported childcare scheme. The new scheme, like the current scheme, will be fully funded by the Treasury. Those who favour the current arrangements should bear in mind that access to that scheme is totally reliant upon employers participating.

It is estimated that around 11,000 parents in Northern Ireland are in receipt of childcare vouchers. In contrast, tax-free childcare will be available to all working families, provided, of course, that they meet the eligibility criteria, and not just to those whose employers participate in the employer-supported childcare scheme. It will also be open to parents who are self-employed. That means that self-employed parents and those working for employers who did not offer the employer-supported childcare will have access to childcare support for the first time. As such, tax-free childcare will be open to more families than the current scheme is. There are, for example, 116,000 self-employed people in Northern Ireland, which is 5,000 more than in 2011. That is a significant and growing section of our workforce. The self-employed were ineligible under the employer-supported childcare scheme but are eligible under tax-free childcare.

I said that I would return to the recommendation in the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's report of 1 October. For the benefit of Members who may not have seen the report, the Committee strongly recommends that OFMDFM seek to identify the categories of people who may be disadvantaged under the new tax-free childcare scheme and, where appropriate, ensure that their needs are addressed in the wider childcare strategy. Some families will receive less support in the new scheme than in employer-supported childcare, specifically because the new scheme is more fairly targeted. However, as I indicated, those families will not lose out, because they will be able to continue in their existing scheme. Parents who currently benefit under employer-supported childcare and who prefer to remain in that scheme can continue to do so after the introduction of tax-free childcare. The new tax-free childcare scheme will offer support based on the number of children as opposed to the number of qualifying parents. So, it will be much fairer than employer-supported childcare, in which lone parents can receive half the level of support of couples.

The current system will be closed to new entrants only. Therefore, any potential disadvantage will arise only after the introduction of tax-free childcare, when some parents may compare the two schemes and find that employer-supported childcare would have offered a higher level of support had it still been available to them. Employers For Childcare has called on OFMDFM to develop a separate funding scheme for employees whose employers participate in the employer-supported childcare scheme and who will not be able to access the scheme after it is closed to new entrants.

We wish to avoid creating a complex and unfair two-tiered system, with those who would have qualified for employer-supported childcare receiving a different level of support. Nevertheless, in recognition of the Committee's recommendation, OFMDFM will seek to estimate the numbers likely to be affected and the scale of the disadvantage. Any findings will inform the ongoing development of the Bright Start childcare strategy. Work to develop the full, final Bright Start childcare strategy is under way. Officials are engaging with the main childcare stakeholders to develop a consultation document that includes firm policy proposals for childcare.

It is intended to launch consultation on the childcare strategy by the end of 2014, with the aim of developing a draft final strategy for publication in 2015. I appreciate that the Assembly would normally look at legislation and legislative competence in that area. However, I hope that Members agree that we are right to go ahead with this legislative consent motion on this occasion. If we agree the legislative consent motion, working parents will be able to claim support from government with their childcare costs in the same way as those who live in England, Scotland and Wales. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I will inform the House of the consideration which the Committee has given to the provisions of this legislative consent motion. We have considered it in some detail during this session.

I am pleased to see that both junior Ministers are contributing to the debate, and, while the Committee was undoubtedly frustrated and disappointed that it was not informed during the consultation and policy development stage of the proposals, I want to place on record the Committee's thanks both to officials who made themselves available over a number of weeks and to the junior Ministers, not least for the informal meeting that they agreed to, at short notice, with members of the Committee to discuss a number of issues and concerns as we felt we were coming up to the wire on our decision.

Junior Minister Bell has outlined the purpose of the legislative consent motion and the effect of the legislation, so I do not intend to go over that ground. However, I want to give Members who were not in Committee a flavour of the issues that members considered in their scrutiny of the legislation and the background to the Committee's decision to support the legislative consent motion (LCM). I state at the outset that the decision was not taken lightly by the Committee. The Committee recognised that a number of parents, such as the self-employed, who are currently not eligible for any childcare support from government, will benefit from the new scheme. However, members were also concerned that there may be parents who now find that they will be worse off under the new arrangements, not least because it only benefits parents with children up to the age of 12.

The Committee first received notice from OFMDFM about the Childcare Payments Bill and the subsequent need for a legislative consent motion on 25 June. It was only during the following briefing with officials on 2 July that members learned that HM Treasury had conducted a consultation on the policy proposals in the autumn of 2013, and that OFMDFM had coordinated a response to that consultation on behalf of other Departments. The Department also wrote to local stakeholders and asked them to respond directly to the Treasury's consultation; however, the Committee was not notified at that time.

Undoubtedly the Committee's opportunity to consider and scrutinise the provisions of the Childcare Payments Bill would have been enhanced had it been informed about the proposed policy changes at that stage. As Chair of the Committee, I put on record that this, unfortunately, is not the first time that the Committee has been ignored. It is not the first time that the Committee has been overlooked and not the first time that the Committee has not been given its place. I believe that statutory Committees are a critical element in the design of the devolved institutions, which were, after all, endorsed by the people in referendum in 1998.

On 25 June, the Committee agreed to a request from Employers For Childcare to brief members on the Bill and the potential implications for working parents in Northern Ireland. During that briefing, on 2 July, its representatives raised a number of concerns, including: the potential impact for parents employed through zero-hours contracts; the potential impact for families where one parent becomes unemployed during an eligible period; concerns about those in full-time training; the impact of welfare reform changes; and concerns that a "qualifying child" will be a child under the age of 12, when currently provision is made for children significantly older.

11.45 am

Following the evidence sessions, the Committee agreed to forward the Employers For Childcare paper to the Committee for Employment and Learning for its information. In September, the Committee received a response from the Department for Employment and Learning, indicating that the proposed approach would complement its existing provision, which offers financial assistance towards the cost of childcare incurred by certain eligible participants while on one its programmes.

Over the summer months the Committee also received a response from OFMDFM in relation to the issues raised by Employers For Childcare, and in early September the Department provided its response to the Treasury consultation and a list of stakeholders that it had notified of the consultation. That correspondence is available, along with other information and correspondence considered during the Committee's deliberations, on the Committee's web pages on the Assembly's website.

During a briefing on 17 September members questioned officials about how the needs of those parents who may be disadvantaged under the new scheme could be addressed. Officials advised that options in that regard would be considered in the development of the Department's full childcare strategy, as Minister Bell informed us.

The Committee then agreed to seek an urgent meeting with Ministers regarding members' ongoing concerns about the impact of the Childcare Payments Bill, and also to find out whether any further thinking had been given to additional protections that may be put in place in a wider childcare strategy for those who may be disadvantaged by the new scheme. That meeting took place on Monday 29 September, when a delegation from the Committee met junior Minister Bell and junior Minister McCann. Again, I place on record my thanks on behalf of the Committee to the junior Ministers for making themselves available at short notice. I think that it is a sign to those both inside and outside this place of how seriously we take matters relating to the support of families.

During the meeting the junior Ministers confirmed that it was unfortunately not possible at that time to quantify how many will benefit from or be disadvantaged by the new scheme. However, it was highlighted by the junior Ministers that all entrants to the new scheme will be on an equal footing with regard to tax relief for childcare, whereas one of the groups that are better off in the current scheme is those in the higher tax bracket. The junior Ministers also advised that figures regarding the number of parents with children aged 12 to 16 who are receiving childcare vouchers through the current scheme are not available. There was, however, an acceptance that that age group will need to be specifically considered in the wider childcare strategy.

On Wednesday 1 October the Committee considered further correspondence from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the CBI, having previously also considered correspondence from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Again, had the Committee been made aware of the policy proposals at an earlier stage,

engagement with a wider range of stakeholders could have taken place.

In reaching its final decision on the LCM, the Committee recognised that, should the provisions in the Childcare Payments Bill not be extended to Northern Ireland, families will lose out on support with childcare costs when the current scheme closes to new entrants. In addition, a number of parents who had been excluded from previous schemes, such as the self-employed, will now be able to take advantage of relief for childcare costs.

The Committee therefore agreed at its meeting on 1 October to support the legislative consent motion to extend the provisions of the Childcare Payments Bill to Northern Ireland. However, in so doing the Committee strongly recommends that the Department undertake a scoping exercise to identify the categories of people who will be disadvantaged under the new scheme and, where appropriate, ensure that their needs are addressed in the wider childcare strategy.

On that point, I pause to acknowledge junior Minister Bell and his words towards the end of his speech when he recognised the potential disadvantage for new entrants who will not be able to access the current voucher scheme when it closes in the autumn of next year as scheduled. I accept and acknowledge Minister Bell's commitment to a scoping exercise in the broader childcare strategy.

The Committee is due to receive a briefing from officials on the final childcare strategy at its meeting tomorrow, and that is an area that Members will undoubtedly follow up on during the evidence session. However, notwithstanding that, I invite junior Minister McCann in her closing remarks to outline whether there are any further plans that she can detail, such as how the scoping exercise will be undertaken in practice.

At this point, I would like to make some remarks as a Member of the Assembly.

Mention has been made of Employers For Childcare, which is a very vigorous member of the third sector, a sector that has so much to offer our economy. The group vigorously campaigned for a dual approach, and now that we hear that such an approach will not go forward unless the scoping exercise recommends it, the emphasis has been switched to an awareness campaign to increase the uptake by families that are entitled to financial assistance with childcare costs.

The group conducted a survey, to which 4,500 parents responded. Of those, 63% said that they struggled at some point during 2013 to meet childcare costs; 46% reduced their working hours or left work altogether as a direct result of the cost of childcare; and 49% were unsure whether they were claiming all the financial support that they were entitled to. That is the basis on which the group called for an awareness campaign. It points out how successful the Social Security Agency's Make the Call campaign has been in raising awareness of entitlement to pension credit and to attendance allowance. Again, I invite the junior Minister, in her response, to give us her thoughts on that.

The Federation of Small Businesses briefed the Committee and was quite clear in saying that, in Northern Ireland, employers will lose employer National Insurance contribution savings in the region of £4 million per annum as a result of the salary sacrifice aspect of the childcare voucher scheme coming to an end. That is significant money for our many micro, small and medium enterprises. If we are to give proper meaning to our assertion that the economy is front and centre of all that we do, we must do more than simply note that £4 million figure. I will listen with interest to what the junior Minister proposes to do about it.

Finally, I return to the lack of consultation with the Committee. Were it a one-off, we could maybe move on. However, it comes in an environment and a context of papers repeatedly being delivered late to the Committee and of late-notice cancellation of briefings. I know that there are a number of reasons for that. Some are political and down to the joint nature of the office, and some are probably administrative. However, it seems to me, at this stage, that it happens so frequently and consistently that it is hard to dismiss the fact that an element of what is going on is a disrespect being shown by some in the Department towards the Committee.

That is baffling to me for two reasons. First, seven of the 11 MLAs on the Statutory Committee are from parties who provide Ministers in the Department, and, as we know, the Ministers are the Department. Secondly, it baffles me because the Committee has a good track record of assisting the Department. As one example, I will mention our work in scrutinising the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill. It was our amendments, which the junior Ministers acknowledged at the time, that helped to improve the setting up of the historical institutional abuse inquiry. So, the Committee is there to complete its statutory duties and to help through its scrutiny, not necessarily simply to criticise.

I shall leave it at that point, having made it clear that the Committee supports the LCM and, as I said, looks forward to the response from junior Minister McCann.

Mr Moutray: A considerable amount has already been said on this issue in the context of the debate of just a few weeks ago. I do not intend to go into all those details again; rather, I will touch on a few for the purposes of addressing the motion.

The childcare voucher scheme was extremely complicated and suffered from low uptake in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom. Organisations such as Employers For Childcare played a constructive and positive role in ensuring that parents could navigate this complex system. However, it remained challenging, and the uptake was too low. It needed to be reformed. I therefore welcome the moves towards this new scheme, which aims to widen the scope of who can qualify and to simplify access for parents. In addition, it will not be dependent on employers offering it and will be targeted towards those lower-income working families who most need financial support for childcare.

Our analysis at this stage is that the new scheme has significant potential to enhance and support affordable childcare. Importantly, the scheme is being funded centrally from London and will add no additional Budget pressure on Northern Ireland while bringing new financial support for many families. There are things that my colleagues and I would like to see changed. I would like the support in the new scheme to extend to young people aged up to 16 rather than to 12, as currently proposed. In addition, I want to ensure that protection is offered, in so far as is possible and reasonable, to any parents who may

be in the group who will not benefit as much from the new scheme when compared with the voucher scheme. We will examine those issues closely as the scheme continues to be rolled out. At this point, we support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Alex Attwood.

Mr Attwood: Thank you.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Sorry, that was premature. I call Mickey Brady.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am not a member of the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, but I wish to say a few words on the subject, because, certainly in my experience, affordable childcare is absolutely essential, and, unfortunately, it has not been so affordable here in recent times. When I worked in the voluntary sector, we carried out a survey in the Newry area and found that we had one of the worst childcare facilities in western Europe. For a population of 90,000, there were around five registered childminders. The difficulty is that, for people on working tax credits to avail themselves of the childcare element, unless their child is being looked after by a registered childminder, they do not get it. That has caused trouble.

The legislative consent motion will increase the number of people who will be eligible for the childcare scheme. Previously, as I said, affordable childcare has not been easily or readily available. It appears that the new scheme will increase the numbers who are eligible, but there may still be gaps that need to be filled. The new tax-free childcare scheme will help to provide financial support for working families, which is to be welcomed, and, as far as I am aware from what has been said, it will also include self-employed people.

I understand that departmental officials have been asked to sit down and fully discuss issues that groups may want to raise, particularly Employers For Childcare, which has raised concerns. I have met the group on a number of occasions, and, as Mr Moutray said, it has played a very constructive role in providing childcare when it was most needed. In that sense, its concerns need to be addressed, because people who make use of the voucher scheme will continue, as far as I know, with that, but I do not think that new people can be introduced.

The Bright Start scheme was launched by OFMDFM in September 2013, and it fits in with the Programme for Government targets. In my experience, however, a large number of families use informal childcare, whether that is offered by aunts, uncles, mothers, sisters or whomever, which has been an issue, as it means that they cannot access the childcare element of working tax credits. Presumably, the scheme will address that at some stage, although it is my understanding — I can be corrected if I am wrong — that children will still have to be looked after in crèches or the like. Crèches are extremely expensive. When we were conducting research, we found that there were a huge number of crèches in our area but that they were extremely expensive. People simply could not afford them, because they would be working simply to pay their childcare costs. That is an issue.

I welcome the legislative consent motion to introduce the scheme, but I think that there are gaps, particularly, as was mentioned, with the age factor. Children up to the age of 12 only are included, and that will have to be addressed as other schemes cater for children up to and beyond the age of 14. As I said, I am not a member of the Committee, but I think that affordable childcare in the North is such as essential item that anything that focuses on it is to be welcomed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I can now call Mr Alex Attwood.

Mr Attwood: Thank you for calling me a second time.

I agree with the Chair of the Committee's comments in acknowledging the contribution, input, efforts, campaign and lobbying of relevant organisations in the third sector.

Given that the Committee had been initially unsighted in relation to what was being proposed and, as a consequence, the limitations of what it could do, it was the efforts of external organisations such as Employers For Childcare, the FSB, Early Years and the family of childcare organisations that brought into sharp relief the opportunities of the new proposals as well as the deficits in the new legislation coming from Westminster. Indeed, my observation of what those organisations did on the legislative consent motion and the issues around it is that it was a case study of how a group of external organisations could powerfully influence the view of government and a Committee. The Committee Chair referred, for example, to the fact that there had been an informal gathering of representatives of the Committee and the junior Ministers and officials on the matter. That seemed to me to be a model of good practice in a situation in which we have difficulties getting Ministers to come to Committees, as the Chair indicated. Here was a model of better practice when it came to how a Committee interrogates a matter of public policy in an effort to get it right. All of that happened because of the work of the external organisations, which brought real evidence and clinical analysis to the issue of the childcare payments legislation.

12.00 noon

In one way, I have to declare an interest: I am a parent of young children aged five and eight years. Although my wife and I are both in work, with good salaries, I have some sense of parents' struggles in accessing affordable childcare and the multiple complications that arise from that.

I repeat what the Chair said: there was a survey of nearly 20% — a 20% response rate — of those in Northern Ireland who were claiming any form of financial support for the cost of childcare. Where have you ever come across a survey on any public policy issue to which 20% of the affected constituency took time to respond? A consequence of that is that the response must be as valid and compelling as any response to a public attitudes survey, if you like, on any issue. As the Chair indicated, of the 4,500 people who responded, 63% struggled at some point in 2013 to meet their childcare costs; 46% reduced their working hours or even left work because of struggles with childcare costs; and nearly 50% were unsure whether they were claiming all that they were entitled to under the available childcare proposals. If that is the experience of so many of those who are trying to access childcare support and given that those real and daily struggles continue, we have to make sure that, in taking forward the consent motion, all bases are covered when it comes to ensuring that all available childcare options remain available in future.

Questions arise from that that the junior Minister may want to address in his reply. First, he indicated that the final childcare strategy would be published in 2015. Given that he also said that a scoping exercise was to be undertaken for parents who may be disadvantaged by the ending of the voucher scheme in autumn 2015, can he confirm where precisely that scoping exercise is, who is conducting it and who is being consulted on the scoping of the scale of the individuals who may be disadvantaged by the ending of the voucher scheme? If, tomorrow, we are to get a briefing from officials about what the childcare strategy proposals might be and given that the Minister has indicated that the childcare strategy in its final form will be published in 2015 — he might want to confirm when that is anticipated — it seems to be a very urgent piece of work for the scoping exercise to be conducted and concluded in good time so that, if a range of people is disadvantaged by the closure of the scheme next autumn and if it is deemed to be appropriate, provision is made for them in the childcare strategy due to be published in 2015. Who is being consulted? What timeline will the scoping exercise conclude within? Will all that converge, if necessary, with the publication of the final childcare strategy?

Given that we are running out of time and that the voucher scheme concludes in the autumn of 2015, it seems that, in addition to the scoping exercise — the evidence from the external sector that I referred to says unambiguously that a number of people will be disadvantaged by the closure of the voucher scheme in the autumn of 2015 — good practice and good government require an exercise to be undertaken to determine, in the event that people are disadvantaged by the closure of the scheme, what a bespoke voucher scheme might look like as part of an overall childcare strategy. We could end up with a situation being accepted and agreed where a range of people are disadvantaged — I think that that will be the outcome of the scoping exercise — without there being a bespoke scheme on the books to be deployed by the end of next year, when the current scheme closes to new entrants. My second question to the junior Minister is this: is it not a wise course of action that, as part of the scoping exercise, you have a parallel process about a bespoke voucher scheme for people otherwise disadvantaged by the closure of the voucher scheme in 2015? Some indications are that it might be as few as 1,000 families. I am not going to second-guess the scoping exercise, but, if it is that number, is it beyond our capacity to come up with a bespoke scheme? In doing so, we could make a judgement about whether that is the right place to invest childcare moneys compared with the other recommendations that might come forward as part of the overall childcare strategy.

The third question is this: as part of that, have there been further consultations with Treasury, HMRC or any other relevant authority to determine whether, if we came up with a bespoke scheme for people disadvantaged by the closure of the voucher scheme in 2015, it would have the Treasury, HMRC or other approvals necessary to ensure that a bespoke scheme could be delivered? The third sector says that some authorities in London are indicating privately that, if it is the wish of the Northern Ireland Executive to take forward a bespoke voucher scheme for families disadvantaged by the closure of the scheme in the autumn of 2015, that is in order. Have there been conversations with the relevant authorities in Britain to get headline approval for a bespoke scheme in the event that that happens?

The third issue is that there are unspent moneys in the childcare strategy. There will be difficult choices to be made on the right investment on the far side of the conclusion of the childcare strategy. However, even indicatively, is a budget line being provided for what might or might not be required for a bespoke voucher scheme in the event of that being the direction that the Executive and Assembly choose?

The Minister indicated that the money that might be available per child per year was up to £2,000. Is it not the case, Minister, that the average that might be available per child per year is £600? Treasury might want to present the figure of £2,000 per child per year for headline grabbing, but, if I recall correctly, the reality is that, when it works itself through, the figure will be £600 per child per year.

I conclude by recognising that the legislative consent motion creates greater opportunities for a larger number of people to access childcare support. That is recognised, and therefore it is not appropriate to divide the House on the matter. However, as the Ministers know, I and other members of the Committee have been quite persistent in trying to tie down who will lose out on the far side of the new arrangements and to see if we can create mechanisms to accommodate those who will lose out in the new order of things. As we take forward a childcare strategy, we have to cover all bases. This debate is about how best we can cover that particular base.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on childcare and, in particular, on the legislative consent motion on the Childcare Payments Bill, as a member of the Alliance Party and the OFMDFM Committee.

Access to quality, affordable childcare is one of the biggest issues facing families in Northern Ireland. It is absolutely vital to the development of our children; it is vital to adults gaining and sustaining employment; and it is vital to our economy. It is also vital to the rate of child poverty. We heard yesterday that the IFS estimates that as many as one in three children could be in relative poverty by 2020, which is a warning that we should heed carefully in the Assembly. I hope that the investment in childcare payments will be of considerable benefit to many families in Northern Ireland. I and the Alliance Party welcome any investment in childcare and support that will go towards working families across Northern Ireland who struggle to access and afford childcare for their kids. Investment in early years is absolutely vital, and it is vital that we provide the opportunities that all our children deserve.

I welcome the financial support that this scheme will make available. However, the maximum of £2,000 per year per child is a drop in the ocean of the average annual childcare cost, which is estimated in the Employers For Childcare's 'Childcare Cost Survey 2013' to be in the region of £8,000 per child per year. We have a long way to go before we meet the challenge of providing affordable and accessible childcare for our families in Northern Ireland.

Members have gone through the details of the Childcare Payments Bill, but I want to look at them. It creates a new scheme to provide financial support with the cost of childcare for working families. Through the new scheme, the Government will provide £2 for every £8 that a person pays for childcare. That support will be capped

at an annual maximum of £2,000 per child. There are no restrictions on the number of children for whom parents can claim support, and the Government intend to introduce the scheme, managed by HMRC, throughout the UK.

We can hope that that will be administered well and successfully and will not cause additional work for OFMDFM, which may be a good thing for us.

12.15 pm

It is also a welcome extra investment in childcare support. Parents will apply to HMRC to open an online childcare account, into which they will pay the money, and government will make top-up payments. Parents will be able to allocate the money to a qualifying childcare provider of their choice after they have satisfied the eligibility requirements. Examples of such requirements are that parents must be over 16, be responsible for the child, be in the UK and be in qualifying paid work. It appears that a certain minimum of around eight hours' work at the national minimum wage is likely to be set. Parents will not be able to exceed an income limit of £150,000 per annum and must not be claiming universal credit. The scheme will apply to children under 12, and, in the case of a child with a disability, under 17. Parents must reconfirm their eligibility every three months.

Although there is much to welcome in the scheme, particularly its application to those who are self-employed, there are concerns; perhaps most particularly with the fact that it will close the existing childcare voucher scheme to new entrants. Those who are in the childcare voucher scheme currently can remain in it. It is important that we look at what the childcare voucher scheme is and does. It is a salary-sacrifice scheme, with savings for parents and employers. It allows parents to save, on average, £77 a month and employers to save on National Insurance contributions.

As has been mentioned, there are real concerns about the lack of consultation on this process. Through its work on the third sector, in particular with Employers For Childcare, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister was able to identify in more detail the concerns that exist in relation to the proposal. The suggestions were that there are two main groups of people whose circumstances will not be improved by the introduction of the Childcare Payments Bill. The first group comprises those who will be worse off under the new scheme than they would have been under the childcare voucher scheme, and the second comprises those who are not eligible for the new scheme and who will not, therefore, be able to progress to employment.

Perhaps I can give an example of the real terms of the situation. Take the Smith family, for example. Mr and Mrs Smith are in full-time employment on a basic rate of tax. They have one child, with their childcare costs at around £450 a month. Under the childcare voucher scheme, Mr and Mrs Smith will each sacrifice £225 a month, which represents a saving of £72 in tax. Over the course of the year, the Smith family will save around £1,728 under the childcare voucher scheme. Under the new childcare payments scheme, Mr and Mrs Smith would pay £360 into an account, with the remaining £90 being supplemented by government. Over the course of the year, using the new scheme, the Smith family would, therefore, save around £1,080. Therefore, they would be around £648 a year worse off under the new scheme. Hopefully, this example puts into some perspective the impact that the new scheme would have on some families in Northern Ireland.

There are also, obviously, concerns in relation to employers. The closure of the childcare voucher scheme to new entrants will, potentially, increase the pay bills of family friendly employers that have supported their staff over many years by providing the childcare voucher scheme. That would be an additional cost at what is an already difficult time for many employers in Northern Ireland. Many of our business organisations, such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the CBI, have done important work, and they are calling on OFMDFM to make sure that there are additional supports for the businesses and employees that will find themselves worse off as a result of the Childcare Payments Bill in Northern Ireland. It has been mentioned that the childcare voucher scheme has brought savings in the region of £4 million per annum for many of our businesses in Northern Ireland.

What can we do going forward? I welcome the commitment from OFMDFM to conduct a scoping exercise on this issue. The consultation to date has been wholly inadequate, and, unfortunately, I believe that it displays an example of the contempt with which OFMDFM treats the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister at times, and indeed the distance that the Department has to go on the development of childcare policy. Concerns have already been expressed today that we have seen around £9 million of a £12 million childcare budget for 2011-15 underspent by the Department.

People have mentioned the Employers For Childcare cost survey that was completed by 4,500 parents in Northern Ireland. It shows the pressure that families in our community are under in relation to this issue. The Bright Start actions have been heralded as a new beginning and a childcare strategy. It has a long way to go, but it does set out some key principles, two of which are informed parental choice and affordability.

We have heard calls for a public awareness campaign around the existing childcare voucher scheme to inform parents of the financial assistance that is available to them now and that would draw down funds from the UK Treasury rather than from the Northern Ireland block grant. This is a public awareness campaign that MLAs and organisations like Employers For Childcare have been calling for for years. Indeed, it is an indictment of OFMDFM that such an awareness campaign has not been rolled out to date. The choice is clear: either the Department can sit on its hands for the next year or it can initiate a far-reaching public awareness campaign in relation to the childcare voucher scheme so that parents can avail themselves of that scheme now and then make an informed choice as to whether the childcare voucher scheme or the new childcare scheme being proposed works better for them. That would be in line with the principles that have been set out by the Bright Start programme. It would bring savings for families now. It would also bring savings for businesses over the next period.

I, in addition to other MLAs, recognise the work of Employers For Childcare. It is one of the finest social enterprises that we have in Northern Ireland. Frankly, it has stepped in and done the work that OFMDFM and other Departments have failed to do. It has conducted an annual cost of childcare survey to set out what is

facing our families in Northern Ireland in reality. It has raised awareness of the childcare voucher scheme and assisted families and employers to administer that scheme, bringing savings across the board for our families and businesses in Northern Ireland. That work needs to be recognised. We need to do much more than just refer to the childcare voucher scheme as inefficient when people in Northern Ireland have been doing their utmost to make it as accessible to families here as possible. I hope that OFMDFM will take heed of the Assembly on that and assist those people in raising awareness of that in the short term.

I would also like to recognise the Early Years organisation in Northern Ireland, which has created an application for choosing childcare and early education that is available to families across Northern Ireland. I welcome the commitment of OFMDFM to conduct the scoping exercise. We will hopefully hear more about that at the Committee tomorrow. I believe that there is much more work to be done in conjunction with the community and voluntary sector, families and the Committee if we are going to see the scale of assistance that families and businesses in Northern Ireland deserve and to ensure that families have access to childcare for the development of our children and young people and our economy.

Mr Spratt: I welcome the consent motion in front of the House. At the very outset, there are a couple of things that need clarification. All of a sudden, the term "scoping exercise" has been used by Mr Attwood, Mr Lyttle and perhaps even the Chair. I have spoken to colleagues, and I do not think that I heard the phrase "scoping exercise" at any point. The junior Minister can clarify the exact words in his concluding remarks, but I think that he said that the Department would seek to estimate the number disadvantaged by the voucher scheme. That is certainly what officials consistently said to the Committee during its deliberations on the matter. It is an important matter, and I think that all Committee members were pretty much in agreement on many of the issues and on some of the issues raised by outside organisations.

Mr Attwood declared his childcare arrangements. I have five grandchildren in four families and know very well the difficulties with childcare arrangements, so I declare an interest as well. I also know how grandparents try to help out, and we certainly try to do that as a family. Self-employment features in one of the four families, and it has been very difficult for self-employed people over the past number of years as they have not been able to get into the childcare scheme. Today was the first time that I heard that 116,000 self-employed people will now be eligible for the scheme. Given that they all have accountants or tax advisers who do their books at the end of the financial year, I assume that there will be a much greater take-up of what is now available through the HMRC scheme. That is very important because, over the past number of years and particularly with the way that the economy has been throughout the United Kingdom, many in the Province, who were perhaps previously employed in the construction industry, have had to become self-employed. I know that, from their point of view, the extension of the scheme is very welcome, and, given their importance, I consistently raised that point in the Committee. Let us face it: the voucher scheme will continue if employers who have had it in place want to retain it.

The Department has already committed to undertake an exercise to see how those who are disadvantaged can be supported in some way within future childcare strategy arrangements. All the Committee members welcome that. Given that there were 11,000 people in the voucher scheme and that the new scheme will be opened up to 116,000 self-employed people, I suspect that, if we were to be back in this place discussing the matter in a couple of years' time, we would find that many more had made themselves eligible for what is a very important scheme, particularly for young families. In most cases, both parents now have to go out to work and, in many cases, they find childcare arrangements very expensive.

Overall, the scheme should be welcomed. I welcome the fact that officials said that they will go back to the Department on specific matters and that the junior Ministers have said that they will examine areas in which people may be disadvantaged in the future. However, let us get this scoping exercise out of our heads. It is not what was promised, and it is wrong of the Deputy Chair and Mr Attwood to put unuttered words into mouths. I make that point on the basis that the junior Ministers and OFMDFM have been misrepresented.

I will not take up the Chair's usual rant about OFMDFM. *[Interruption.]* However, well on you — you got it in again.

12.30 pm

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. It is important to note that the North could be left without any government-subsidised childcare if the Bill before Westminster does not go ahead here. OFMDFM has received the proposals to extend the provisions of the Westminster Childcare Payments Bill to the North of Ireland by means of a legislative consent motion. If enacted, the Bill will provide the statutory basis for the introduction of a new tax-free childcare scheme to provide financial support to help working families with childcare costs.

The new scheme will replace the existing employer-supported childcare scheme that provides financial support to parents. As childcare is a devolved matter, there is a fear that if the Bill is not extended to the North, we will be left with no scheme to subsidise childcare, as the previous scheme is being phased out. The new scheme, which is aimed at giving relief straight to parents as opposed to employers, would allow child carers, whose employers do not currently participate in the scheme, to apply. A number of concerns were raised regarding the LCM, by Employers for Childcare, for example. The Committee has raised those concerns with officials and will continue to ensure that working families have maximum access to financial support for childcare.

The affordability of childcare is one of the main obstacles to getting people back to work, so it is important that we maintain supported childcare schemes in order to encourage people back into employment. I am aware of a family who pay almost £700 a month in childcare costs. They receive approximately £100 a month in childcare working tax credits, but they cannot avail themselves of a childcare voucher scheme. It is my understanding that it is one or the other. More needs to be done to promote the use of childcare vouchers, as figures show that less than 2% of people apply for them.

The cost of childcare has increased dramatically over the past few years and is seen as a stumbling block for many mothers returning to the work market, as, after paying for childcare, it may not be economically viable to remain in work. Many families do not realise that there is help with childcare. That is not being utilised to the full extent, as recent figures show. Many families with children need to return to work, so, if we are to encourage mothers and fathers back into employment, it is essential that we cater for them by having proper, affordable childcare in place.

In a childcare cost survey that was carried out in 2013, it was estimated that the average cost of childcare here in the North was £158 a week and that childcare costs were taking up to half the average household net income. School-age childcare services cost, on average, £118 a week during term time and £120 a week during summer holidays.

The Programme for Government commits the Executive to publishing and implementing a childcare strategy with key actions to provide integrated and affordable childcare. The first phase of the Executive's childcare strategy, Bright Start, was launched in September 2013. Bright Start aims to create, by 2020, a joined-up, sustainable childcare service supporting developmental needs and positive change for children. The Bright Start childcare strategy works in parallel with a Programme for Government target to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage.

The consultation on the childcare strategy began in December 2012 and ended in March 2013. Submissions to the consultation on the childcare strategy raised a number of concerns regarding provision, for example. It was stated that there are too few childcare places, especially for school-age children in the age range of four to 14. Affordability was also raised. The cost of childcare often outweighs the financial benefits of working. Childcare provision in rural areas was also identified as a particular problem. Childcare for children with a disability was also raised, as was the difficulty experienced where current provision fails to meet their needs.

Research also indicated that there is a significant reliance on informal childcare provided by other family members. As a mother and someone who lives in a rural area, I can relate to that, as there is little or no affordable childcare in rural areas.

Finally, we need childcare services that are affordable and sustainable. Without that incentive, it will be difficult to make work pay. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. 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. When the House returns, the first item of business will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.35 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Education and Library Boards: Resources

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education whether the education and library boards have the required level of resources to fulfil their remit pending the establishment of the new Education Authority. *(AQO 6939/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): As the Assembly is aware, I bid in June monitoring for nearly £50 million for inescapable pressures and received £5 million. The bulk of those pressures relate to services such as special education and schools maintenance, which are provided to schools by the education and library boards (ELBs). I did not receive any allocations from the October monitoring round. Hence, I have to manage those pressures internally. I am on record stating that the ELBs are currently operating at the extremities of corporate risk, which is why the establishment of the new Education Authority next year is vital.

All five education and library boards have submitted their 2014-15 initial resource allocation plans, and the Department has approved them all. I believe that the five ELBs have the required level of resources to fulfil their remit during 2014-15. However, as I already stated, we face significant internal pressures, and it will be very challenging to deliver a balanced education budget for this financial year. Nevertheless, that is my aim, and I believe that, to date, I have demonstrated a clear commitment to prudent budget management while maximising the use of the finite resources available to me.

Mrs Overend: The five education and library boards have been effectively run down for months, if not years. Will the Minister confirm whether any of the five education and library boards are projecting a financial deficit for the 2014-15 financial year? Will the new single Education Authority be saddled with historical debt at its inception?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said, my Department has accepted and agreed the boards' current spending plans. We would not have accepted and agreed any plans that would have seen a significant overspend or planned overspend by any of the boards. However, we are significantly into this financial year, and unforeseen pressures may bear down on the boards, or other pressures may come to light in the boards, particularly for special educational needs, which place greater pressure on their budget management. I will work with the boards to the best of my ability and financial resources to ensure that, where real pressures are identified, we can support them. However, I am not aware of any board that will overspend at this stage.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answers. Will he please outline what steps have been taken to ensure

smooth transition from five education and library boards to one authority by April 2015?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta. A business plan has been submitted on the workings and transition between the five education and library boards and the new authority. Obviously, that will depend on the final outcomes and workings of the Education Bill and the final shape, size and roles of the authority. I have urged Members to keep their amendments few and far between, as we are working on a compromise Bill. It is vital that the principles of the Bill are not detracted from if we are to seek agreement on the way forward. However, we are progressing with the transition from the five boards to the new authority. I do not expect the authority to inherit any major or significant deficits from the five education and library boards.

We have been preparing for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) over the last number of years. The boards have, at times, been running heroically with the number of staff that they have to deliver their services. Staff reductions have been in place in preparation for a single authority, which was ESA, but we are now moving to the Education Authority. So, significant preparation has already taken place to allow us to move forward towards the single authority.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Minister, in the first year of operation of the new Education Authority, it is important that it works effectively. What budget has been set aside for the establishment and operation of the new Education Authority in its first year?

Mr O'Dowd: As the Member will be aware, the Executive agreed their draft Budget only last week, and it was presented to the Assembly on Monday. I will be working with my officials over the coming days and weeks to prepare a budget for the Education Department for 2015-16. As part of that budget, obviously how we fund the Education Authority moving forward will be a significant factor.

While welcoming the fact that education received significant protection in the 2015-16 Budget, we have to deal with a significant reduction in resources of somewhere in the region of £94 million, and that will have an impact on my planning for the Education Authority.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I omitted to advise Members that question 12 has been withdrawn.

Teachers: Permanent Posts

2. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Education how many newly qualified teachers do not have a permanent teaching post. *(AQO 6940/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Information provided by the General Teaching Council shows that, from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, there were 598 local graduates, 466 of whom are registered with the council. A total of 417 of those registered have not found a permanent teaching post here. However, 106 of those teachers have found significant temporary work of one term or more. Forty-nine of those registered have permanent teaching posts. However, figures from the council show that, at January 2014, 67% of registered teachers who graduated here in 2009 had secured employment of a permanent or a significant temporary nature.

I recognise that this is a very difficult time for teachers, particularly for those who are newly qualified. The education budget continues to face significant pressures, and that has necessitated cost-based redundancies in teaching staff over the past four years across our schools. As that continues, I suspect that it will impact on the teaching workforce in our schools. I will, however, continue to push the education budget at the Executive table.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. Will he explain why he is capping pupil numbers in areas that are showing a large population growth? Is that not exacerbating the problem for newly qualified teachers who are trying to find employment opportunities?

Mr O'Dowd: No, because I will be taking all pupils from one area and concentrating them in another area, which means that it is the same number of pupils who require the same number of teachers. In fact, if you were to concentrate all the pupils in one school, you might require even fewer teachers. In fairness to the Member, I know what she is hinting at, but this is not the answer to that question.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire an mbeadh sé sásta scéim fostaíochta chéad-bhliana do mhúinteoirí nua-cháilithe a thabhairt isteach anseo, fé mar atá acu in Albain? Is the Minister prepared to consider an employment scheme for first-year newly qualified teachers such as the one in Scotland?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta. I thank the Member for his question. We considered the scheme that was outlined in Scotland, and, if we were to have followed through with that, quite significant costs would have fallen on my Department and the Executive. We simply do not have the resources to bring that to fruition. We brought in a similar scheme, but it does not involve the scale of numbers that perhaps everyone in the House would like. Under the Delivering Social Change programme, we brought newly qualified teachers into the workforce for numeracy and literacy projects in our schools, and those are paying great dividends to pupils and to those newly qualified teachers. However, the scale of cost involved in the Scottish scheme was unachievable, given the current budgets and block grant delivered to us by the Westminster Government.

Schools: Mission Statement

3. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to develop a mission statement for all non-grammar post-primary schools. *(AQO 6941/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: My mission statement for all post-primary schools is already clear and is set out in my Department's school improvement policy, Every School a Good School. The Member needs to be aware that all post-primary schools are required to deliver the same revised curriculum. The Member also needs to be aware that the legislative definition of a grammar school has no relationship with the curriculum or even with so-called academic selection.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer and for making me aware of certain things that, I can assure him, I am aware of. In light of his answer, will he agree — I will press him — to develop a technically based vocational

curriculum in our secondary schools that is dovetailed into post-16 vocational education and apprenticeships?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member's original question and his supplementary question come from a flawed position whereby he believes that, in some way, grammar schools teach a different curriculum to non-grammar schools. All our schools now have to match up to the entitlement framework. They have to offer a wide breadth of subjects for young people to study, and those cover the wide areas commonly referred to as "academic" and "vocational". So, what the Member urges me to do is already in place, and for all post-primary schools, regardless of the nameplate on the front gate.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline how non-grammar post-primary schools have performed in recent years?

Mr O'Dowd: In the 2013 year, 39·2% of school-leavers in the non-grammar sector achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and maths, compared with 94·8% of those leaving grammar schools. In 2013, 15·5% of school-leavers in the non-grammar sector achieved three or more A levels at grades A* to C or equivalent, compared with 65·1% of leavers in the grammar sector. International evidence and our own analysis point to the fact that concentrating deprivation in particular schools compounds the negative impact that deprivation has on pupil outcomes. In our post-primary sector, that concentration of deprivation is most evident in non-selective schools, and we are aware of the particular challenges facing those schools.

However, it is also worth noting that achievement in our non-grammar sector, and I use the term advisedly, continues to grow, despite the challenges placed on it by the system being largely weighted against pupils by the continued use of alleged academic selection.

Teachers/Principals: Development

4. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education how his Department assists teachers and principals with their continuing professional development. *(AQO 6942/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I recognise the importance of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and school principals in raising standards and improving educational outcomes for our young people. CPD is mostly delivered by the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) and the Regional Training Unit (RTU), which my Department funds.

In each education and library board area, CASS provides advisory and support services to schools. Therefore, it is the main provider of in-service training. To identify training needs, CASS carries out an annual training needs audit of schools, from which it prepares a scheme of support. It is therefore a matter for schools to prioritise the training that they require. The professional development requirements of individual teachers can be established by school leaders through the annual performance review and staff development scheme. CPD for school leaders is provided by the RTU. It includes leadership and management support for emergent and aspirant leaders, as well as serving principals. The RTU provides a range of programmes, based on good practice and research.

In addition, the Department also directly funds other educational partners to provide CPD in specific areas, including special educational needs, STEM subjects and Irish-medium education. Officials are working on a strategy for teacher education and are engaging with key stakeholders to get a consensus on the way forward. That will result in a new strategy for teacher professional development, to be launched next year.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister very much. I am sure that he is aware that, in the joint DE/DEL review of teacher training, the international panel member, Professor Gordon Kirk, said that there was a:

> *"discontinuity between initial teacher education and continuing professional development."*

He also said:

> *"There is a need for a huge investment".*

The Minister has just said that he is bringing forward a strategy. Has he any funding to put behind it so that there is a common approach by the Department, rather than leaving the CPD of individual teachers up to individual boards of governors or principals?

Mr O'Dowd: I am personally delighted that so many Members are concentrating on the financial needs of my Department as we start an eight-week consultation on the draft Budget. I have no doubt that Members who rise to speak today will fully support me when I lobby my Executive colleagues for more money for the education budget, as they no doubt know I shall.

I do not have a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We have been facing significant challenges with the education budget over the last three years, and, as a result of policies from elsewhere — I refer to Westminster — we face significant further pressures on our education budget. However, we are going to develop the strategy. I will engage with my officials over the coming weeks on how we will fund the various programmes of work that exist in my Department and what other programmes of work we can invest in.

I assure the Member that I will have close regard to the fact that we are developing a new teacher development programme, which will require funding.

2.15 pm

Mr McCausland: We are all very clear on the role of teachers and principals within the education system, and it is important that they have professional development. School governors also have a very important role to play in the running of a school, setting the ethos, monitoring the work of the school and so on. Is the Minister satisfied with the current level of training provided to governors and will he ensure that there will be a review of that to make sure that it is adequate for the needs of governors? I speak as a former governor.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is absolutely right. Boards of governors play a key role in any school and are key not only to the professional development of teachers but to the development of pupils through educational achievement. Over the last number of years, I have set aside half a million pounds for training for boards of governors. It is in place. I accept that, as with many other factors, it could do with more money, but we are now moving forward with

a training programme for boards of governors, which will take time to bed in. Once it has ran for a number of years, I think that we should review it as we move forward, but I think we have made a good start to it.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. Will he provide some details on the strategy for the teacher development programme?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said, my officials are engaging with stakeholders and others in relation to how we bring that teacher development programme forward. Obviously, lessons will be learned from CASS, the regional training unit and professionals themselves as to how we ensure that continuous professional development is built upon and that the training and development needs of our teacher workforce are brought to the fore.

Mr McCarthy: How will the Minister seek to reduce teachers' workloads sufficiently to ensure that professional development is genuinely accessible?

Mr O'Dowd: I have no wish to add further burden to teachers in their delivery of education in our schools, but any parent here will be aware that there are teacher training days when pupils are not at school and the teachers are away at training courses. So, we do provide time off from teaching for teachers to go into training practices, which alleviates some of the pressure from the work commitments of teachers.

Speech and Language Therapy

5. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the importance of access to speech and language therapy for preschool and primary-school children. *(AQO 6943/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I recognise the importance of access to support for speech, language and communication therapy for children in preschool and primary school who require it as part of their special educational needs provision. Responsibility for arranging therapy, of whatever nature, when that forms part of the SEN provision in a child's statement, falls to the education and library boards, whereas prime responsibility for providing the therapy rests with the Health and Social Care Board and trusts, as the employers of therapists.

The Public Health Agency is conducting a review of the current level of allied health professional services and support, including speech and language therapy for children with statements of SEN. My Department and the ELBs are engaging with the PHA in that process. The ultimate aim of their review is to agree a proposed regional model to best meet the needs of those children. Early intervention is particularly important and, since 2001, ELBs have received over £14 million — almost £1·7 million of which was in 2014-15 — in additional funding for early intervention at Key Stage 1 for speech, language and communication needs.

I recently announced additional funding of £200,000 for eligible voluntary private school settings to help them identify and address underdeveloped social, emotional, communication and language skills. Speech, language and communication support is also a core element of each of the 39 Sure Start projects, with the Department investing approximately £1·1 million per annum in that specific provision. In addition, the recently completed three-year pilot in DE-funded early years settings included speech and language therapists working as advisers in some pilot settings across the ELBs.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer and the review. If ever there was a key building block in education, it is bound to be speech and language. Given that up to 30% of preschool children present themselves with language acquisition problems, is any immediate remedial action being taken by the Department in conjunction with health to address that ever-increasing problem?

Mr O'Dowd: As the Member stated, I have given him a quite detailed answer on the services and support available from my Department and others in relation to speech and language therapy. We have carried out a quite extensive pilot scheme in preschool providers, and that work is being analysed to find out which points worked, what others need to be developed and whether the overall approach is the way forward for our education system. I have provided further funding to allow those schemes to continue into the start of the next financial year, while we analyse the work that has been conducted. We await the outcome of that report. I will work on its action points and match them against whatever funding I have available at the time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Members, I am picking up background noise. I do not know whether it is from inside or outside the Chamber. Will everyone ensure that mobile phones etc are turned off? OK, back to Question Time.

Home-to-school Transport

6. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the independent review of home-to-school transport. *(AQO 6944/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The independent panel conducting the review of school transport presented its report to me at the end of August. I am taking time to consider the report and its recommendations before deciding on the way forward. The report will be published in due course.

Miss M McIlveen: In light of the concerns being expressed within area learning communities about the cost of transporting pupils between schools in support of the entitlement framework, is the Minister considering extending the use of bus passes around the concept of being able to use them during the school day?

Mr O'Dowd: That element and many others of school transport provision have been analysed by the authors of the report, and I am taking them all into consideration. Obviously, all these factors have cost consequences, and they will have to be decided on as part of my deliberations around the report. Any changes to school transport that I propose as a result of the report will also have to go out to consultation, for the public and others to have their say before any final decisions are made.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. The Minister has outlined that there will be some form of public consultation. Can he perhaps give some insight as to what sort of consultation he would like to see happening on this issue?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. I am studying the report, which is quite detailed and contains recommendations. I have to decide whether we put the full report out to consultation. I am going to publish the full report, but will we put elements of the recommendations that I believe are workable and feasible going into the future out to full consultation, or put the full report out to consultation and await the views of the public and others in regard to that matter? Those considerations form part of my deliberations.

It is worth noting that school transport costs approximately £75 million a year. A significant proportion of that is in relation to special educational needs. I am not suggesting that I want in any way to tamper with or touch special educational needs transport, but quite a significant amount of money is spent on our transport system. We, as a society, are going to face difficult questions in the months and years ahead about how we spend our reducing public resources on public services. I have no doubt that, if and when I go out to public consultation, there will be quite a healthy debate, at times, around the way forward for school transport.

Mr Kinahan: When looking at those transport costs, is the study looking at children who travel maybe 15 or 20 miles so that they can do A levels somewhere else? I know that many in Antrim have to travel a long distance because there is not post-16 provision.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. The report is quite comprehensive. In fairness to its authors, they have been diligent in their work and spoke to many stakeholders in the transport system, especially young people. I have been impressed by their engagement with young people in relation to the report's findings and observations. All those factors are being taken into account and will, no doubt, be raised many times during the consultation period.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister has already referred to two key points, one being the budgetary complications, but there are proposals for closure of some rural schools, as well as the proposed closure of Drumcree College in his constituency, which will inevitably lead to increased transport costs. How does the Minister propose to deal with that in the management of his budget? Will he take into consideration a cost-benefit analysis with CCMS and others as part of the business case for retaining some of our local schools?

Mr O'Dowd: All such factors will be taken into account when making a decision about any school, whether it is in my constituency or not. To the best of my knowledge, no development proposal has yet been published for Drumcree College. If one is published, there will be a two-month public consultation process during which the Member and others can provide the Department with any information they believe to be relevant to the decision-making process.

Education: Savings

7. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to implement the savings recommended by the performance and efficiency delivery unit. *(AQO 6945/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) produced a report in two stages. The first stage was a scoping study examining a number of areas with potential for realising efficiencies. The second stage involved a detailed examination of two selected areas, namely home-to-school transport and school catering services. There is a link between some of the potential efficiencies identified in these reports and the reporting of savings achieved in my Department's published savings delivery plan. This will include areas such as professional support for schools, administration and management costs in the Department's arm's-length bodies, and procurement.

The recommendations made by PEDU in respect of home-to-school transport and school catering services were initially used to develop a series of actions. Many of these were referenced to the planned establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, with efficiencies to be realised through the redesign of services. Now that the Executive have agreed that legislation should be brought forward to create a single body to replace the existing five education and library boards, the new Education Authority will be able to take on board the PEDU reports and decide what, if any, action it wishes to take with regard to the recommendations made.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. PEDU also highlighted potential efficiency savings in administration, pointing out that CCMS had seen a 51·7% increase in its staff, with costs rising from £1·7 million in the financial year 2002-03 to £2·9 million in 2009-2010. Has the Minister been able to rein in these costs over the past three years?

Mr O'Dowd: That is a reflection of the growing responsibility of CCMS. It is also worth noting that, had we achieved ESA, that would also have taken into account the running costs of CCMS and many other bodies. We can pick out individual sections of reports that suit our arguments at the time, but if we do not follow through on the decision-making process — ie, taking the hard decisions on restructuring — then there is no point in wishing for savings. Savings can and should be achieved through the new Education Authority. We are very close to agreement on the new Education Authority, which, in my opinion, can deliver savings that can also be delivered to front line services.

The two PEDU reports I put on hold concentrated on school meals, which is affecting the lives, work and opportunities of some of the most low-paid workers in our education system, and on school transport. I have dealt with school transport through the transport review, and I am bringing the matter further. I was of the view that, while there was political deadlock over ESA, affecting the lives of the lowest paid in our education system did not make sense to me.

ESA Spend

8. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education what proportion of the money spent on the Education and Skills Authority will be recouped through the proposals contained within the Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16). *(AQO 6946/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: In preparation for ESA, significant progress was made in planning the delivery of services on a consistent regional basis. That work will now support the creation of the Education Authority and included the development of common procedures and policies for a

single organisation. A significant part of the money spent on ESA will therefore support the delivery of the Education Authority and allow it to move forward more rapidly once established. However, it is not possible to quantify the proportion of moneys that will be able to be utilised by the Education Authority.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That is the end of our time for listed questions. We now move to topical questions. Question 7 has been withdrawn.

2.30 pm

Parkhall Integrated College: Governors

T1. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Education whether the recent actions by a UUP councillor in Antrim to exclude him from a school prize-giving evening are the actions of a fit-for-purpose governor of an integrated school. *(AQT 1681/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: First, I want to put on record that, in my opinion, the actions of the individual in no way reflect upon Parkhall Integrated College. I have had the privilege of meeting members of the school's board of governors and an all-party delegation of political representatives from the town who were seeking a new build for the college. I found them to be courteous, respectful and seeking to live up to the principles of integrated education.

I do not find the actions of the individual to be in accordance with the principles or ethos of integrated education. In my humble opinion, he is not fit to be a governor of an integrated college.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas don Aire go dtí seo. In light of the Minister's answer, what training or support is available to boards of governors so that their actions can have a positive influence on school communities?

Mr O'Dowd: In my response to Mr McCausland, I think, during listed questions, I referred to the fact that my Department has set aside £500,000 a year to facilitate training for boards of governors in their roles and responsibilities in managing schools. We are beginning, I believe, to see positive results from that investment. I am not sure whether, if I had endless money, it would make any difference to the attitude of the individual involved — we can only hope.

Integrated Education: Greater Ards Area

T2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Education whether he acknowledges that there is a gap in integrated education provision for children aged between three and 11 in the greater Ards area. *(AQT 1682/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: If there is such a gap, what is required is a development proposal put forward by the relevant sponsoring body to the relevant education board or, in future, the authority. We will then decide through the normal processes that apply to development proposals — analysing the available evidence and listening to interested parties in the area — whether there is a gap in integrated education.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he agree that the transformation of, say, Loughries Primary School outside Newtownards would extend integrated provision and therefore accommodate parental choice in the greater Newtownards area?

Mr O'Dowd: I think that the Member knows fine well that I cannot express an opinion on a development proposal that has not yet been published or which may be published in the future. If the Member believes that, it is up to him to convince the relevant authorities to put forward a development proposal. I will take on board all evidence presented to me during that development proposal process before I come to an opinion on it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I will not call the Member who is listed to ask topical question No 3.

Education System: Flexibility

T4. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Education whether he believes that we have enough flexibility in our education system to meet the needs of a 21st century economy, given that he will be aware that, in order to meet the needs of a modern economy and our responsibilities around parental choice, it is argued that education and the economy need to be flexible and responsive, with schools providing education to meet the needs of the economy. *(AQT 1684/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I believe that we have the flexibility. We need to ensure that we get the best from that flexibility and that there is greater coordination between business and schools in the future. I regularly engage with the business sector, as it does with me. In fairness to that sector, it is very proactive in this matter and in how it relates to the role of education under my remit to the economy and the needs of businesses. That engagement is ongoing. I encourage businesses to get involved with local schools and schools to become involved with local businesses.

Minister Farry and I have launched a review of the Careers Service. Part of its role must be to look at the relationship between schools and businesses in their communities; the understanding of teachers, parents and pupils of the needs of the economy as we move forward; and the range of new careers that has developed over the last 10 years and careers that will develop in the next 10 years. The Careers Service must do that to ensure that the educational pathways chosen by young people allow them to be flexible and adaptable to the new economy, which is developing all the time.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. He will know that, in the draft Budget, he is scheduled to lose a significant proportion of money. Does he have any ideological opposition to English-style academies in Northern Ireland? In addition to his earlier reply, they could receive support financially or in kind from personal donors or corporate sponsors. Does he have any objection to that?

Mr O'Dowd: My ideological opposition is not based on the fact that they are English. Let us start there, OK? My ideological opposition to them is the fact that they are a further level of exclusive schools rather than inclusive schools. We have enough schools that exclude pupils in this society without creating another brand to exclude young people. Our curriculum allows all our schools to engage and be proactive with the business sector and the economy, so let us develop that instead of going into academies, as have been provided in parts of England. They have had very mixed reports on their performance.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Tom Elliott is not in his place.

Schools: Holywood New Builds

T6. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Holywood school project, involving Holywood Nursery School, Priory College and Holywood Primary School, with which he is very familiar, and to give an indication as to when there might be a new build for at least one of the schools. *(AQT 1686/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the case; the Member has raised it with me repeatedly. A number of things have to take place before we move towards the start of construction or the announcement of construction in relation to the Holywood schools. There has to be a realisation that Priory College is a sustainable school. That box is now ticked; it is accepted. I have always said that it is not a case of whether it needs a new build; it does.

The next phase is that I have to identify the money to build new schools. I have used the limited resources available to me thus far. I am facing a £50 million cut to my capital budget next year. I accept that there are very tight constraints on all Departments, but I will be concentrating on that with the Finance Minister in the weeks ahead to see whether there is any flexibility around the capital budget to allow me to invest in more schools. When I finalise my capital budget, I will make a further announcement about a new school build programme in the future. It will not be until that stage that I will be able to decide whether all three schools or one in Holywood will be on that list.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his comments. He has partially answered this, but does he recognise the real need for capital investment in the town of Holywood? We have three schools, all of which are over 50 years of age and are in poor condition. We urgently need capital investment.

Mr O'Dowd: I do recognise the need for capital investment in the Holywood area. As I said, the first part of that process was identifying and agreeing that Priory College was a sustainable school. It is, and we need to provide it with new accommodation. That has a ripple effect on the other schools. I do not wish to sound repetitive, and I do not raise the issue just for the sake of raising it, but my capital budget next year faces a significant challenge. I am going to engage with the Finance Minister in relation to that matter to see what options we have to increase that capital budget, or whether there are other funding mechanisms that we can use in relation to the schools estate. Once I know the final outcome of those discussions, I will then make a decision on what, if any, new schools I can build in the foreseeable future that I have not already announced.

Schools: Parkhall Rebuild

T8. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Education for a progress report on the rebuild programme at the Parkhall school. *(AQT 1688/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the full details in front of me, but it is progressing. There has been engagement between the relevant authorities and my Department in relation to moving to the various stages of design etc around the school. I will provide the Member with a full written answer as regards that matter to give him an update as to where the building programme for Parkhall rests.

Mr Girvan: The reason I am bringing the issue forward is that there is concern about some of the moneys for the project and ensuring that they have been ring-fenced. There is concern that, under the current pressures, it might disappear into the black hole that seems to exist in the Department of Education.

Mr O'Dowd: I will ignore that last remark.

As I said, we are in constrained financial times, and why we are in this position was well rehearsed in the House yesterday. I have to make decisions in the weeks ahead about my capital budget and my resource budget. I am of the view that I have eight weeks to negotiate with and harry the Finance Minister and other Ministers, and I intend to use that time very usefully. So, no final decisions have been made about anything yet.

Parkhall is working its way through the process towards the commencement of a new build, and I will give the Member a written update on that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Barry McElduff is not in his place.

St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen: New Build

T10. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen. *(AQT 1690/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: St Joseph's, Crossmaglen, is in the very early stages of the new build programme. I announced the new build in June, if my memory serves me correctly, so it is in the early stages of development. My departmental officials will be engaging with the relevant authority to move that project forward.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he face any financial issues arising from the current economic crisis that might halt or delay that project? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: As I outlined repeatedly during this Question Time, I, along with those in other Departments, face significant financial pressures moving into the 2015-16 financial year. I am not in a position to answer the Member's question either affirmatively or negatively.

I am still engaged with my officials on my budget, and I will be engaging with the Finance Minister and other Ministers on the draft Budget and progressing our way through the next eight weeks. I will be discussing, particularly with the Finance Minister, a range of announcements that were made as part of the Budget speech yesterday to see whether there are other ways of funding the school building programmes going into the future. So, I have a number of options that I wish to explore.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The next period of Question Time is not due to commence until 2.45 pm, so I ask you to take your ease for a few minutes.

2.45 pm

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): We will resume Question Time. It is now time for questions to the Minister for Employment and Learning.

Apprenticeships: South Antrim

1. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many young people in South Antrim are undertaking apprenticeships through the Skills to Succeed programme. *(AQO 6954/11-15)*

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The most recent published statistics show that, as of 30 April 2014, 481 employed apprentices in the South Antrim constituency are being funded through my Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme to undertake the off-the-job training element of their apprenticeship. Of those, 250 are targeted to achieve level 2 qualifications, and 231 are targeted to achieve level 3 qualifications. Apprenticeship qualifications are outlined in apprenticeship frameworks for each occupational area. The age distribution is as follows: 192 are between 16 and 19 years old; 222 are between 20 and 24 years old; and 67 are aged 25 or older. The Member will be aware that I published a new strategy for apprenticeships, 'Securing our Success', in June 2014. It outlines a significant new approach to apprenticeships to be introduced in Northern Ireland between now and 2016. It will be central to transforming the skills landscape in Northern Ireland and securing our economic success. Evidence shows that apprenticeships provide an excellent means by which employers can obtain the skills they require, as well as being assured that there is a critical mass of people with strong technical and employability skills across the economy. Apprentices know that they are getting the skills that are required by employers and are relevant to the economy, both now and in the future.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his very full answer. Does he believe that enough is being done to promote on-the-job training for young people exiting the formal education system?

Dr Farry: The Member is right that Northern Ireland is starting from a relatively small base on apprenticeships, which somewhat goes against what people view as the industrial heritage of Northern Ireland. However, the new strategy is set to change the landscape dramatically. Key interventions include a new advisory forum to look at the system as a whole that will include employers and other key stakeholders and a range of sectoral partnerships that will try to drive apprenticeships in particular sectors, including drawing attention to opportunities for employers. We are working on five potential new sectoral partnerships. Hopefully, there will be more announcements on that in the very near future. Critically, for the first time in Northern Ireland, we are also looking to introduce a central service that will act as a brokerage for employers and potential young apprentices so that we can have a more efficient matching of supply and demand. A lot can be done outside the structures, whether by MLAs or other opinion formers, to highlight the importance of the apprenticeship pathway as a strong alternative to the more traditional academic pathways that people are perhaps more familiar with.

Mr Kinahan: Is the Department involved in studies of the number of pupils in Antrim moving to higher skills and apprenticeship training and having to travel from their schools to Newtownabbey and Belfast? Is the Department looking at how we can do it better in Antrim so that all the schools work with the technical colleges, and, maybe one day, we can get everything back into Antrim?

Dr Farry: I am certainly keen to ensure that we develop the capacity around apprenticeships and vocational training not just in Antrim but in every quarter and corner of Northern Ireland. With reference to South Antrim, there is a critical mass of good employers who are interested in apprenticeships and are already engaged. However, there will be times when people move to other parts of Northern Ireland for work opportunities, and that also applies to apprenticeships. It is important that we encourage labour mobility and recognise that it is part and parcel of the modern world of work. That is matched, of course, by ensuring that we do what we can to invest in local capacity. I can certainly write to the Member and give him any information that we have on the inflow and outflow of apprentices. However, I would not describe the situation as unhealthy. As long as we are providing the right opportunities and getting the right level of engagement from employers and young people in Northern Ireland as a whole, we should be pleased.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Questions 2, 4 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Steps 2 Success: Subcontracts

3. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many jobs will be transferred from the Steps to Work contractors to the subcontracts awarded on the Steps 2 Success programme. *(AQO 6956/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The transfer of contracted staff engaged in the delivery of the Steps to Work programme to the subcontractors involved in the delivery of Steps 2 Success is a matter for the respective organisations. The transfer process is subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, known as TUPE, which is a defined legal procedure. The Department is not directly involved in the process.

Mr McKinney: Nonetheless, I am trying to obtain some information. Can you outline how many of the most successful contractors and subcontractors under Steps to Work will be in the supply chain under Steps 2 Success?

Dr Farry: I am happy to provide that information to the Member. It is quite detailed. All the information is on the Department's website, but I will also make sure that my officials write to him to give him the full details.

The headlines are that we have the three main contractors, which are Ingeus for the Belfast region, EOS for the northern region and Reed in Partnership for the southern region. Given that the Member is a Belfast MLA , I will give him the supply chain specifically for Belfast: we have Armstrong Learning NI, People 1st, Springfield Learning, SES Consortium and Addiction NI.

Mr Nesbitt: To continue the theme, what is the Minister, as a Northern Ireland Minister in a Northern Ireland Executive that puts the Northern Ireland economy first, doing to maximise Northern Ireland job creation out of the scheme?

Dr Farry: The scheme is designed to assist us with employability in our labour market and is therefore part of a much wider landscape of what my Department offers to support job creation and ensure that we have a strong skills pipeline. Already, we have had discussion around apprenticeships, for example, and we have a new strategy in place. We will shortly make a statement on a new system of youth training that will complement

apprenticeships. We have our more established routes through universities and further education colleges, albeit that there is a question mark over the scale of the future offer in the light of the budget restrictions.

A number of our other programmes are about how we can re-engage people with the labour market, including people who are economically inactive or, in the case of Steps 2 Success, those who are long-term unemployed. We have designed the programme specifically for Northern Ireland. We have not simply copied the work programme from Great Britain. Indeed, I hope that we will do things better here and have a stronger track record of placing people into sustainable employment, which is what this is ultimately about.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will be aware that I am not exactly a fan of the scheme. Given that the first thing that it has done is put a significant number of people on the dole, is there anything to stop those people from applying for a programme through the Steps 2 Success scheme?

Dr Farry: I think that the Member is being somewhat flippant in making that comment. I ask him this question: if he is dissatisfied with the current programme, what is his alternative? I will be charitable and assume that the Member wants to assist people —

Mr Flanagan: It is questions to the Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Dr Farry: — who are long-term unemployed into employment. We seek to build on the track record of Steps to Work with a new and improved programme through which we get a better return on employment.

As I said, TUPE will be applied in the shift between contracts. That has still to fully work out, but there is a protection of employment that is integral to it all. I do not recognise the comment that the Member makes about vast numbers of people being made unemployed on the back of the switch between programmes.

JTI Gallaher

5. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to secure funds under the European globalisation adjustment fund for the employees affected by the closure of the JTI Gallaher factory in Ballymena. *(AQO 6958/11-15)*

Dr Farry: JTI is currently engaged in a consultation process with the trade union and staff to discuss the potential closure of its factory in Lisnafillan, Ballymena. I have met representatives from JTI Gallaher to discuss the recent announcement and ways in which my Department could assist.

The European globalisation adjustment fund supports workers made redundant as a result of major structural changes in world trade patterns due to globalisation and global financial and economic crises. My officials have been in contact with the European Commission office in Belfast and the Commission in Brussels to discuss the potential for an application to be made to the fund. All applications must be agreed by the member state Government. Therefore, my Department has also initiated discussions with relevant officials in the Department for Work and Pensions. My Department will continue to liaise with the Commission and the UK Government.

Regardless of the success of any bid to the European globalisation adjustment fund, my Department will provide a range of services, if required, through the redundancy advice service, the Careers Service, Bridge to Employment and the further education sector, particularly the Northern Regional College. I will ensure that my Department does everything it can to assist those affected by the recent announcement and will continue to work with the company throughout the process.

Mr McKay: I thank the Minister for his answer. Obviously, it will depend on the outcome of the talks between the employees and Gallaher's. Following on from that, €6 million was drawn down from the fund by Austria, for example, but we are dependent on the Westminster Government being positive about the application, should it be forthcoming. Will the Minister outline how positive the British Government have been about the fund? They have not drawn down any of that funding before.

What discussions have he and the Enterprise Minister had with other manufacturing companies in the wider area about the possible relocation of those jobs?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I will allow the Minister to choose which question he wants to answer. Members should remember that they are allowed to ask a question.

Dr Farry: The Member packed a lot in. I will try to cover a number of the points that were made. It is a serious issue and deserves as full an explanation as possible.

On the Member's last point, I chair a manufacturing and engineering working group. The last meeting of that group was at Caterpillar in Larne, and we highlighted the potential opportunities that would be available in the wider sector.

On his first point, it is worth stressing the point that we are in a consultation period, so final decisions have yet to be taken about what will happen. Secondly, the timescale of any redundancies will be around 18 months, and production needs to continue in the factory. Indeed, if anything, production may intensify over the coming months, as the factory seeks to maximise its production under the current regulatory framework.

The Member is quite right that the UK Government have never supported an application to the fund, but there is always a first time, and we will strongly make the case if it is appropriate. One of the key determinants is whether there will be a net loss of jobs in the European Union. In a context in which jobs in Ballymena were relocated elsewhere in the European Union, there would be no net loss jobs in the EU, so those jobs would not be eligible for support from the fund. However, there is the potential to make an application on the basis of the net loss of jobs combined with the loss of jobs in the supply chain. I have raised the issue with the Executive, and there is cross-party support for the work that is being done with DWP and the Commission to prepare the ground for a bid, which can only be made in the teeth of the actual redundancies.

Mr Swann: The Minister referred to the 18-month timeline for the factory closure. Will he assure the House and the workers that he and his Department will still be there in 18 months' time to ensure that the workers are upskilled and retrained and will not just disappear into the night once the glare of the PR and the cameras goes?

Dr Farry: Given our political situation, I cannot perhaps give a personal guarantee of that. However, it will be a priority for as long as I am in post, and I am sure that that would apply to any successor in my Department in any context. It is fair to say that the issue is a concern across all the political parties, and there is consensus on the range of steps that we need to take.

I have met representatives of the unions and the management of the factory. We have to respect the fact that a consultation is under way, and we do not wish to interfere with production in the factory. We can, however, undertake advanced planning around some of the retraining programmes, and that is where the Northern Regional College will come into its own as a key delivery partner. We can also prepare the groundwork for any bid to the European Commission and potentially have something in draft form that is unofficially cleared in advance of a formal application. Again, that could only technically be made in the context of the redundancies becoming live.

3.00 pm

Mr Dallat: I am trying to get my head round all of this. The Minister tells us that production might well increase over the next couple of years. What protection is given to workers who want to leave early and avail themselves of their redundancy payments and so on? Has the Minister got assurances from JTI that it will be flexible and will afford every opportunity to those employees to leave early, if they so wish, if another job is available, and that they will not lose the perks they have worked hard for over the years?

Dr Farry: We need to be fair to the company in this regard and recognise that they did not have to make these announcements in the timescale in which they did. At present, the law in Northern Ireland dictates a 90-day consultation in relation to redundancy of this size. So, in theory, they could have waited until the start of 2016 to make it public. The fact that they have moved early allows us to engage in a lot of planning around the situation, and that gives us vital breathing space.

The last thing we want to do is undermine the current business model of the factory. Again, I stress the fact that we are still in the consultation period, and no final decisions have been taken in this regard. We need to be careful about assuming that things are a done deal. There is a formal process around redundancy, and that is a process that has to be respected in this situation, but I think the fact that good warning has been given is to the advantage of workers and government as we consider how we can best address the issue with proper long-term planning.

Living Wage

6. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on the introduction of a living wage. *(AQO 6959/11-15)*

Dr Farry: My Department does not have policy responsibility for matters relating to the introduction of the living wage and has not held any discussions with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on the issue.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I understand that Belfast City Council recently passed a motion on implementing a living wage. Given that this is Living Wage Week, and given that we live in a low-pay economy, can the Minister assure us that he will take up the mantle of pushing for a living wage for low-paid workers?

Dr Farry: I am prepared to say this to the Member: I am happy to encourage any employer to pay the living wage on a voluntary basis. I think that all of us want to see people getting as much money in their pockets as they possibly can. However, I think that we need to be somewhat cautious around a degree of compulsion or making something like this mandatory. The best way to drive up wage levels within an economy is to invest in skills and, on the back of that, to achieve a gain in productivity. That will lead to a natural increase in wage levels. If you artificially set the bar in that regard at too high a level, there is the potential that you will undermine jobs, that jobs will be removed from the economy and that more people will end up in unemployment. So, it is important that we approach this in a responsible and balanced manner. That is why I stressed the voluntary adherence to what the Living Wage Commission is saying, based upon the particular characteristics of businesses.

We need to bear in mind that a large number of people in Northern Ireland earn below the living wage threshold. On the one hand, people may say that that is a very clear example as to why we have to stress the importance of people being paid the living wage. Equally, it exposes that there may well be a danger if we move too far too fast within the structure of our economy at present. That is why I urge a degree of caution in the matter.

I am also mindful that we have a large number of employment programmes through which we pay subsidies to employers to take on people who are unemployed or who, potentially, will be economically inactive. Again, if we are setting mandatory levels in excess of the market rate in that regard, we may end up in a situation where our ability to move people from unemployment into sustained employment is compromised. That is another factor that we have to take into consideration.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Chris Hazzard is not in his place.

Skills Shortages

8. **Mr Wilson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how skill shortages are hampering growth in Northern Ireland. *(AQO 6961/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The latest employer skills survey, from 2013, reported that Northern Ireland had the lowest level of skill shortage vacancies across the UK. The report found that approximately 20% of all vacancies that Northern Ireland employers found hard to fill were, in part, due to skills shortages. While that was the lowest level reported, it still had an impact on employers' ability to run their business. As detailed in our skills strategy, my Department has a clear mission to address those skills issues through ensuring that the supply of skills matches demand from industry. Our skills solutions advisers have a key role in engaging directly with employers to understand and address their skill needs.

Furthermore, I have worked with employers to establish a number of working groups across key sectors — including

ICT, advanced engineering and manufacturing, and food and drink processing — to address particular skill needs in sectors. We have also developed a new programme of apprenticeships, and we are currently exploring a new system of youth training. We are also engaging the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy to develop a skills barometer, which will provide useful information to identify where skills development will be required in the future.

Mr Wilson: Does the Minister share my alarm that some sectors are reporting that up to 40% of firms are indicating that growth potential is being hampered because of skill shortages, especially in the engineering sector? Given that this is engineering week, what action has he taken, along with DETI and employers, to get employers to go into schools, colleges and universities to change the perception that many young people have of the opportunities that exist in the engineering industry?

Dr Farry: I will respond to the Member in two respects. First of all, very specifically, I chair, as I have mentioned, a working group on engineering and advanced manufacturing, which brings together colleges, universities, Departments and a range of employers. We have an action plan in place, and a number of the actions that the Member has identified are contained in that action plan. That is something that we review and refresh on a six-monthly basis. More generally, the Member will also be aware that Brian Ambrose has chaired an expert panel that was appointed by me and John O'Dowd to take forward a review of careers policy. We have now received that report and are studying it. Again, whether we are talking about the engineering sector or other key sectors in the economy, hopefully, the recommendations of that report will go a long way to ensure that we lay the platform and foundation for a much better matching of supply and demand within our economy.

Mr Ramsey: Following on from Mr Wilson's question, I recently visited a very successful jobs fair in the Millennium Forum in the city, and it was clear that a number of companies were experiencing difficulties securing skills from people in the city. What discussions has the Minister had with Invest Northern Ireland? What are the outcomes of job fairs in respect of preparing and looking at lessons learned?

Dr Farry: Jobs fairs are an effective tool to match those who are looking for work with those who have vacancies. Just to put this in context, at the most recent jobs fair that we hosted in Belfast, we had potentially around 1,500 vacancies available. Several thousand people were coming through the doors, and people were actually leaving with job offers or potential formal interviews for jobs. So it is producing results in that context.

Beyond that, the Member was also alluding to wider strategic discussions that we can have around issues, and he mentioned Invest Northern Ireland. My Department runs a programme called Assured Skills, which works alongside Invest NI to attract inward investment and also works with local companies. We put in place very bespoke programmes to move from what is a very good generally trained population to ensure that we are investing in the very particular skills that companies require. The Member will be familiar with a number of academies and areas — such as software testing, cloud computing and data analytics, and, most recently, this week, around sales and export — that we have put in place to address some of the very particular requirements and demands that are being voiced to us by industry.

Ms Lo: Can the Minister give an assessment on how the budget cut for next year for his Department may affect his efforts in skills training in order to meet the skills shortage in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. We have heard a lot of commentary around the importance of job creation. It is important that I stress that job creation comes in a number of different ways. At its base has to be a strong skills base in Northern Ireland. That is how we go out and sell Northern Ireland internationally to potential inward investors. It is how we ensure that our local companies are able to grow. There is an ongoing challenge of ensuring that we match supply and demand, which is at the heart of the original question, and ensuring that we are investing in the most relevant areas for the businesses of the future. However, I have some very real concerns, on the back of the recently announced draft Budget, that the inevitable cuts in higher and further education will remove places, which will not only undermine the life opportunities of young people but corrode our economic base.

At a time when we are emerging, at long last, from a very difficult and deep recession, and when we have the potential to grow our economy through levers such as the lower level of corporation tax, we will not be able to fully maximise the opportunities if we do not have a proper skills base. Potentially, we are looking at a situation in which Northern Ireland is the only part of the Western World where the number of university places is going backwards. I do not think that that is a place where any of us wants to be.

Public Appointments: Diversity

9. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his appointments ensure diversity on the boards of public bodies. *(AQO 6962/11-15)*

Dr Farry: I share the aspiration of John Keanie, the Commissioner for Public Appointments, for greater diversity on the boards of our public bodies. It is concerning that many seem to think that public appointments are not for them. Unless a board fully reflects the breadth of knowledge, skills and experience in the wider community, its full potential and effectiveness may not be realised.

Public appointments in my Department are decided on the basis of a robust, merit-based system, which complies with the commissioner's code of practice and aims to identify the best person for the job. However, there is scope to continue to improve diversity through effective awareness-raising of what public appointments are and how individuals can apply, and by ensuring that the process is accessible.

My officials have taken various steps to enhance diversity, such as using social media to publicise competitions, engaging with diversity bodies, and clarifying and streamlining the application process. This has had some success: for example, recent competitions attracted twice as many applicants as previously, and the pools of applicants were more diverse. However, more can be done.

My officials are compiling information on best practice throughout these islands with a view to identifying new ways to broaden interest in public appointments. They are also working with Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)

colleagues on taking forward the recommendations in John Keanie's diversity report, published earlier this year.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I appreciate the answer given by the Minister, but only 464 of a total of 1,400 public appointments across the board in the North are women. In that context, would he consider looking at ways outside the box to assure that diversity is actually the case, rather than just paying lip service?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for the question, and I share the aspiration and objective that she outlined. Ultimately, appointments have to be based on merit, which is at the core of the code. Gender, like other factors, cannot be taken into consideration in the final merit-based decisions. The key probably lies in ensuring that we have as representative a pool as possible, which means maximising applications from women and other underrepresented sections of society. I am pleased that we have seen an increase in applications in my Department and that some of the different ways of promoting this are having an effect. Obviously, more can be done, and I am always happy to learn lessons in that regard. I have asked my officials to keep working on the matter. We will, no doubt, share across Departments any best practice and lessons that we pick up along the way.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mar a dúradh ansin, is annamh a cheaptar mná ar na boird seo. Lena chois sin, is annamh a cheaptar daoine míchumasacha, nó daoine faoi 30 bliain d'aois, nó daoine ó mhionlaigh eitneacha ar na boird stáit. An ndéanfaidh an tAire cinnte de nach mar sin a bheas le linn dó bheith ina Aire? Women, as mentioned earlier, people under 30, people with a disability and those from ethnic minorities are rarely appointed to boards. Will the Minister ensure that changes are made under his watch?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask the Minister to make a brief response.

Dr Farry: Yes.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you. *[Laughter.]*

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That is the end of our time for listed questions; we now move on to topical questions. Questions 5 and 6 have been withdrawn.

Employment: Cross-border Cooperation

T1. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what work his Department carries out with agencies in the rest of Ireland to improve employment opportunities for people along the border corridor. *(AQT 1691/11-15)*

Dr Farry: We are developing, as the Member will know, a number of programmes, in particular new strategies on apprenticeships and youth training. My officials and their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland have had discussions on those and, in particular, on issues around mobility. The Member will also be aware that, in Northern Ireland, we provide a large number of further education places for students from the Republic of Ireland. I have to say that the direction of travel is very much one way. The net cost to the public purse in Northern Ireland is in excess of £7 million, and this is becoming a major drain on our public resources, particularly at a time when finances are so challenging. I would say that, from our perspective, we are doing a lot to facilitate cooperation on both sides of the border on training programmes, but, in our residents moving in the other direction, that is not necessarily reciprocated in the level of offer on the southern side of the border.

Ms Fearon: I thank the Minister for his answer. Obviously, it is hugely important that we focus on developing the border region, given that there are higher levels of job losses, higher migration and more barriers to trade. Would the Minister be willing to engage, at some point, with representatives of the steering group behind the border development zone to explore ways in which his Department can support that concept?

Dr Farry: Yes. If the group wishes to contact my private office and ask for a meeting, I have no doubt that one would be granted.

Budget Cuts: DEL Impact

T2. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what impact the cuts in the 2015-16 Budget will have on his Department, given the failure of the DUP and Sinn Féin to address the Budget inadequacies over the last four years. *(AQT 1692/11-15)*

Dr Farry: As the Member will know, the published cut for my Department is 10·8% for the 2015-16 financial year. This does not, of course, take into account changes in prices, so the real-terms cut will be in excess of that. We also have to bear in mind that what happens in one year cannot be viewed in isolation from other Budget phases. In particular, when we are investing in training places or university places, where there has to be a commitment over more than one academic or training year, we need to have a much greater degree of certainty in that respect.

I have already alluded to the fact that skills are the foundation of a strong economy, and that is true in Northern Ireland as much as anywhere else. Perhaps it is even more true here because we have to transform our skills base to ensure that we will be truly competitive globally. A lot has been done in that regard over the past number of years. There are now some very real question marks over the scale at which we can continue to invest, particularly in university and further education places. That means that some young people may be denied opportunities to invest in their skills and their future. It also means that local companies and, indeed, potential investors may be denied the opportunity to get the skills that they require, and we may not see some businesses grow or some businesses come to Northern Ireland as a consequence.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. Given the shocking information that you have given us about the inability to invest in young people's futures and job prospects, what steps will you take to mitigate the impact of that for as many young people as possible?

Dr Farry: First, we have to be conscious that the draft Budget is out for public consultation. Concerns that I may voice about my Department are not about special pleading for my own point of view and the services that I provide. There is a whole host of other Budget issues that we have to reflect upon, and they will be reflected, no doubt, in the responses that will be received from stakeholders.

Looking inwards as well, I will seek to act as strategically as possible, which means trying to protect, first and foremost, those areas that are most relevant to the economy, as well as looking to those services that we provide to those who are most vulnerable. However, in the context that we face, trying to achieve those objectives is going to be incredibly difficult.

I also think that there is a very deep, fundamental lesson in all this. Part of the reason why we are in this difficulty is a failure to face up to the need to accept welfare reform. There is no point in simply investing in transfer payments to people so that they have an adequate standard of living through benefits; that is something that we all share. However, unless we invest in training programmes that allow people to invest in their skills and to have the opportunity to secure a job, in effect, we are condemning them to a life on welfare, rather than giving them the opportunities to play a fuller role in realising their aspirations in our society. So, I think that we are missing the much bigger picture in the way that we approach this.

Northern Regional College: Magherafelt Campus

T3. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given his answer to the previous question, whether he can update the House on any plans, if any exist, for the Magherafelt campus of the Northern Regional College. *(AQT 1693/11-15)*

Dr Farry: At this stage, there are no immediate plans for the Magherafelt campus of the Northern Regional College. We are awaiting a business case on some capital redevelopment, and there are probably three issues at stake. The first is the future of the campus in Larne and what happens there; the issue is not whether one is there or not, just in case the Member for East Antrim is getting agitated. The second issue is the future provision for Ballymena, and the third is the future provision for the north coast, where we have existing campuses at Ballymoney and Coleraine. That has been a matter of considerable interest for a number of his colleagues in their respective constituencies. Hopefully, that business case will be with us in January 2015, and we will take decisions on the way forward as soon as we can afterwards.

Mr I McCrea: I will let the Members in the other constituencies deal with their own, as no doubt they will. I think that the Minister is confirming that the Magherafelt campus is not under any immediate threat, and I would be happy if he could clarify that again. Given that it provides an excellent service not just to those who are part of the FE sector but in the work that it does in conjunction with local schools, will the Minister at least clarify that it is not under threat and that there are no proposals in that regard?

Dr Farry: I am more than happy to give the Member all the assurances that he needs that there is no question mark hanging over the Magherafelt campus.

FE Courses: Rural Areas

T4. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the strategy he is using to attract people from rural areas to avail themselves of further education college courses. *(AQT 1694/11-15)*

Dr Farry: Building on the question from his colleague a few minutes ago, the Member will be aware that we have a large number of campuses distributed across Northern Ireland. In some respects, further education is better placed to engage with what, compared with other parts of Northern Ireland, can be a very rural population. It is ultimately for the FE colleges to market their courses. However, I would draw the Member's attention to this: in our higher education strategy, we are looking to see how we can place some outposts of our universities in the FE sector, and we are looking to develop a number of pilots on that. Hopefully, there will be some clarity on that over the coming months.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that, by promoting the gaining of qualifications, we are increasing the employability of people from all areas, urban and rural, and from all age groups?

Dr Farry: Absolutely. The Member will also be aware that Northern Ireland comes from quite a low skills base. Historically, we have had some people at the very top of the skills ladder who do extremely well, but we have also had a lot of people with either low or no qualifications. I have no doubt that that is perhaps more acute in some rural areas than elsewhere in Northern Ireland. So, the Member's message about investing in skills is crucial. As we look to the future, more and more jobs will require a footprint with higher-level skills. We are projecting, for example, that, by 2020, almost half of those in employment will need to be skilled to level 4 or above. Those at level 2 or above are well in excess of 80% of the population, and we need that level of skill. By contrast, the opportunities for those with either level 1 or no qualifications will be less than 10%. At present, about 20% of jobs are filled by people with that type of background. Over the coming years, there will be a much diminishing range of opportunities for people with low skills or no qualifications. It is important to get that message out.

South West College: Budget Cuts

T7. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has received representations from, or is in discussion with, the South West College, which is one of the largest employers in the Tyrone and Fermanagh region and has fears that cuts will disable it from continuing to deliver first-class education and training, especially as local further education colleges in the Mid Ulster constituency are very concerned about how the budget cuts will impact on them. *(AQT 1697/11-15)*

Dr Farry: We are always in discussion with our further education colleges, particularly the principals and chief executives. Those discussions have been had and will continue. While perhaps I was able to give reassurance to Mr McCrea about campuses on the capital front, equally, I have to be very blunt with the Member and say that we are looking at a very precarious situation in further education, whereby the full current offer will have huge difficulties in being maintained, and all colleges will be facing up to what may be some very difficult decisions over the coming months. That is the simple reality that we find ourselves in when we are faced with the potential budget cut in excess of 10%.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his response. Given that the South West College delivers higher education

locally to 1,600 students in partnership with Queen's University, does he anticipate that such further education colleges might be given the resources to increase their capability in the face of cuts to university places in order to maintain and improve the skill set of people in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I will build on the answers that I gave to my colleague Mr Dickson and to Mr Robinson a few moments ago. We are very mindful of the need to focus on the provision of higher-level skills in our economy, and that includes academic and vocational skills. I am also very mindful of the need to act strategically in the way in which we address quite severe cutbacks. In that respect, I have no doubt that the FE colleges will want to focus on the areas that are most relevant to the needs of the economy generally and also to their local subregional areas. Higher education within further education is a key component of what the colleges offer, and I have no doubt that, while no area can be immune from the cutbacks, people will want priority to be given to that area strategically.

St Mary's University College

T8. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he will tell St Mary's University College to waken up and realise that we cannot have a split teacher training system that feeds inequality, especially in light of the budgetary pressures facing him, which he has explained to the House. *(AQT 1698/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The Member may have missed quite a lot of the things that I have been saying over the past number of years about the teacher training infrastructure in Northern Ireland. We have commissioned a two-stage review. The first stage outlined the financial implications of our fragmented system, and the crux is that we are spending more on training teachers in Northern Ireland than on training engineers. We have too many teachers but not enough engineers, so something is not quite right. We have now completed the second stage of that review, which maps out the options on the way forward, and we are in discussions with providers about the different models. Those discussions are still under way, and I expect robust and challenging comments to be made to all the providers in those meetings. Indeed, that has happened.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Childcare Payments Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Childcare Payments Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]*

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I start by saying a sincere word of thanks to Mr Nesbitt, the Chairman of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Stephen Moutray, Mr Brady, Mr Attwood, Mr Lyttle and Ms Bronwyn McGahan for their contribution to the debate.

Given the impact that the Childcare Payments Bill can have on working families, I am not surprised by the interest shown by Members. Indeed, it reflects the scrutiny that was given to this by the OFMDFM Committee when the legislative consent motion was in Committee. From listening to what everybody said, it is fairly safe to say that the vast majority of the Members who spoke agree that more needs to be done to support families with childcare costs. The Bill will make a valuable contribution to enabling more working parents to access financial support to help with their childcare costs. Some Members raised concerns about the specifics of the new tax-free childcare scheme and on the way in which it will be implemented. I will do my best to respond to each of the points raised.

I welcome the positive comments that the Chairman of the OFMDFM Committee made. It was a very difficult, tight time frame for all of us, and I think that we tried, formally and informally, to get through it as best we could. I am aware that the Committee expressed its disappointment that it was not consulted earlier about the tax-free childcare scheme, so let me try to explain why. Her Majesty's Treasury launched the public consultation on the coalition Government's plans to introduce tax-free childcare in August 2013. The consultation document sought views on the design and operation of the proposed new tax-free childcare scheme. Immediately prior to that launch, the relevant UK Minister wrote to alert the Northern Ireland Administration to the fact that the Government would be publishing a consultation document on tax-free childcare. The letter stated that tax-free childcare was a reserved matter and, as such, would be delivered by the UK Government on a UK-wide basis. It did, however, welcome contributions from officials during the consultation period. At that point, the issue was not a devolved matter, just as the employer-supported childcare scheme is not a devolved matter.

In early 2014, devolved officials were approached by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs about the need for a legislative consent motion to implement tax-free childcare here. That communication indicated that the Home Office legal advisers branch and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs legal advisers were both of the view that the tax-free childcare scheme may be within the competence of

the Northern Ireland Assembly. Officials took legal advice from the Departmental Solicitor's Office, which confirmed that the proposed tax-free childcare scheme did not fall within the excepted fields, as provided by schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That was communicated to OFMDFM Ministers on 18 March 2014. Therefore, when it became clear that tax-free childcare was neither a tax nor a duty and was thus a transferred matter, the OFMDFM Committee was engaged after OFMDFM Ministers and the Executive agreed to promote a legislative consent motion on the matter.

I appreciate the concern that the Committee had, as elucidated by its Chairman, Mr Nesbitt, on the potential for disadvantage. Currently, if we take some of the information that we got from Employers For Childcare — I share in the compliments paid on the excellent work that it and the other groups have done — we are looking at around 1,000 people a year being recruited under what would have been the old scheme. We understand from the Treasury that, under the new scheme, 80% of people will be better off, which, potentially, if we take into account the 1,000, leaves us with a figure in the region of 200 people who may be worse off.

The point was raised also about children over 12 years of age. The research that I have noted, by RSM McClure Watters, indicates that only around 6·5% of childcare providers provide for children who are over 12. Many of those are for disabled children and, as I have taken pains to point out, disabled children up to age 17 are included in the new scheme.

I appreciate the work that Mickey Brady has done. He spoke to me formally in the Chamber and indicated his concern that childcare providers should be registered. It is the case that, under the new scheme, people can go to whomever they wish, but the childcare provider must be registered. I appreciate that there is a concern for child safety. Family members also need to be registered, and they can do so as a childminder within their own home. My response to Mr Brady is that tax-free childcare will support parents with the cost of childcare that is formally registered or approved, and that can include childcare provided by nurseries, playschemes, childminders, nannies and school-based childcare. The providers will be registered with the health and social care trusts or approved under the home childcare providers scheme.

I will respond to some of the comments that were made by Mr Attwood. The intention is that the childcare strategy will be a flexible, living document, able to take into account the findings that we constantly get, even if the strategy has been published. We are trying to ascertain as quickly as possible who will be disadvantaged. We want to check whether, where people are disadvantaged, they can be helped by some or other of the key actions. We started with 15 Bright Start key actions. We want to see whether they can fit in with or be a match for the people who are potentially going to be disadvantaged — the 20%. We will try to ascertain that as quickly as we can to ensure the best outcome for everyone.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for giving way. I note his comment that he is trying to assess as quickly as possible the number of people who may be disadvantaged by the end of the scheme for new entrants. Can I take it from that that, for example, since you met the Committee informally in relation to this matter, you or your officials have had ongoing contact, conversations and meetings with Employers For Childcare, which, as everybody including you acknowledges, is one of the leading authorities in respect of all this? Since the informal meeting, have you had ongoing, active meetings to assess the level of disadvantage?

Mr Bell: Every day, we are looking at where there are levels of disadvantage and working with groups. I have met Employers For Childcare in the past. We have done functions together with them, and we will certainly do that in the future.

My response to Mr Lyttle is that we need to be clear that OFMDFM did not initially have responsibility for childcare. The childcare vouchers were a UK tax scheme for which we did not have policy responsibility. OFMDFM stepped in. I do not mind constructive criticism, but the constructive part of it is important. If we are to deliver proper childcare into the future for the society that we all live in and that Northern Ireland needs, we want to take a constructive approach to it. OFMDFM effectively stepped into what was a vacuum on the issue, and we have taken the lead on coordinating the strategy. It was a strategy that was not being pursued by others. That is why we stepped in to take this part forward.

As I have said, we understand that, under the old scheme, a number of people were left out. The people who were left out were those whose employer was not part of the scheme and the 1,600 people who are self-employed today. Mr Spratt made the point extremely well, particularly about the construction industry, where people were part of larger companies and are now working on their own very successfully. The good news of today is that we are offering those people something that they never had before — a 20% contribution to their childcare costs that they could not access before. We are offering it to people who were working for employers who did not have it before either.

Mr Spratt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Bell: Yes.

Mr Spratt: I think that the Minister mentioned the figure of 16,000: would that be 116,000, as opposed to 16,000?

Mr Bell: Sorry, yes. I think we had 111,000 five years ago, and today it sits at 116,000. Apologies for that oversight on my part.

We know that 80% will be better off, and we want that to happen. We also know that everybody who is currently on the scheme can stay on the scheme, but it is for the potential people in the future — the 20% — that we will see what we can do to mitigate the effects.

It is now time to make a decision on the matter. The issues have been well aired in the time that has been available to us. The whole House should take a moment to consider what we are actually agreeing to in this legislative consent motion. We are saying to working families here that they will not lose out on valuable support with childcare costs when the employer-supported childcare is closed to new entrants. We are sending out a clear message that working families will not lose out when that is closed.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will he respond to the call for a wholesale public awareness campaign between now and the introduction of the new scheme to ensure that anyone who has not taken up the

childcare voucher scheme is aware of the opportunity to do so?

Mr Bell: That is a very valuable point that Mr Lyttle has made. I will certainly put my shoulder to the wheel, the Office of the First and deputy First Minister will do so, and I will ask all Departments to do exactly the same to ensure that people are aware. The reality is that we will provide childcare for more people and bring more people into the system. I want to emphasise that tax-free childcare will have greater local uptake than the current employer-supported childcare scheme. In addition, the local benefits to parents —

Mr Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Bell: Just a second. The local benefits to parents from the tax-free scheme are expected to exceed the total local benefit to parents under the employer-supported childcare scheme. I give way to Mr Wilson.

Mr Wilson: Thank you for giving way. Will the Minister accept that the main thrust, however, is not what happens between now and when the new measures are in place but, even more importantly, what happens after the new measures are in place? There will still be choices for people to make. For example, people who are coming off benefit and going on to the new tax scheme, with the 25% subsidy that they can get, will have a lot of detailed calculations that they need help with. The emphasis at Westminster appears to be that that is where the real help and the real attention of government should be.

Mr Bell: The Member makes a valuable point. Mr Wilson is in the uniquely valuable position of being able to sit in both Houses and take this legislation through. Mr Wilson is correct that it is about making sure that all working families are aware of the 20% that is available to them after the Bill receives Royal Assent. As I said in my opening remarks, I believe that it is already up and running on the HMRC website that people can put in their details and see, from the level of complexity that is there, how they can benefit and how they can work.

It will give parents information — and remember that this is open to lone parents and couples — as to what they can receive. Also, not just parents but others can pay into the account that is opened and have it topped up 20% to the value of £2,000 per child in any one financial year.

3.45 pm

I re-emphasise what Mr Lyttle said: it is not only us who will want to create an awareness of this — and every MLA will want to put it out in their constituency office and everything else — but primarily it is the job of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to promote its scheme UK-wide. We will certainly try to ensure that it does that.

So, the new scheme will be available to all working families. We want to get out the message that it is not just for those whose employers participate in the scheme, because that is a critical change. The scheme is going to be available to all working families, regardless of whether an employer participates in the scheme. Secondly, as I have said, it is open to parents who are self-employed, and it will take into account family size. I think that the House will want to collectively ensure that working families here are able to access the financial support that is to be made available to working parents in England, Scotland and Wales. I therefore 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 the Childcare Payments Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.*

Private Members' Business

Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014: Prayer of Annulment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Business Committee has agreed to group these five motions into one debate. Following the debate, I will put the question on each of the motions.

Mr McElduff: I beg to move

> *That the Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/230) be annulled.*

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

> *That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*
>
> *That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*
>
> *That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*
>
> *That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. An chéad rud ba mhaith liom a rá go bhfuil mé sásta na cúig rún impí chun neamhniú seo a mholadh. I am pleased to move the five prayer of annulment motions, which essentially seek to annul and pray against statutory rules 2014/230 to 2014/234, inclusive. In essence, Sinn Féin is resolutely opposing any legislation, or enforcement of such legislation, that would introduce and preside over any charge for the use of the road network in the North of Ireland by heavy goods vehicles from the rest of this island. That is, principally, our case set out in one sentence.

However, I will elaborate. I am sure that others in the debate will emphasise a wider European context for the introduction and enforcement of this legislation. They will point to the fact that this levy has come about as a result of a European directive. They may also say that this levy is an excepted matter and that responsibility for its implementation rests with the Department for Transport in Britain. That may be so, but I emphasise that the Assembly is not powerless in this matter, and it is a fact that our Department of the Environment can withhold its consent, because, for this bad law to come into force, the Department of the Environment is required to introduce secondary legislation. It is this secondary legislation that we are praying against today in the Chamber, essentially in order to prevent bad law.

The HGV levy is one of the most regressive taxes ever introduced here. It fails spectacularly to take into account the particular circumstances of the island of Ireland. In the context of all-island trade and North/South cooperation — I gcomhthéacs comhoibriú trasteorann — economic development, business and commerce, this levy is an absolute nonsense as far as the island of Ireland is concerned.

By way of further technical explanation, I should outline that the secondary legislation deals with financial deposits, penalties and powers to require payment when a vehicle is found using a road in the North without having paid the appropriate levy. The Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (NI) 2014 creates the so-called offence of using roads here in the North without having paid the levy. The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2014 refers to the fixed penalty that should be applied to this so-called offence. I say "so-called" because not in my wildest imagination could I contrive a scenario in which a haulier from Donegal drove into and did business in County Tyrone, Fermanagh or Derry being worthy of any such charge or fixed penalty.

The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2014 inserts the amount of £300 for the fixed penalty, while the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2014 and the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2014 constitute further parts of this legislation relating to the amount set for the financial penalty deposit etc. At this point, I want to thank Suzie Cave from the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RalSe). Suzie provided Members with a very helpful briefing note outlining the technical content of these statutory rules.

The Department for Transport (DfT) in Britain is not listening and has not listened. Crucially, this legislation — this bad law — requires the approval of the Assembly. We must not give it. It should not come as a great surprise that the Department for Transport has not listened at any stage of the process. It did not listen to us or to the lobbyists from the north-west and Coleraine about the need to retain Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) jobs there. It did not care a damn about jobs in Coleraine. It is a long distance from the south-east of England to Coleraine, and nowhere was that distance more keenly felt than in the DVA jobs debate.

The DfT did not listen to us. It did not listen to Minister Attwood in his time. It did not listen to what Minister Durkan or Minister Varadkar had to say about this HGV levy. DfT did not listen to any Minister on this island regarding attempts to secure, for example, an exemption for the A5 or any other measure that might mitigate the impact of this levy. In the Chamber, an Ulster Unionist MLA — I think that it was you, Mr Deputy Speaker — described as very reasonable the notion that there could or should be an exemption for the A5. That was never my position; of course there should be an exemption for the A5, but we want an exemption for all roads in the North because of the unique geography of the island of Ireland.

You said yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you felt that seeking an exemption for the A5 was a reasonable objective. However, DfT did not listen to any attempt to secure what some might describe as a fairer and better deal, never mind to objections to the levy in principle. One of the reasons why DfT is not listening and has not listened is that it consistently exhibits no understanding whatsoever of the more complex issues that affect the island of Ireland, which is on the edge of Europe and which has two separate economies and tax regimes — all on a small island with 6·5 million people. Of course, everybody knows that, on the island of Ireland, the economies are intertwined. There is an interdependency, linkages and

relationships that have been built up over decades that can easily be damaged.

No one in this Assembly — not even, I suggest, the most integrationist unionist — can argue that this part of the world is any more than an afterthought for politicians in the south-east of England. British policies are not designed to cater for the needs of the people of the North of Ireland; they are made in Westminster for the benefit of the 97% that constitutes the British economy and not for the 3% in the North of Ireland. This levy is but one example of legislation that has been enacted in Westminster but which is not fit for purpose here.

Members will know that exemptions are being allowed for seven kilometres of the roads network close to Cullaville and Clones, but this has been described in the past, quite accurately, as rather pitiful in the larger scheme of things. The logic of the A5 speaks for itself, given the geographical location and peripherality of County Donegal. Failure to secure any exemption for the A5 has compounded and will compound Donegal's plight. I commend the Minister for his attempts to secure an exemption for the A5, but they fell on deaf ears. I expect consensus on that.

It is a fact — I stand to be corrected — that the only point of exit out of Donegal that does not involve the Six Counties is Ballyshannon bridge. It is also worth noting that the Irish Government have invested and pledged significant funding to the A5 upgrade and to others on the island of Ireland.

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

As an MLA, I was invited to and attended a meeting in Letterkenny in February 2014 on a Sunday afternoon. Although that might not have suited everybody, I went along. At the meeting in the Swilly Group building in Letterkenny, I listened to impassioned arguments from local hauliers. Later that same February, I facilitated, with others, a group of those hauliers and their cross-party elected representatives to meet Minister Durkan in this very Building. I was grateful to the Minister because he responded at short notice, attended and lent an ear to the hauliers who came along that day.

The British Minister responsible for pushing and driving this agenda is Stephen Hammond. He offered up as a point of contact — a conduit for this message — Parliamentary Under-Secretary Robert Goodwill.

Mr Weir: Pause for effect. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McElduff: If ever there was a misnamed official or elected representative — call him what you will — it is Robert Goodwill. Did you ever hear the like of it in your life? When goodwill was called for, all we got was bad will and bad faith. I suggest that Robert Goodwill head off and change his name by deed poll because it does not reflect his contribution to the HGV levy. He showed no goodwill at any stage; it is a total misnomer. He showed no good faith at any stage in the proceedings.

Of course, my main point is perhaps that it is in the gift of the Assembly to withhold consent to this bad law.

I appeal to all parties in the Chamber to unite to prevent this bad law from coming into force. This is not simply about compliance with Westminster; it is about choice. We can reject these proposals and collectively work to ensure that the British Government use their power in the legislation to exempt all roads. That would have a minimal impact on the British Exchequer but would have the maximum impact on protecting the North/South economy. That is our local economy, and we in the North will lose out if it is damaged. We must remember that it is our local economy that receives the biggest return from the island economy and that our small- and medium-sized enterprises are reliant on cross-border trade.

4.00 pm

I genuinely do not want to engage in point scoring, but I call on the Minister and his party to vote according to the spirit of their earlier contributions to the debate on this issue. Minister Durkan, to his credit, has previously expressed concern, and, I think, still will, about the negative impact that this is all going to have on economic cooperation between North and South. He has previously stated that, coming from the north-west himself, he is particularly well placed to understand how this negative impact will be experienced most by the already hard-pressed haulage industry and SMEs along the border corridor. He publicly stated that the British Government did not give proper consideration to the island of Ireland's unique position when setting out to transpose this legislation.

It is worth noting that there was not unanimity in the Environment Committee on the matter, although, disappointingly, the Minister's party colleagues voted to enable the DOE here to enforce the levy. I call on those Members to reconsider their position and to vote in accordance with these —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: — five prayer of annulment motions.

I will certainly give way in about half a minute, Sammy. You just watch the clock and count back from 30.

That was hugely disappointing. I invite all Members, including the Member for East Antrim, to join with me on this one. I ask others to remain true to their earlier statements on the levy and vote logically with us on these five prayer of annulment motions. Without prejudice to the fact that you may be down to speak later, I will certainly give way to you, Mr Wilson.

Mr Wilson: I listened to the Member's whole speech. He has not actually addressed the issue. How does he justify that lorry drivers in Northern Ireland have to make a contribution towards the upkeep of roads in Northern Ireland for the damage that lorries do to roads in Northern Ireland, yet he says that lorry drivers from outside Northern Ireland, who have the same impact on roads, should have the free use of roads? Where is the logic in that? Where is the justice or the fairness for transport organisations in Northern Ireland when they are faced with people coming from the Irish Republic who do not have to deal with the same costs?

Mr McElduff: Thanks very much, Mr Wilson. Can you imagine the Southern authorities deciding to impose a tit-for-tat reciprocal countermeasure?

Mr Wilson: They do; they have toll roads.

Mr McElduff: You are not comparing like with like. Those are universal; they are on the M50 in and around Dublin. Everybody knows that. It is not for what they might call out-

of-state visitors. Just imagine for a second that there was a tit-for-tat reciprocal measure.

This morning, I spoke on the telephone to a Donegal haulier who regularly leaves his base in Lifford to travel the few short miles to Dunnamanagh, where he collects sand and gravel. Does Mr Wilson seriously expect Mr Christy Gallagher from Lifford to pay £1,000 a year for collecting sand and gravel in Dunnamanagh and taking it back to Lifford? If he does, he is more foolish than I thought.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way, and since he asked a question, I am quite happy to answer it. I cannot understand why hauliers in Northern Ireland, who are bringing sand and gravel from Lough Neagh to building sites, have to pay the cost of travelling on the roads. I find it most bizarre that the Member should be arguing for people who are not his constituents in the Republic and against his constituents who operate haulage firms in his locality. He wants those constituents to have to pay a cost and for their competitors to be exempt from doing so. That is a strange kind of representation.

Mr McElduff: I will not go into it now, but the Republic has yet to be established. I will put that to the one side. *[Laughter.]* You seem to be very myopic on the whole question of cross-border cooperation in trade and commerce. You — the economics teacher. I wish you well.

The Irish Government have invested in the roads network in the North, and the haulage taxation bills in the South are significantly higher than they are in the North. However, I will say this —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: May I just interrupt you a second, given this little exchange? It is important that all remarks — all remarks — are addressed through the Chair to keep good order and ensure that this does not get out of hand. It is a very good debate, and it is good-humoured at the moment.

Mr McElduff: I agree with you, Principal Deputy Speaker. I will speak to the Member in the third person singular from this point onwards.

I invite all Members to consider this truth: the cost of the levy will definitely be passed on to local consumers. There is a myth that the imposition and enforcement of the levy in the North will not have any impact on taxpayers or ratepayers in the North. That is a myth.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: This is probably the last time that I will give way in the next five or six minutes.

Mr Weir: I am very grateful —

Mr Wilson: You are not going to go on for another five or six minutes, are you?

Mr Weir: Yes, suddenly I see my life disappearing before my eyes. I thank the Member, nevertheless, for giving way.

The Member is being slightly short-sighted when he talks about the levy being passed on. Clearly, any levy will ultimately be passed on. If the Member got his way and the Government across the water completely defied Europe and made some form of pure exemption so that there would not be any levy on anyone in Northern Ireland, an economic cost would be passed on to the rest of us. Inevitably, the Government would seek to recoup that from the block grant.

You would be in a situation in which the levy would be levied in a different way, and the burden would simply be placed on much-stressed public services. As it is, we found it very tough to reach a Budget, so if we were expected to find an additional pot of money, even given the level of fantasy in the Member's proposal, that would be an additional burden on services here as there would be a reduction in the amount of money that we would have to spend. It is a myth that doing this will not have economic consequences.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Member for his intervention. Later, I will refer to arrangements in the Benelux countries, which show greater flexibility than the Member was just prepared to entertain for the island of Ireland and its uniqueness.

I have no doubt that additional costs faced by hauliers will be passed on to local consumers through increased prices for the products they deliver. In a previous contribution to the Assembly, Members highlighted the statement by Mr Seamus McMahon of Linwoods, which is a company based in County Armagh. He said that he runs a large bakery, employing more than 250 staff. He said that the HGV levy could ultimately result in higher bread prices for local customers, because hauliers from the South provide the packaging and the ingredients for his business. Mr McMahon, to his credit, said that he will do everything in his power to ensure that that does not happen but that Southern hauliers would somehow have to recover the additional costs they would incur due to the levy. Hauliers, North and South, already have to pay for the cost of diesel, vehicle excise duty, driver wages, depreciation of their vehicles etc.

Huge work is being done by the two Agriculture Departments on the island, especially to grow the agrifood sector, and by the respective trade promotion Departments, not least DETI in the North and InterTradeIreland itself, to increase cross-border trade, which is already a massive contributor to both economies on the island and said to be worth £2·8 billion a year. A lot of that work would be disadvantaged by any new barriers introduced that would become new impediments to economic growth.

Speaking politically — although I do not speak for the Unionist parties — it is my understanding that both main Unionists parties are in favour of North/South economic cooperation when they deem it to be of practical benefit to all people on the island. Therefore, economic protectionism is not the way forward. If that were the chosen path — I reiterate a point I made earlier, through you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, to former Minister Wilson — the Government in the South could introduce a reciprocal measure of a tit-for-tat levy on hauliers travelling from North to South. Economic cooperation threatens no one and benefits us all.

As has been said repeatedly, the border areas have the highest rates of unemployment and deprivation, and it is there that consumers find the cost of living perhaps most burdensome of all. The crucial question that the Minister needs to answer today on behalf of DOE, and perhaps on behalf of his Executive colleague Arlene Foster, is this: has either Department carried out any significant body of research on the economic impact of the levy on smaller hauliers and single operators? If not, why proceed

apace with the legislation and its enforcement without the necessary evidence base?

Local businesses, particularly SMEs, are looking to expand and find new markets. It is regrettable that business with the nearest and what should be the most accessible market is inhibited through unnecessary trade barriers such as the HGV levy, when the focus should be on removing barriers to trade. According to figures from the Department of Finance and Personnel, trade with the South accounts for 37% of the North's gross value added (GVA), which is the best measure that we have to illustrate local economic output. The British Government should use section 3 of the Act to exempt our local road system, which would be a crucial step to ensuring that we protect our local economy from this poor legislation.

At this point, I want to refer to two pieces of correspondence that I have. One comes from Mr Allan Rainey, an Ulster Unionist councillor based in Omagh. He is a very strong public representative and currently chairperson of the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), which is a cross-border partnership comprising 11 councils — six from the North and five from the South. The matter of the HGV levy is deemed by that organisation to be of huge concern. In 2012, it conducted an evidence-based socio-economic and business case for improvements to the N16/A4, from Sligo to Ballygawley, and the N2/A5, from Monaghan to Letterkenny, transport corridors.

The study supports the case that the border area performs poorly in economic terms when compared with the wider island of Ireland and that that is, at least in part, attributable to its low-quality transport infrastructure. The letter goes on, at length, to refer to the particular circumstances of the island of Ireland. For example, it talks about the fact that, in the North, roads are almost exclusively the only way in which to transport freight, as rail is limited. Of course, we had a nice wee debate yesterday in the House about the rail infrastructure from Coleraine to Derry, but many counties have been without any rail infrastructure at all since it was removed in the 1960s in one of the greatest acts of economic discrimination against the north-west that ever was applied.

Hauliers are being penalised for providing a crucial service by the only transport means possible.

Then, in light of the Irish Government's existing commitment to the upgrade of the A5, Mr Rainey has said that the people of the South of Ireland will actually be contributing to road costs in the North. Some of the geopolitical language that I use might differ from that of Mr Rainey, but I am sure that you get the point. Conditions are such that hauliers from England, Scotland and Wales will be able to come into the South of Ireland, pick up Irish goods and pay no tax whatsoever.

4.15 pm

There are a lot of points made in this ICBAN correspondence, which was addressed to elected representatives by Mr Rainey some time ago, that are very useful in the context of this debate. It states that, in adding to this charge:

> *"It is clear that poor transport connectivity is having a negative impact on the economic performance of the Border area."*

We just cannot ignore evidence like this. It is irresponsible for this to proceed and for people to ignore the evidence.

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly met in October. One of the committees of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly deals with EU affairs. In all, there are four committees in that structure. The European Union affairs committee looked at the issue, and Robert Walter MP and Joe McHugh TD said quite similar things. For example, Robert Walter said:

> *"There is an extensive network of roads that cross the border ... used on a daily basis by ... hauliers. As a consequence, our report calls for both the British and Irish Governments to provide an assessment of how the new HGV Road User Levy is compatible with EU rules. There is a danger of such policies hindering not just cross border co-operation but also cross border trade so we are calling for an urgent response from both governments to our concerns."*

They refer jointly to the A5 as a special case, but, once again, we are reminded that DfT was not listening at any stage. Why should we dignify its deafness to us on this matter by approving this legislation today? I appeal to all Members to give this the most careful consideration and not to endorse bad law.

In my conversation with one of the leading Donegal hauliers this morning, he said that hauliers were not opposed to paying a levy at port entries in England, Scotland or Wales but that there is an issue because of the uniqueness of the island of Ireland and the north-west of Ireland; for example, the geographical peripherality of Donegal and how it feeds into the economy of the north-west on both sides of the border. They have also demonstrated that, when they arrive in Britain, in England, Scotland or Wales, there is a willingness to comply with payment.

Very interestingly, on 30 October, in was stated in a commercial motor truckers magazine that the British Government's initial target of collecting annual revenue for this levy came to a figure of £20 million. In the first six months of its implementation in Britain, it has yielded £23·4 million. The money is not ring-fenced for transport; it goes back to the British Treasury. I ask all parties in the House to think very carefully about this motion. I am not setting out to score points of a party political nature, but I ask Members to support the five prayer of annulment motions before the Assembly.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): As Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, I wish to set out the views of the majority of the members of the Committee. I would like to outline the work that we have carried out that has led us to form these views and resulted in agreement, by a majority vote, that this subordinate legislation should be added to the statute books of the Assembly.

Earlier this year, the Committee noted that the Department was consulting on proposals to introduce secondary legislation in relation to the UK HGV Road User Levy Act 2013, and we requested an oral briefing when that consultation exercise had been completed. The Committee was aware that the key objective of the levy is to ensure a fairer arrangement for UK hauliers, who have to pay charges or tolls in most European countries while non-UK registered HGVs had not, until the introduction of the levy,

paid to use the road network in the UK. The Committee also understood that the DVA was to act as the primary enforcement agency in Northern Ireland and, alongside the PSNI, would enforce the charge and penalties for non-payment.

On 20 February 2014, departmental officials briefed the Committee on the responses they had received to the consultation. They advised the Committee that the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association — organisations representing the majority of Northern Ireland's hauliers — were broadly supportive of the Department's proposals but that —

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that she would acknowledge that, if the prayer of annulment were to be successful, it could place local road hauliers in Northern Ireland at a significant financial disadvantage.

Ms Lo: I agree with you. Essentially, it is about creating a level playing field for everyone.

As I said, the two associations were broadly supportive of the Department's proposals. However, other respondents objected to the level of enforcement proposed against hauliers from the Republic of Ireland.

The Committee was subsequently contacted by the Donegal Truckers, who believed that the levy would adversely impact on the high level of business that takes place between North and South. Members agreed to pass the correspondence to the Department for its comments on the issues raised by the truckers. In his response, the Minister stated that, although the levy is an excepted matter, he had made robust representations to the UK Department for Transport about increasing the extent of exempted routes in Northern Ireland. He confirmed that he did not intend to move the secondary legislation until he had received and considered the reply to his most recent correspondence. The Committee asked to be kept updated on the outcome of that correspondence and on his discussions with the Irish Minister for Transport on the same issue. The Committee also sought clarification on how the HGV road user levy is being implemented, including any provisions being made for exemptions, and on the danger of infraction of the Eurovignette directive.

The Department's reply, which was considered at the Committee meeting of 6 May 2014, stated that it did not consider that its position put the UK at any significant risk of infraction. It also confirmed that all Northern Ireland hauliers had been paying the levy, as it was being collected in combination with vehicle excise duty, and that significant numbers of Irish hauliers had paid the levy via the online payment scheme. Nonetheless, members felt that departmental officials were in a somewhat invidious position as it appeared that they were able to draw drivers' attention to the levy but not to enforce penalties for non-payment.

When the Department initially brought forward SL1 proposals for the rules in June 2014, the Committee agreed that there were still issues to be resolved before the legislation was put in place and, accordingly, deferred further consideration until the commencement of the new session in September 2014.

Departmental officials returned to brief the Committee on 11 September. They emphasised that the levy itself is a tax and, as such, is an excepted matter outside the powers of the Assembly. The Committee had no role in scrutinising either the scope or the amount to be charged. They highlighted how the Eurovignette directive requires that, if any such levy is in place, compliance must be enforced throughout the UK by the Department of the Environment directly or by agents of the Department for Transport. DfT is prepared to fund the cost of enforcement by paying for equipment and additional personnel. The Committee believes that this would mitigate, albeit to a very small extent, the recent job losses suffered by the DVA.

The Committee raised the issue of the impact of the levy on small businesses close to the border. Officials explained that the current Minister and his predecessor had made repeated representations to DfT to extend the exemptions for Northern Ireland roads and, in particular, to include the A5, but those had been unsuccessful. Officials also indicated that the costs of paying the levy were unlikely to be unduly punitive, even for small businesses, with the annual cost likely to be around £85 for vehicles up to 25 tons.

The Committee asked officials for further information on the Department's planned approach to enforcement. This is likely to take the form of checkpoints, both random and intelligence-led, and, although it will be cost-neutral, it will offer DVA officials the opportunity to widen compliance checks to include all aspects of road traffic law, such as roadworthiness and drivers' hours. The Committee believed that that was a positive aspect and welcomed any measures that would result in improved safety on Northern Ireland's roads.

With the exception of the three members who have proposed the prayers of annulment today, the Committee accepted that the Minister had no real choice in this matter and that he had strenuously put the case for a wider exemption for cross-border roads, but to no avail. The majority of members also accepted that the result of refusing to agree these statutory rules would be that DfT would put in place its own enforcement measures, as it is legally bound to do, and that the Department would lose out both on this additional funding and on the opportunity to carry out wider compliance tests.

For the reasons I have outlined and after detailed and lengthy scrutiny, the Committee for the Environment agreed that it was content for the rules to be made.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, if I may say a few words as a member of the Alliance Party —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes.

Mr Wilson: In her last point, the Chairman indicated that DfT would put in place its own arrangements to ensure compliance. Maybe she could spell out exactly what those arrangements would be. It would be interesting to see whether Sinn Féin would rather see Departments based in Westminster starting to enforce here in Northern Ireland, rather than having the issues dealt with locally. Maybe she could outline that for us.

Ms Lo: I will not speculate on which agency DfT would employ to enforce it, but it will not be one in the Department of the Environment. It would not give DVA staff the potential to make available that additional funding.

On behalf of my party and in line with what I said as Chair of the Committee for the Environment, I oppose

the motions. I believe that the current and previous Environment Ministers made reasonable efforts to argue our case for more exemptions, but, ultimately, the decision lay with DfT. The fact is that the longer we fall out of step with UK-wide legislation, the more we lose out on additional funding to improve road safety.

4.30 pm

Mrs Cameron: As Deputy Chair of the Environment Committee and a DUP member of the Committee, I oppose all five motions tabled by the party opposite to annul the regulations.

All these statutory rules are to enable the enforcement of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013. The UK Parliament passed the Act on 28 February 2013, providing legislation that introduces a specific time-based charge for the use of the UK road network by heavy goods vehicles weighing 12 tons and over. The key objective of the new law is to ensure a fairer arrangement for UK hauliers. Currently, foreign-registered HGVs do not pay to use the road network in the UK, whereas UK-registered HGVs pay charges or tolls in most other European countries.

The levy is an excepted matter under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and the responsibility for its implementation rests with the Department for Transport. However, the Department of the Environment is required to introduce some limited new secondary legislation relating to the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 on to the Northern Ireland statute book. As part of that process, the Department of the Environment consulted on those requirements.

It is worth noting that the levy received support from the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, which represent the majority of road freight operators in Northern Ireland. Their support extends to the proposals for the secondary legislation that is needed to allow the effective operation of the levy in Northern Ireland. This is to the benefit of the enforcement authorities and hauliers, and it ensures that Northern Ireland hauliers are not financially disadvantaged compared with British hauliers through adjustments to vehicle weight bands.

It must also be worth noting that the levy is paid by many in Northern Ireland already. The motions today ask us not to enforce it. They ask us to let others pay the levy and adhere to the law that already stands in Northern Ireland but not to enforce it on those who do not pay.

By way of background, on 11 September, departmental officials briefed the Environment Committee, and I will quickly run through some of the information that was given. The levy can be paid daily, weekly, monthly or annually. The fees depend on the time covered and the weight of the vehicle. The maximum charge for the largest vehicles is £10·00 a day; for smaller vehicles of up to 25 tons, it is £1·70 per day. The largest annual charge is £1,000 a year for five-axle vehicles or £640 for six-axle vehicles. Those charges are set to reflect the road wear created by the number of axles, weight and so on.

As already mentioned, the levy is a tax, so it is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Ministers past and present, supported by their Irish counterparts, have made representations to the Department for Transport focusing on exemptions for particular routes, for example the A5. As the Chair of the Committee mentioned, those representations were not successful. The proposer from the party opposite said that some exemptions would not be acceptable. They want every road to be exempted.

The benefits of the Department of the Environment enforcing the levy include having a coordinated approach to hauliers by having one enforcement body looking after all HGV matters, including weight, drivers' hours and roadworthiness, as well as the levy. As has been alluded to, the Department for Transport is quite happy to come to Northern Ireland to enforce the levy if need be. So, the choice that we have today is not luxurious.

The Department for Transport is making funding available for additional enforcement officers for this work, which will slightly mitigate the loss of staff caused by the centralisation of vehicle licensing in Swansea. The DfT is also providing funding for cameras and other equipment to allow for enforcement of the levy. That equipment can also be used for the enforcement of other road-traffic offences.

On the day of the Committee meeting in September we were told that, of the five SL1s presented, one creates the offence on the Northern Ireland statute book of not paying the levy, two add that to the list of fixed-penalty notice offences and set the amount for non-payment, and the other two set it on the list of financial penalty deposit offences and set the amount. By law, the levy has been payable by all HGVs using UK roads since 1 April 2014.

The Committee proceeded to a vote on the rules and voted in favour of them by eight to three, with all Sinn Féin members voting against.

I am at a loss as to why Sinn Féin opposes this change. Given that this will level the playing field for a substantial number of businesses that will be assured that overseas companies are no longer being given a free run on Northern Ireland's roads, it strikes me as somewhat unbalanced that, on the one hand, Sinn Féin is prepared to accept bail-outs and parliamentary expenses from Westminster, yet dogmatically rejects all other aspects of parliamentary business even when, just like this piece of legislation or the welfare reform package or the work of the National Crime Agency, they are necessary measures and should be implemented without further delay.

Mr Eastwood: I do not propose to speak for too long. Some people seem to want to make this a very long debate: I cannot imagine why.

It is important to bring a bit of reality to the discussion. We can all bring motions and, sometimes, we can all be accused of politicising issues and hiding the fact that there is a reality there and that, sometimes, things are not even within our control and just have to be done. So, we need to be clear for anybody who is watching — especially Donegal hauliers or people who have an interest in this — and we need to be honest with them.

This debate is not about whether we think that this levy is a good idea: from our perspective, we do not think that it is. It is not about whether this tax should be collected: the British Government are going to collect it anyway. It is about whether there will be a fixed penalty at the roadside for not paying the levy or whether you would have to go through court proceedings. That is what this debate is about; it is not about us being able to stop the levy coming in.

This Minister, the previous Minister, Minister Attwood, and any SDLP Member who has spoken on the issue has said

consistently that we think that it does not make sense that the levy be introduced. However, the bottom line is that this is an excepted matter; it is a tax issue. Sinn Féin is constantly talking, and it is good to have that debate, about the need for more tax-varying powers for the North. We do not have them; we do not have control over tax issues in the North. It is not up to us, unfortunately. Yet, we could say that we are not going to enforce this legislation, this levy or this tax but that we will let the British Government do it. We will let the people that the British Government employ do it, and we will not take the benefit of the cash and the jobs that would come to enable us to do it. If there is any ray of sunshine in this, we should grasp it. We should grasp the couple of jobs that we will get out of it and the money that we will get for the camera equipment that will also help with other road traffic issues.

There is no choice here. The Minister fought the battle. The Minister in the South, Leo Varadkar, fought the battle. We have not been successful. The British Government are bringing this in. The bottom line in all this is that, for all of us who are pro-European — I am not sure where everybody is on that, because it changes quite often — or even the people who are not pro-European, the fact of the matter is that, when a member state brings in a levy like this, the European Union insists that it is enforced. It does not have to bring in the levy, but when it does bring it in and in this way, the European Union insists that it is enforced and that the levy or tax is collected. I have not yet heard how we can do this differently.

I am from Derry. I understand the impact of the border on the economic life of our city and, in particular, of north-east Donegal. I understand what the border has done for our people. It has been an economic disaster. But that is not the question today. That is a question that some of us will continue to debate for decades to come; hopefully, not too many. This is a matter of fact and of what we can do and what power we have to actually effect change. The bottom line is that we have no power to stop this legislation coming in, and we have to be honest with the people who will suffer as a result of it. We do not have authority on this issue, so people should stop pretending that we do. In the proposer's very long speech, I did not hear one answer on how we can change this, stop it or prevent the British Government from implementing the legislation and enforcing the levy. It just is not possible.

I reassert the fact, and I am sure that the Minister will do so too, that we do not believe that it is good to try to hinder cross-border activity or cross-border trade. We need to break down all the barriers to that. However, the truth of the matter is that this is outwith our control. The Department for Transport in London will collect this levy whether we like it or not. We have heard it enough times now that we should be listening; that is the truth of it. This Assembly is powerless to change that, unfortunately. I will end with that.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate and on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party to oppose the prayers of annulment proposed by Sinn Féin Members. As my colleague Tom Elliott, who was on the Environment Committee before me, said at the time, the heavy goods vehicle levy will:

> *"provide a level of equality among haulage businesses whether they be in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland or indeed anywhere else throughout Europe."*
>
> *— [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 95, p84, col 1].*

The Ulster Unionist Party supports our local Northern Ireland hauliers, who are, until this levy is enforced, operating at a disadvantage.

These statutory rules give the Department of the Environment the powers to enforce the levy and the associated penalty. We are mindful that this levy will have a greater impact here in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK, given the unique position of Northern Ireland in having the only land border with a foreign country. We are also keen to ensure that the levy is not passed directly on to consumers, but early indications show that that has not been the case. At least I understand that the vehicle excise duty has been reduced at the same time as the levy was introduced and that both are paid at the same time in one transaction.

I wonder whether the Environment Minister, when responding to the debate, could inform us how many operators from the Republic of Ireland have taken up the opportunity to set up registered accounts, whereby it is easy for them to log on and pay the levy. Can he also tell us how many hauliers the Department of the Environment is aware of that have refused to pay the levy so far?

4.45 pm

The primary legislation that introduced the levy uses the provision of a European directive, as was said this afternoon. In turn, that requires member states to take all necessary measures to ensure compliance with any levies introduced. Therefore, that European law requires enforcement of the HGV road user levy across the UK.

I will make two points about the way in which Sinn Féin is handling the legislation. By praying against the statutory regulations, it is inviting the possibility of infraction fines from Europe. I would have thought that that party might have learned its lesson following the infraction fines for farm maps through the Department of Agriculture and after coming within a whisker of them for Strangford lough. Then again, if the Department of the Environment does not enforce the levy, the Department for Transport will step in to enforce it. As other Members suggested, for a party that is keen to support devolution, it is a rare proposition for them to support and promote it.

To conclude, the proposer said that there is no tit-for-tat measure in the Republic of Ireland, but Members know that toll roads exist in the Republic of Ireland, which is that country's policy for financing its roads system. If I travel into the Republic of Ireland, I will pay those road tolls just like any other person from Northern Ireland travelling in the Republic of Ireland. Likewise, it is equally fair that, as Councillor Allan Rainey suggested, those heavy goods vehicles that use the UK roads should make a contribution to UK roads.

Mr Boylan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: Go ahead.

Mr Boylan: I appreciate the Member talking about toll roads in the South, but here is the reality of it: that is by choice. You can travel on a number of roads in the South, but if you want to use a toll road, you pay the toll. That is a simple argument for anybody travelling in the South, so the Member should be mindful of that: it is by choice.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Member for his intervention.

I will continue as I began a few minutes ago. The heavy goods vehicle levy will bring equality among haulage businesses in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and across Europe. We in the Ulster Unionist Party support its implementation and the penalties for those who break the law that has been in place since April this year. We support Northern Ireland hauliers, and we oppose the prayer of annulment.

Mr Weir: I will not detain the House too long. I hear a "hear, hear" from my left-hand side, and perhaps the Member beside me should take some of his own medicine.

As a member of the Environment Committee, I, like others, have been through all the arguments on this issue, and I oppose the prayer of annulment for a range of reasons. The last Member to speak and others mentioned the need for a level playing field — forgive the pun — and that should be the case. I listened to the proposer of the motion. He said that the Republic had not yet been achieved, but it is clear that the honourable Member for West Tyrone sees himself more as the TD for Donegal South-West than he does for West Tyrone. Given that our roads are used, it would create a situation of there not being a level playing field across the border. Indeed, it would provide an advantage to the Republic of Ireland that Northern Ireland hauliers do not have. We should operate on the basis of the much-cherished ideal of equality. Whatever else can be argued about this case, that needs to be embraced.

Members mentioned toll roads. Ultimately, there are alternative routes that anybody can take in any set of circumstances. From that point of view, there are opportunity costs, in the same way as, for example, when you travel to Dublin, you can avoid the toll roads and take other routes. While I am not somebody who generally believes in the virtues of taxation, there is at least a logic that says that the user should pay, so there is logic behind the levy.

There is a slightly schizophrenic quality to the proposer of the motion, in that I am not quite sure whether he sees himself as a TD for Donegal or as the Northern Ireland equivalent of Nigel Farage. It seemed that he was holding back the tide coming in from Europe and suggesting that, in some way, we could simply be defiant. However much some of us may, at times, want to close our eyes and pretend that the European Union does not exist, the reality is that it is there through the directives. I do not know whether the Member will be leaving the Sinn Féin Benches and joining Mr McNarry as a new member of UKIP, but we have seen his Euroscepticism today in his saying that, in some way, we should be some form of odd special case to which European law does not apply.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. He might be interested to learn that, ahead of the recent elections, a full-page advertisement was carried in all our regional papers saying that, if you vote for UKIP, it will give us our country back. I am more than happy to support David McNarry in that regard.

Mr Weir: From that point of view, I appreciate that there is a latter-day conversion to UKIP.

Mr A Maginness: It is not surprising.

Mr Weir: It is not surprising, as the Member indicates. One feels that perhaps, as regards joining UKIP, people could even be better educated on the name of golf tournaments, for example. That might be helpful, and joining another party might lead to a greater level of education for some Members and perhaps even to them learning to count.

The reality is that we have a European directive. As Members, including Mr Eastwood, indicated, it is then an excepted matter, and all that we are doing through this debate is potentially making a token protest and pretending that we can oppose this. One might question the length of some of the speeches that have been made and, indeed, the motivation behind that, and it seems fairly clear that, given the political realities of this, it seems more of an attempt from the party opposite simply to try to embarrass the SDLP and the Minister than it is to make a genuine case. It seems that that is the principal motivation. We are not in a position to stop this, and, consequently, it is a futile and wrong gesture for us to vote against the proposals that are in front of us. Therefore, we will be opposing the prayer of annulment on that basis.

Whatever one feels about the merits of the levy itself, the repercussions have been abundantly clear. I quite often find myself in disagreement with the Minister, but he has taken a fairly straightforward, obvious and correct approach to this. He made his reservations clear and went with the Minister from the Irish Republic to lobby the Department for Transport. We should treat this on its merits and not simply see it as some sort of tit for tat because of the way in which Coleraine was treated over the DVA. We have to look at what is there. It is abundantly clear that as strong a case as possible was made, but we cannot simply be ourselves alone on this issue. We cannot have some level of exemption that does not apply in the rest of Europe.

Although I missed some of the proposer's speech, I was intrigued to hear him say, "Ireland is a unique example, but here is how we can perhaps follow Benelux". There seems to be a contradiction in that. The Minister undoubtedly made the best case possible and fought as hard as he could, but, at some stage, reality has to dawn that this is European directive with an exemption and that it is an excepted matter because it relates to taxation. We do not have any other choice, and, consequently, let us stop the posturing, oppose the prayer of annulment and put through what has to be put through.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. I want to take him back to his comments about a level playing field. Our fundamental opposition to this is not that a tax is being imposed on people who are driving lorries. The principal objection to it lies in the fact that you are charging people who are crossing the border. If a tax were to be introduced that applied to everybody, and hauliers in the North or in England did not get a £1,000 reduction on their annual excise duty on a vehicle and other road users had to pay that, it would be fair.

This is not a stick for Sinn Féin to beat the SDLP with, no matter what you think. It is not about that at all. If it were, Mr McElduff's opening contribution would have been an awful lot more political. This is about trying to create a level playing field. Members from the unionist parties have compared the imposition of a £1,000-a-year levy only on hauliers to cross the border to a toll that applies on the new major roads in the South and that everybody pays. Therefore, if lorry drivers or car users based in the South want to use a toll road in the South, they are not exempt

from that tax. Everybody has to pay that. It is a fair taxation across everybody. If the tax were to be introduced for all hauliers that are using the roads, it would be fair, and everybody would pay it.

What this is doing is distorting —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will. It is distorting the market and having a serious impact on hauliers, the people who work for them and, ultimately, the people who get goods and services using those hauliers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Your interventions should be brief.

Mr Weir: For one strange moment, it seemed that there would almost be intervention to an intervention. I appreciate that other points will be made. This is about creating a level playing field. The reality is that, if this is not passed, hauliers from a particular part of the island of Ireland — whatever way you want to put it — will be advantaged over others. This is about providing some level of a level playing field.

I am not, generally speaking, a fan of taxation, but heavy goods vehicles have a greater impact on the roads. There is a certain logic in having some degree of imposition on that, and it seems to me, certainly from the examples that have been given, that the party opposite seems more concerned about protecting hauliers in Donegal than about many of the hauliers in Northern Ireland. Secondly, despite the protestations of the Member who spoke previously, it seems to be utterly transparent that there is an attempt at a populist move to embarrass the SDLP, which, to be fair, has been left with no other choice on this. I urge the House to reject this thinly veiled attempt by Mr McElduff and others at a form of political assassination of the SDLP and, indeed, to vote for something that is inevitable and, indeed, sensible and reject the prayer of annulment.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank my colleagues for tabling this important motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Please speak into the microphone.

Mr McAleer: We are on a very small island, and this is certainly perceived as an attack or a tax on trade. Along with some of my colleagues in the Assembly and in Leinster House, we have met the hauliers and got a deep appreciation of the impact that it will have on them. It has rightly been said that this is a British Government tax on Irish domestic trade. It is a tax on the trade on which we are all dependent for economic recovery. I am from a constituency that straddles the border, and we believe that placing a charge on someone to deliver goods between, say, Donegal and Dublin or, indeed, between Strabane and Donegal, which are virtually neighbours, does not make sense. If we look across the water — this is coming from the British Government — it is like charging somebody to deliver goods between Liverpool and Leeds. It really does not make sense.

The levy is ridiculous, and it is financially unviable for our local economy to subsume these charges in terms of trade or in charges to customers. The failure to make roads exempt from the levy is disappointing and reflects a lack of overall support for our local economy from the British Government. When I was reading through the notes in preparation for today's debate, I noted that the Department for Transport in Britain, when it was talking up the benefits of this, said that it was investing £6 billion in motorways and trunk roads and introducing 500 extra miles of lane capacity. We are not getting any of those benefits here. We face cuts to the Budget here by Westminster. There is no carrot here such as they are talking up across the water.

Indeed, on the broader picture, two competing economies on the island will not deliver prosperity. Taxing cross-border trade will only impede economic growth. Over a million people live along the border, and, like me, my colleague Michaela Boyle and others, they face the challenges every day. The border areas have some of the worst unemployment, the worst housing and the worst transport infrastructure, and putting a levy on border trade simply puts undue pressures on areas that are already struggling to grow.

In terms of deprivation, outside the cities of Belfast and Derry, west Tyrone fares the worst, certainly in the North. The most westerly parts of west Tyrone along the border, including the town of Strabane and along that area, have the wards with the highest levels of deprivation in west Tyrone. This will have a very adverse impact.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. I am not disputing what he has said about west Tyrone, because I do not have the figures. Will he accept that, if west Tyrone is one of the areas of highest deprivation, this legislation will help transport operators in west Tyrone? They will be in an unfair competition with those across the border if it is not imposed?

5.00 pm

Mr McAleer: I fail to see how the Member can follow that argument. What will happen is that the hauliers will pass on many of the charges to customers, certainly in the west Tyrone area and other parts of the North. Importantly, if you live in areas like west Tyrone, Fermanagh and other parts, you know that there are people who live in Strabane and are employed in the South of Ireland. This will have a detrimental impact on them and the companies that employ them. I do not see the point that the Member is trying to make. The point that I was trying to make is that the border area has —

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Mr McAleer: Yes, go ahead.

Mr McElduff: I would like to address Mr Elliott. Does he have any surprise whatsoever that this letter, which lobbies for the levy not to be enforced, is written by a west Tyrone Ulster Unionist councillor representing a cross-border partnership that is partly made up of Fermanagh and Omagh district councils? It is the ICBAN partnership. It is fair to say that Tom Elliott and his party colleagues in Fermanagh and Omagh are at odds on this issue.

Mr McAleer: I welcome that intervention from my colleague from West Tyrone. I think —

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr McAleer: Yes, go ahead.

Mr Elliott: I am assuming — *[Interruption.]* Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, when Mr McElduff settles down — I

assume from what he said that that letter was written on behalf of ICBAN. It was written on behalf of an organisation, and an Ulster Unionist member was part of it. From what I have heard, it was written on behalf of ICBAN. Councillor Rainey may have signed it, but members of other parties are also on ICBAN. The Ulster Unionist Party cannot be held responsible for that, but let me tell you: we are in total support of the legislation. I give you my absolute guarantee of that. We support it. I made the point in Committee that we support the legislation, and my colleague, who is now on the Committee, is supportive of it.

Mr McAleer: OK. I think that I am correct in saying that it was a unanimous decision by ICBAN.

I will get back to my point. It is important that we should be focused not on taxing cross-border trade or on enhancing division but on building cooperation. Indeed, cooperation is not new to us along the border, and we have assisted each other in many ways. Health is a good example of that. We should focus on addressing the challenge of the border and not try to reinforce it. Where we have applied joint activity to health, it provides a higher standard of care and produces better economic outcomes. It also improves the economic and physical well-being of our citizens. The point that is important for us is that we must adopt a similar approach to the economy and, indeed, to transport infrastructure.

The legislation makes provision for exempting roads in the North, and there is a reason for that. Clause 3 should be used to exempt our road system. We should not have legislation permitting the enforcement of a levy that does not assist our local economy or our people. There is a precedent for exempting roads — parts of the A3 and the A7 — but that is not enough. I know from my experience that the A5 and its feeder roads form a critical corridor that leads in and out of our constituency. It is much easier to exempt all roads in the North from this levy; it does not make sense to split the island's economy. What makes sense from an economic perspective is encouraging free movement throughout the island and exempting local roads from this British HGV levy.

The cross-border market is very important for local firms. Indeed, local firms have identified a lack of internal financial resources as a key challenge in building their business. This levy will do nothing to increase the ability of our businesses to generate finance for the local economy. It is totally prohibitive and does not cater for our unique island circumstances.

My party feels that it is in the interests of all the people, North and South, that the free movement of EU goods is enabled, North and South.

Lord Morrow: This is a very interesting debate, but it also raises the question of whether it should be taking place. There is a challenge for the rules committee of the House to look at whether it should ever have come here. At the end of the day, we cannot do anything about this. I wonder whether debating something that we know perfectly well we cannot change is the best way to spend the time of the House. It is unfortunate that the Members opposite seem to be slightly confused. I listened to Mr McAleer and Mr McElduff —

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes, I will in a moment or two. It seems to me that they are confused as to which side of the border they really live on. It seems that they are confused as to where their constituencies really are. I know that some of their constituencies may extend up towards the border, but they have to realise that there is a border. Yes, Mr McElduff, you wanted to say something.

Mr McElduff: Through the Principal Deputy Speaker, I just want to ask Mr Morrow if he has a clear understanding of the raison d'être of a prayer of annulment, as someone who, I think, has chaired the procedure side of the House. Surely there is validity and merit in tabling a prayer of annulment. It is a legislative tool at our disposal that we are using to try to prevent bad law. What is wrong with using a prayer of annulment? Is there something inherently wrong with doing that?

Lord Morrow: This is not legislation made in this House that we are talking about; this legislation is made elsewhere. You know that perfectly well. That is the point that I am trying to make, and I hope that you pick up on it.

When the matter was first discussed in Committee some time ago — I suspect it goes back six or nine months or thereabouts — the whole debate in relation to it was around the A5 corridor. There was a debate that was of some interest. Although I was not in support of it, nevertheless I thought it was an interesting debate that was generated. It was argued that the A5 should be exempt in some way. For the life of me, I could not understand the rationale behind it, but, nevertheless, I was prepared to listen to the debate and the discussion. However, we now hear that in fact it has moved on from that. I think Mr McElduff made it clear that he was speaking not simply about the A5 corridor but, in fact, about the whole road infrastructure here in Northern Ireland. Then he went on to say something about the uniqueness of the island of Ireland. He did not explain in any detail what the uniqueness of the island of Ireland is in relation to its road infrastructure. Maybe when he or one of his colleagues winds up, they will deal with the uniqueness of that.

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: I am being very generous to you. I am beginning to get dodgy about it, but go on.

Mr McElduff: I appreciate the Member's generosity. In my contribution, I accused DfT of not listening; it appears that Maurice was not listening either. In May, this party tabled a motion in the House — I invite you to read the Hansard report of that debate — which detailed that the exemption that we sought was for all of the road network in the North of Ireland. That is not something new. I suggest that you do some reading of Hansard in either the Committee format or the plenary format.

Lord Morrow: I suggest that you do some listening. It would run a wee bit like this. I think you were an infrequent attender at the Committee at that time because you were heavily pressed and doing other things, and you prioritised, as I suppose we all do from time to time. However, I am sure there is not a member of the Committee at that time who does not know perfectly well that the debate, more or less and to a great degree, was generated around the A5. I know that it has been extended now; I hear clearly that it has been extended to all roads.

There is a bit of "Let's get a poke at the SDLP and see if we can embarrass them". I am glad to see that the SDLP has caught that on and can see clearly what the whole thing is about. Mr Eastwood hit the nail on the head. It

is not often that I agree with him, but I agree with him on this one: this is not the time or the place for a bit of point scoring. It is an issue that, to all effects, is done and dusted. Those who bring the prayers of annulment here today realise that too. It is a wee bit of "We will stand up for the hauliers in Donegal". Quite frankly, you are not standing up for the hauliers here in Northern Ireland. We know that the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association support the measures. Therefore, I sincerely ask the Member this question: on whose part have those on the Sinn Féin Benches been speaking today? You are obviously thinking of your Donegal friends. Mr McElduff was at pains to point out that he spent, I think, a whole Sunday afternoon listening to what Donegal hauliers had to say. It is a pity that he did not spend time listening to what hauliers in Northern Ireland are saying. After all, believe it or not, Mr McElduff, Mr McAleer and Mr, Mrs or Miss anybody else over there, your constituencies are here in Northern Ireland, and you have some duty and responsibility to try to look after them.

My colleague made a point that I want to reinforce. A myth is being spewed out here about the charges. Remember that the charges are already in place and are being paid. It is not as though this is coming down the track in two, six or 12 months; it is here and in place now. My colleague Pamela Cameron said that the largest annual charge is £1,000 a year for five-axle vehicles or £640 for six-axle vehicles. That is not an astronomical charge.

Mr McElduff made the point — I think that I quote him correctly — that the original target was £20 million a year but that in the first six months — so he acknowledges that the charges are in place — some £23 million has been realised. I do not think that I misquote him on that, and I have no doubt that, if I am, he will say so. Therefore, we need to get a degree of reality into the debate. I make it clear that, as far as DUP Members are concerned, we will vote against the five prayer of annulment motions because we believe that to be the right thing to do.

We on these Benches are often castigated for not being the best Europeans, and I accept that. However, it is ironic to see that those who claim to be the best Europeans —

Mr A Maginness: They are not.

Lord Morrow: — are not. They are not, exactly. They are not today, anyway. When it suits, they pick and mix and pick and choose. Here is a levy, legislation or a directive — whatever terminology you want to use — from your darling Europe, on which you put so much emphasis. They say that this has to be done, but you say, "Oh no, we will stand up to them". You mentioned that the Minister across the border has also failed you. The SDLP Minister has failed you, the Dublin Minister has failed you and Europe has failed you. Everybody seems to have failed you. Why, then, do you fail yourselves? Recognise that you cannot change this. Recognise that it is in place and happening. Be honest with your Donegal freighters and tell them, "Look, we made a hoo-ha in the Assembly, but that's all we were doing. There was nothing else we could do but get up and have a bit of a barge. Really, we were shooting our arrows at Minister Durkan, who happens to come from a border constituency also".

I will leave it there because most of what is being said has been said previously. I hope that the Member will see the wisdom of not pressing this to a vote and withdraw the motions. I think that the House would be very appreciative of that.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. My retort to Mr Morrow is that I have been lobbied by constituents who own quarries in the locality —

Lord Morrow: On this side of the border?

Ms Boyle: — on this side of the border. They depend solely on hauliers coming across the border to keep their business afloat. The way that the economy is, without the hauliers coming across, these businesses would have to close.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue today. I also put on record my opposition and that of my party to the ludicrous proposal by the British Government to charge hauliers based in the rest of Ireland a fee of £10 a day or £1,000 a year to use the road system here.

5.15 pm

Sinn Féin has a wider vision and a greater ambition for the people and the economy. There are no advantages for an island nation of 6·4 million on the edge of Europe with two separate tax regimes, two currencies and legal systems and two separate economies. Indeed, the power to harmonise structures across the island would be central to creating a fully integrated and healthy economy, yet the British Tory Government want to split the island further by introducing this levy on vehicles crossing the border from the South to the North.

As a representative from a border region, like other Members here, I know all too well the potential damage that this will cause. The imposition of this levy would have a detrimental effect on the expanding island-wide trade that currently generates £2·3 billion for this island and could dissuade investment in Northern operations by Southern parent companies.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. She talks about the "detrimental impact" that this will have right across the island of Ireland, but I would like her to understand that we are talking about a charge of £2·74 a day. That is the maximum charge.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Member for his intervention, but that equates to £1,000 a lorry. That would have a negative impact on the agrifood sector that we rely on; it is our fastest growing sector North and South of this island.

Sinn Féin has been vocal in its opposition to this levy, and our representatives, North and South, have been to the forefront of highlighting the issue. Indeed, my party colleague Pat Doherty MP has consistently lobbied the British Government on this issue, and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and other TDs have kept this on the agenda at Leinster House. Our local councillors who have been to the forefront of this issue — Councillors Jay McCauley and Gary Doherty — along with our MEP Matt Carthy attended a public meeting in Letterkenny along with Barry McElduff earlier in the year. I also commend my Sinn Féin colleagues on the Environment Committee who have brought this before the House today.

The British Government need to use legislation to exempt roads in the North from this regressive charge. The Irish Government must also ensure that they challenge their British counterparts to stop this charge, which has the potential to severely affect the future viability of small and

medium-sized businesses, especially along the already struggling border regions.

This HGV levy is against the ethos of the European Union, which is working to eliminate borders that separate people. In particular, this levy aims to separate people from the North from the rest of the island of Ireland. Haulage firms are already under extreme pressure in the current climate without adding insult to injury by imposing this levy. The price of fuel has remained at an all-time high. These costs impact on the businesses that utilise haulage firms and would eventually come back to hit the average consumer. That is without even thinking about how this levy would work on a practical level. Will we be faced with the return of checkpoints at the border?

Once again, we have an example of policy formulated at Westminster that gives no consideration to the economic or geographic realities on this island. Indeed, last September, Pat Doherty MP wrote to the Minister for Transport in London outlining these concerns. The subsequent response from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport was completely dismissive by attempting to equate the planned £10 levy with the toll charges payable on HGV vehicles on some motorways in the South.

Given that there are hundreds of border crossings, this British Government levy plan would also be completely unworkable in practical terms. I, along with others, have met hauliers from Donegal and surrounding areas and have heard at first-hand on several occasions the devastating impact that it would have on their business. These people's livelihoods stand to be impacted immediately. Areas like Strabane and Lifford, which are less than a mile apart, will be particularly affected by this regressive measure. It will also have the potential to cost jobs across the island and will certainly damage the development of an all-Ireland economy.

It is time to focus on building and not dividing the island's economy. A single island economy for all citizens across Ireland would provide the opportunity for fair and harmonised progression, taxation, regulation and trade. The all-Ireland economy is a reality. Let us now begin to agree and to implement policies across the island that will deliver prosperity and equality for all our people, promote economic growth and trade for enterprises, safeguard public services and create and sustain jobs. Partition never made economic sense. Together, we can build a new stronger economy that works for us all. This threatens no one and will benefit all.

I want to go back to my party colleague Mr McElduff's opening speech, when he referred to Mr Gallagher, who travels from Lifford to Dunnamanagh daily, sometimes two or three times a day. Indeed, as I said, I have been speaking to quarry companies in my area, which have told me that, if this is the case, their businesses will go down the tube. They will be out of business. They depend on hauliers coming across. This only adds to the impact on jobs and business sustainability in our already burdened economy.

I urge Members to support my party's motions.

Mr A Maginness: I say at the start that this is a bogus debate. It is a fraudulent debate. It has been brought for party political and campaigning purposes —

Mr Flanagan: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr A Maginness: Sorry —

Mr Flanagan: I ask the Principal Deputy Speaker to make a ruling on whether it is all right for a Member to make an accusation that the debate is "fraudulent". It is a strange phrase to use. I do not think that it is an acceptable phrase.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind all Members of the standards that we expect in debate and to be careful with their language.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. This debate is a pretence. It is a pretence brought by Sinn Féin, not because of any internal reasons in Northern Ireland but to appeal to the electorate in Donegal, where it has seats that it wishes to retain. That party has to appear to be defending the rights and interests of Donegal hauliers. That is the reason why the debate has been brought. Let us be frank about it. Let Sinn Féin be frank about it: that is the reason.

Of course, it is a dig at the SDLP. It is a poke at Mark H Durkan, who is a border MLA and Minister of the Environment. It is an attempt to embarrass him and do him down. That is the reality of this debate.

I know Donegal very, very well. In fact, my mother came from Donegal. Many family members live there. I have a deep affection for the county, as, indeed, do many Members of the House. I know that the Donegal people are very sensible. They are not easily fooled and are not gullible. When they view this debate or read the text, they will understand that there is an attempt to try to deceive them. That attempt is being made by Sinn Féin Members. They do so because they want to curry favour.

As was stated in the House —

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I will not give way. You have filibustered for long enough for other reasons, which we all know about.

The point that I make to you, which has been made on a number of occasions during the debate, is that this is an excepted matter. The British Government have directly legislated for this, and they can and will enforce the charge, even if we, as a House, were to grant the prayer of annulment. In actual fact, this is a futile legislative exercise as well as an act of deception.

The merits of not having a charge have been well and truly illustrated. I have great sympathy for the people in Donegal and elsewhere on that. Although our unionist colleagues have not supported the exemption per se, they have not opposed our trying to get an exemption from the British Government. That has not worked, despite pressure put on by the Irish Government and by former Minister Attwood and Minister Durkan.

Of course, the grandstanding by Sinn Féin on the issue has begun to fall apart, partly because of Mr Flanagan, who, from time to time, drops the mask. On this occasion, he expressed overt sympathy for UKIP. Mr McNarry is not here, but I am sure that he was very impressed when Mr Flanagan expressed his sympathy for UKIP. Of course, he is quite right to express —

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I will not. You have made your point.

Mr Flanagan, of course, revealed the reality of Sinn Féin, which is that it is the Irish version of UKIP. It is as xenophobic and as Eurosceptic as UKIP. Indeed, I go further: it is not even Eurosceptic; it is anti-European. The Member who spoke previously talked about creating a single market in Ireland. There is a single market in Ireland. It came about as a result of the Maastricht treaty, which these people opposed. It created a single market in Europe. I know that other Members opposed it as well. We have a single market in Europe thanks to the European Union. We have much better and closer contact on the back of cross-border economic trade and development. That all emanates from the European Union. If these people had their way, we would be out of Europe. Sinn Féin has opposed every major European development, whether it was Maastricht, Nice or Lisbon, which increased democracy and the powers of the European Parliament and allowed more people into the European Union by expanding it.

Sinn Féin opposed the creation of the European currency. It opposed the euro. It is only latterly that it has become supportive of it. I remember the time when, along with the 'Daily Mail' and perhaps the DUP, it wanted to retain the pound sterling. That is the reality. That was the position that your party adopted, so do not come —

Mr Wilson: *[Inaudible.]* good thing that it did. Thank goodness that it did.

Mr A Maginness: Well, there you are. You have something in common at last.

Of course —

Mr McElduff: On a point of order. I seek guidance from the Principal Deputy Speaker on whether Mr Maginness may be straying far from the debate on the HGV levy. He has totally played the man and not the ball. It has been ad hominem throughout.

5.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is not a legitimate point of order. Quite a lot of the debate has strayed from the original subject under discussion, and Mr Maginness is picking up on some of the opportunities that were presented by others.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you very much, Principal Deputy Speaker. I am glad of your ruling.

Another point was made about trying to remove borders in Ireland. What does Sinn Féin want? It wants to create a border in Spain, between the Basque Country and the rest of Spain. So, on the one hand, it wants to remove the border in Ireland, but, on the other, it wants to create a border in Spain. Those are the contradictions —

Mr Flanagan: What is your view on that?

Mr A Maginness: If you want to speak, you can speak later.

Those are the contradictions that are encompassed within Sinn Féin. So, let nobody misunderstand the position of Sinn Féin when it comes to Europe. It is fundamentally antipathetic towards the European Union and it has always — always — opposed any major improvement in the European Union.

I will end there, which Mr Flanagan is probably happy about.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I would like him to clarify a point. He talks about borders. Is he saying that Sinn Féin supports the border here between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic?

Mr A Maginness: It would not surprise me what Sinn Féin would do tomorrow, because on every major issue, it has changed its mind. It changed its mind in relation to Stormont, power sharing, the Council of Ireland and the police. So, Sinn Féin might even tomorrow decide that it supports the border. I will end there.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak in favour of the motions.

It is time to build — not split — an island economy. In these difficult economic times, we must ensure that every opportunity is taken to grow the local economy. The levy runs counter to that and will have a negative impact that will be felt not just by hauliers but by local businesses and, ultimately, the consumer. The regressive HGV levy serves only to further split the island economically at a time when the focus should be on rebuilding, realigning and repairing it.

Cross-border movement in Ireland, North and South, is already affected by different levies for vehicle registration tax, differences in direct and indirect tax rates, eligibility for tax credits, differences in tax years and housing costs. The levy is yet another example of a destructive barrier to cross-border movement and trade. Despite the interconnections and the interdependence of the economies North and South, there has been limited focus on promoting island-wide growth and recovery.

Island-wide trade has yet to reach its full potential. Immediate action is required to address the state of the economy in the border region, which has been particularly disadvantaged by the historical legacy of the border. Far from being a minor issue, the implementation of the aggressive HGV levy acts as a barrier to building the island economy in a mutually beneficial way.

If we are to maximise the return of the island economy, we must maximise economic growth. That means ensuring that there are no added impediments to that growth, and the HGV levy, as it stands, is an impediment. All HGVs crossing the border into the North are liable to pay a levy of up to £10. That could drastically lower the potential of our SMEs to compete in the island market, particularly in the agrifood sector, which is our fastest growing sector, North and South.

We have a choice to make. We can choose to reject the secondary legislation and collectively call on the British Government to exempt all roads from the levy.

The British Government can, through an affirmative order, exclude roads from the levy, and should do so in recognition of the unique situation that exists here on the island of Ireland. The inclusion of the North will have only a marginal impact on the British Treasury but a detrimental effect on local businesses.

Our border areas face significant challenges. There are high rates of unemployment and higher rates of

deprivation. Crucially, SMEs along the border perform better at exporting than other local businesses. Those businesses are heavily reliant on border trade to survive. The HGV levy would result in increased costs for those businesses, which would destabilise and even close some small businesses. In circumstances where the costs can be borne by the business, it is the consumer who will ultimately pay. We are already experiencing a cost of living crisis. Our food and petrol prices are higher than elsewhere. Daily disposable income does not even cover the cost of a return train ticket from Portadown to Belfast or Belfast to Derry. It is time to focus on building, not dividing, the island economy for the benefit of all citizens.

I know, Minister, that you did make representations to Westminster that, unfortunately, fell on deaf ears. I repeat that it makes no sense to split the island economy. In the context of Europe, there is scope for us to collectively present the argument that our unique circumstances on the island of Ireland should be considered. We know that North/South cooperation works, whether it relates to the economy, health or education. Cooperation threatens no one, and economic cooperation is vital to stimulate growth. More can be achieved through collaboration and integration than competition. We should be developing island-wide transport infrastructure, not dividing it.

The levy is one of several regressive steps, alongside the lack of progress on the Narrow Water bridge and the A5. There are no advantages for an island of 6·5 million people on the edge of Europe with two separate tax regimes, two currencies, two legal systems and two severed economies. What makes sense is harmonising, cooperation and mutual benefits. What makes sense is maximising the return of the island economy for the local economy. What makes sense is protecting people from a further rise in food costs as a direct result of a regressive and poorly planned levy directed from Westminster. What makes sense is ensuring that there is free movement throughout the island. What makes sense is exempting local roads from the HGV levy.

We need to work together to lay strong foundations for a new era of economic development and sustainable recovery. The opportunities from integration and the transforming of the island economy are great. Ensuring that the levy does not disrupt cross-border trade in this, an already fragile economy, is crucial. That is why I ask you to support us in rejecting this regressive charge.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion.

I will refer briefly to what Mr Maginness said. I have had the misfortune to listen to him during Budget debates. I thought that he invented filibustering. I also take exception to being referred to, as a member of Sinn Féin, as "these people". Common courtesy is obviously not his strong point, but I suppose that I should not expect anything else from him and his ilk.

Mr Wilson: Is "his ilk" not the same as "these people"?

Mr Brady: You can interpret it whatever way you want.

Living in and representing Newry and Armagh, which is a border constituency, it is my responsibility to protect our local businesses and economy. That is certainly something that the Tory Government have no intention of doing. Over 80% of businesses on this island are small or medium enterprises. That includes local businesses. Any additional costs or levy will impact on local businesses, and ultimately that burden will be passed on to the local consumer.

What strikes me as peculiar is that, when I sat on the Social Development Committee with the Minister, he did not seem to be quite as wedded to parity as he seems to be now. Certainly, at a time, parity was not something that he was enamoured of, if I remember rightly.

In Newry, for instance, it is impossible not to notice the number of HGVs from the South delivering locally on a daily basis. Take shopping centres in Newry. In the Quays, for example, you can go from Debenhams at one end to Sainsbury's at the other. All that income goes back to Britain. The only income coming into our local economy is, usually, the minimum wage. People in my constituency cannot afford the extra burden that will inevitably be passed on.

The enforcement of this levy will impact on all businesses that transport goods across this island. It will actually discourage companies in Donegal, Louth, Monaghan and even Dublin from trading in the North. I cannot understand why we are creating barriers instead of building the economy. We are going back to the days when lorries had to go through physical border posts and were stopped and searched etc, leading to delays and extra costs. Surely this can only be a regressive step.

I do not understand why a Minister in the Executive would even contemplate such a harmful levy that will have a negative impact on established businesses. The point was made earlier — and I will make it again — that our border areas face significant challenges. They have higher rates of unemployment and deprivation. Two of the most deprived wards in the North are in my own constituency. These businesses are also heavily reliant on border trade to survive. The levy will result in increased costs for these businesses, which could destabilise and even close some small businesses. It has been mentioned that the costs that we pay are already higher. Our food and petrol prices are higher than elsewhere.

Mr Eastwood made great play of the fact that —

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Member for giving way. Can I just ask the Member to clarify that what he and his party actually want us to do is to continue as we are without the enforcement of this tax, which is not of our making but has come from the Department for Transport at Westminster, which, if it is not brought in by Northern Ireland, will come and enforce it itself? Can the Member just clarify that that is the position?

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for her intervention. To that, I will say something that we have been saying about other things: it might help if we present a united front, stand up and face these people down.

According to Mr Eastwood, we just have to roll over and accept all of this. That has been the tenor of some of the debate. As has been mentioned, the British Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, can, through an affirmative order, exclude roads from the levy. If you look at what the levy would actually create, you will see that it would have only a marginal impact on the Treasury, as any importers or exporters would still have to pay the costs when landing in Britain. So it would not make any real difference. Maybe we should do what we should do on other things and stand

up, present a united front and speak up for the people whom we represent.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue. I am a bit disappointed at the tone of some of the contributors. I fully support the proposers of the motion and their efforts to ensure that this bad piece of legislation is not enacted.

The proposed HGV levy, which some people managed to speak on for an awful long time without actually getting near to mentioning, is a crazy policy on an island such as this one. We see greater cooperation taking place between governments and organisations North and South. When we now have the political maturity for a joint trade mission to go to an air show in Singapore in February involving the North's Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the South's Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation jointly promoting this island and, along with their British counterpart, promoting both of these islands, and when the British and Irish Governments can come together to bring forward a joint visa scheme for people who are visiting either of these islands from thousands of miles away, why can they not do it for a lorry that wants to drive up and down these roads? If it can be done for people who want to travel to or from Singapore either to promote this place as a potential location for investment or to make it easier for people coming for business or tourism, surely they can sort out the whole issue of heavy goods vehicles travelling on our roads.

Some people appear to think that a tax of £1,000 a year on a lorry is not a pile of money. It is certainly nothing to be sneered at. If there were an increase of £1,000 to the annual fuel bill for a HGV, we would certainly hear about it. I presume that our colleagues in the SDLP would not say, "There is nothing that we can do about it." It would be raised, there would be a debate about it here, and there would be complete outrage. We would not be saying, "Oh well, there is nothing that we can do." There is the whole nonsense that we cannot table this motion as there is nothing we can do. There is nothing we can do about the persecution of Christians at the far end of the world, but it seems that it is dead on to table two motions to debate that. There is nothing we can do about that in this wee debating hall that turns into a sixth form common room at times. This is an important issue.

5.45 pm

We have been told by many that it is not the time or the place for this issue to be debated and that we are attacking the SDLP again. I do not think that anybody mentioned the SDLP. I do not think that any of the Members from our party who spoke mentioned Mark Durkan. The only person who went on a rant about party politics was Alban Maginness, but that was no surprise to us. Barry McElduff spoke, and I do not think that he once mentioned Mark Durkan in a negative way. He is trying to build a united front and is not out to score political points against the SDLP. I will tell you in a minute what we would say if we were trying to score political points against the SDLP. I will come to that; I had not meant to, but I have been provoked.

Nobody sought to embarrass the SDLP. We have not criticised Mark H Durkan. As far as I know, this is not his policy. He did not sit down in a darkened room one night to write the HGV levy. It was not his idea. We are not fighting him, and our fight is not with him. The faux outrage from the SDLP that we are trying to embarrass it is a load of crap. That is not what we are dealing with. This is a policy of the British Government, and we should not support them by implementing it.

There are a number of solutions. I am sympathetic to what a number of the Members opposite said about Sinn Féin's alternative. Our alternative is that the roads in the North should be exempt from the levy. Some said that an exemption should apply to the A5. Exempting the A5 is a sensible argument, but we do not need to stop there. We need to make sure that all roads in the North are exempt. However, if we cannot get agreement on that position, there are alternatives. We could come up with a scheme that covers both of these islands so that there is not the unfair playing field that is there at the minute. Everybody would pay the levy, but it would be applied fairly across all hauliers.

Colleagues mentioned that businesses in border areas do much better at exporting and that they often use Southern hauliers. To be honest, anybody who says that this is only about hauliers in Donegal does not know what they are talking about. Businesses based in border areas use Southern hauliers and are reliant on them to move their goods and products. Someone will have to pay the additional costs. If they put a tax of £1,000 a year on the lorry, who do they think will pay that? It will be passed on to the end user, who —

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member realise that the £1,000 is a maximum charge and that it can be paid daily, weekly, monthly or annually? Road usage and vehicle weight affect the payment. The maximum is £1,000 a year.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for her intervention. I also thank Sean in RaISe, who produced a very helpful document, which includes a table giving the rate for each band. The Member is right that £1,000 a year per lorry is the maximum charge. You can pay it daily at a tenner, weekly at £50 or monthly at £100. None of those are small sums, and they will seriously impact on hauliers in the South and on customers, producers and manufacturers in the North.

The customers and the constituents whom we represent will foot the bill. Whatever small amount is raised will have a huge impact here, but it will not stay here. It will go off to Britain and help to build a train track from London to Birmingham or somewhere like that. It will not help to extend the railway from Derry to Coleraine and get it open again. It will certainly not build a train track to Enniskillen. I can guarantee you that that is not what the money will go on. As much as I would like that, it will not happen. We have been told that our food and fuel bills are already higher here, so we can certainly do without an additional tax to move goods.

Two roads are partially exempt, and that has been the case from the start. That was the case when we tabled the motion in May, and we called for further exemptions. Some Members indicated their support for adding the A5 to the list of exemptions, and the Minister said that he would seek such an exemption. In May, we were also told that it was the wrong time for a debate and that we were tabling a motion as an election was coming up and we were using it to attack the SDLP. It has nothing to do with the SDLP; the SDLP is not bringing forward this HGV levy. Its Minister has a responsibility for enacting a secondary piece of legislation, but it is not his piece of legislation. So,

once again, I want to tell Alban Maginness that we are not fighting with the SDLP over the issue, even if he wants to be outraged and offended and say that I am attacking the Minister. He is on the wrong planet; he is definitely in the wrong continent.

Some people might say that this is not the time or the place, but maybe some people do not want to have this debate; maybe some people do not want to hear that partition is bad for our people.

Additional roads need to be exempt. We have adopted the position that all roads need to be exempt. Maybe some other people would adopt a smaller position where some roads need to be exempt. Would they pick the A5, which runs from Derry to Aughnacloy, or the A4, which goes from Belcoo the whole way to Ballygawley and extends up to Dungannon and Belfast? Would they add in the A46, which goes from Enniskillen to Belleek, or the A8, which the Member for East Antrim probably knows right and well? Would they add in that road, given its strategic importance?

It is rich for Alban Maginness to stand up and tell us that this is not about the North. Not once did he mention the HGV levy. In all of his wide-ranging, historical address — talking about things that happened before I was born — he never once mentioned the HGV levy. That shows you what he is here for. He is not here to debate the HGV levy; he is here because he thinks that there is a political attack against Mark H Durkan, and he is here to block that attack. He is the one who started the attack; it did not exist until he got up to speak. A large number of Members spoke, but not one of them mentioned Mark H Durkan. Nobody attacked or crucified him or said anything negative at all about the man. He stands up and tells us that this is not about the North and that it is us looking to the South. Well, we have a lot more voters in the South than the SDLP has.

From Alban Maginness's lengthy pontification on the issue, he did not seem to have a clue what he was talking about. He has not engaged with people to be able to tell us about the issue. He certainly has not engaged with anybody in a border area. Maybe, sitting in his ivory tower in north Belfast, everything is fine and dandy for him, but it is certainly not good for people in border areas. It is not good for the people who are manufacturing stuff — the manufacturing and agrifood companies that are trying to get the stuff that they make sent to their customers. It is not all fun and games for them.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will in a minute, Colum. As someone who represents a border constituency and who engages on a consistent basis with businesses, I know that this is a problem for those who are based in the North. Let me tell those in this room who think that this is only about hauliers in the South that it certainly is not. It is about businesses in the North that are trying to get their stuff moved; it is about people employed in the North who are going to lose their jobs; and, ultimately, it is about our constituents who are going to face increased costs as a result of this tax.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for giving way. I am from a border constituency as well, so I understand the negative impact that partition has had, and I understand the negative impact that this could have. We have already stated our opposition. Earlier, I asked a question that I would like you to address: how do you stop it? I have not heard once in the debate how we can actually stop this. This is an excepted matter controlled by the British Government in Westminster; they will come in and implement the tax if we do not. Tell me how to stop that. We will do it tomorrow.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his contribution. I always think it is great to hear the SDLP insisting that we come up with alternatives. Perhaps if the Member for East Antrim had the Floor he might suggest that the SDLP might suggest that we sell the City of Derry Airport and use the funds to offset the taxation. That is the type of alternative that we are dealing with.

I want to finish on a positive note, when I get there, and that is where I want to see a solution coming from. I will come back to Colum's question in a minute. It was not us who introduced party politics into the debate; it was Alban Maginness.

When he gets up to speak, I am genuinely reminded of the comments that Paul Gogarty made to Emmet Stagg in the Dáil one day, and I dare not repeat those, because there are enough people getting thrown out of this place at the minute. I genuinely do not think that he mentioned the HGV levy once in his historical debate. He accused us of trying to embarrass the SDLP, as have others. We do not need to embarrass the SDLP. If you have Alban Maginness speaking on this issue for you, he is doing a good enough job. We never once mentioned Mark H Durkan in a critical manner. I am sure that we are all aware —

Mr Wilson: You mentioned him about 50 times.

Mr Flanagan: I hear you, Sammy; I hear you. I have mentioned him in a passive manner. I am saying that we have not attacked him.

I am sure that he did his best because, fundamentally, he does not agree with the policy, and his party does not agree with it. This is not an attack on his party. If this was going to be a political attack on the SDLP, I would have plenty of material here without having to get into Mark H Durkan's inability to get the British Government to roll over on a HGV levy.

Mr Wilson: Fifty-one.

Mr Flanagan: I think that it was 52. The SDLP has a number of policies. It has gone to considerable effort to make up policies that it has presented to the electorate, and the electorate have not really liked them that well. However, it is important that people realise that, in 2011, it produced a manifesto, which had a considerable section on its environmental policies and how the SDLP has delivered on them.

Lord Morrow: What about the prayer of annulment?

Mr Flanagan: I am on SR 2014/232, Maurice. If you read it, you will see where I am going. The SDLP manifesto stated that it had maintained pressure for an independent environmental protection agency:

> *"to improve government and private sector accountability, and in recognition of the fact that pollution, waste and habitat destruction know no borders."*

The Minister now says that it is not necessary to create a new statutory body outside of government to secure the necessary improvements. What has changed? Have

people stopped polluting, or is it simply the fact that the SDLP is now in charge of the Department?

Before the 2011 election, you could not stop SDLP MLAs tabling questions and motions and raising the issue of how bad PPS 21 is. They bombarded the previous Environment Minister, who was here earlier for this debate, about PPS 21. In fact, when Patsy McGlone was Chair of the Environment Committee, he claimed that PPS 21 was exactly the same as PPS 14. What do the MLAs do now that they have the ability to change the policy? They run away from it, and they raise the issue of the definition of a business, whereas when the party did not have the Ministry, it was all about non-farming families. When the SDLP is in a position to change things, it does not do so.

Lord Morrow: What about SR 2014/230?

Mr Flanagan: We are still on SR 2014/232, Maurice.

Mr Flanagan: The SDLP's economic vision is that it wants:

> *"a North which is attractive to business, grows the private sector, delivers jobs and builds prosperity for all our people."*

It says:

> *"Disappointingly, North-South is still hampered by overtly political considerations, as if in some instances it is seen as a concession to nationalism rather than pure common sense."*

If ever there was a pure common-sense approach to dealing with a tax, this is it. It is not a concession to nationalism to say, "Don't tax people who are coming three miles across the border to lift something out of a quarry and to bring it back into Donegal again". That is common sense, but the SDLP seems to be opposing it.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: Yes.

Mr Eastwood: For somebody who did not set out to attack the SDLP, you have done an awful lot of research into some of our previous documents. I do not want to press you on it, but the question that I asked you was, "How do we stop the levy being collected, no matter who collects it?" We are all ears.

Mr Flanagan: There are a number of solutions, and I told you that I will return to them. I have a three-word answer for you: vote for it. Vote for our motion to annul the legislation that your Minister brought forward. The initial solution is for you and your party to vote against it.

These are U-turns in SDLP policy — it is interesting that Mr Eastwood is here — and Alban Maginness gave us a lecture on Sinn Féin's position on Europe, but what is the SDLP's position on a border poll? Mr Eastwood was quoted in the 'Belfast Telegraph' in his weekly opinion piece saying that it is time for a border poll —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Get back on the road, please.

Mr Flanagan: — but the leader says that a border poll would not be useful. What is the party's position on that? Mr Maginness made a ludicrous allegation about UKIP, which is a load of nonsense. The point that I made was that UKIP had an advert in Irish newspapers telling people here to vote for UKIP, and it will give us our country back, meaning that if people here vote for a UKIP candidate, it will give us back Ireland. It is nothing to do with Europe or any of that oul' nonsense. That was the point that I was making. Maybe Mr Maginness just does not get humour. *[Interruption.]* Mr Morrow has encouraged me to return to SR 2014/230, which I will happily do. In all fairness to this policy, let us give Barry's friend Mr Goodwill a bit of credit. This policy probably makes sense on the south coast of England, where people drive lorries across from Calais, go into London for an hour and a half, drop something off and go back out again, or they come in from Calais, lift a load in the south of England, deliver it somewhere else in England and leave again. That is affecting English hauliers, but we are not here to represent them; we are here to represent the people who elect us, and I am here to represent the people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. That is my primary interest. The policy may make economic sense in the south of England, and that is where the policies that we are having to deal with are being set for. The British Government do not set economic policies with our interests at heart. Certainly not. They do not even think about us. We are not even an afterthought. They do not think, "What are the consequences of this for the people on the far side of Lough Erne in Fermanagh? What impact will it have on their lives?" They are interested only in the people who vote for them in the south of England and do not care about us. This policy does not make sense here. We do not face the problems that they face; we face our own problems.

6.00 pm

I turn to the Minister now, and this is what I want him to do, as well as to vote in favour of the motion. I want to see him return to the issue. I do not want him to say, "Well, lookit, the Assembly has voted for this issue, and that is the end of it". Regardless of the way in which the vote goes, I want to see the Minister return to the issue with his colleague in the South and his colleague in Britain and find a solution that meets the needs of people and businesses here. I want to see something that creates a level playing field, to use a phrase from one of the Members opposite. I do not want to see the distorted situation that we have currently. What we have at the minute is completely unacceptable. It goes against the stated ethos of greater North/South cooperation where that makes economic sense. A better solution has to be found. It does not make sense to charge people £1,000 a year for crossing the border with a lorry. Firms could be employing staff here and buying products here. In Michaela and Barry's case, they could be going to a quarry to lift aggregate, for which tax is paid. They could have staff who are paid here and are spending their wages in shops in the North, yet perhaps the firm that owns the lorry is based in the South. The policy does not meet our unique needs.

A better solution has to be found, but the one point that I will make is that it will not be found with a British Minister who has no accountability for, or interest in, the affairs of people here. Regardless of what people think my view of Mark H Durkan is, I certainly have more faith in him to deliver a HGV levy scheme that meets the needs of the people here than I do in any Minister in a British Government based in the south of England.

Mr Spratt: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I know that Mr Flanagan is an extremely talented person on radio, but will you examine his comment earlier

in the House in which he referred to a "load of crap" — those were his words — and check that in the Hansard report? Will you come back and tell the House whether that is strictly parliamentary language?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will review it. I actually noted his comment and did not find it exceptionally difficult, given the context in which he presented it. However, I will read the Hansard report.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Members of the Assembly, I welcome the opportunity today — tonight — to reply to the prayer of annulment for the five statutory rules that create a fixed penalty regime for non-payment of the HGV user levy, even though, I suspect, the motives of those who have decided to bring it to the House have possibly more to do with party politics than serious concern about the impact of the levy, despite protestations otherwise.

Let me make it very clear: the HGV levy is a tax that has been introduced by the UK Government. As a tax, it is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act. The levy has applied across Britain and the North since 1 April this year. However, while it has been enforced in Britain, it has not been enforced here to date.

Since the Department for Transport introduced the levy, it must comply with EU legislation and put an effective enforcement regime in place. The levy has been thrust on us, and we must now make sensible decisions moving forward.

Today, we are not debating the introduction of the levy but the mechanism for its enforcement here. The legislation being considered concerns whether it is appropriate that drivers of a vehicle, within the scope of the levy, receive a fixed penalty if they have not paid for their journey instead of court proceedings being instigated.

I will inform the Assembly of the actions I have taken to engage with Department for Transport Ministers in London, who are ultimately responsible for the levy. I will set out my reasons for bringing forward these five statutory rules despite my continued reservations about the appropriateness of the levy itself. I have previously articulated my concerns about the levy in this House. I will also address some of the issues that Members have raised today, and there have been quite a few.

I have made it very clear to Department for Transport Ministers that the decision to introduce the levy may impact on the economies of both jurisdictions on this island. I do not believe that the UK gave proper consideration to the unique position here on this island, particularly in respect of the operation of the haulage industry and the reliance on it to maintain and grow a wide variety of businesses. I believe that my engagement with Minister Goodwill has given DfT greater understanding of the position on this island, and I will continue to make my views known to him or to whomever, as appropriate. I have been actively engaged with hauliers, haulage industry representatives and with Ministers in London and Dublin to identify ways to ensure that the island-wide economy is not adversely impacted on by this new levy.

Coming from the north-west, I fully understand the significant economic problems that exist in the area and know that any increased costs could have detrimental impacts, not only here but on the island-wide trade and economy. Although some signs of economic recovery, North and South, are beginning to emerge, this is still a very fragile process, and I am committed to doing all that I can to ensure that the levy does not have a detrimental impact on that recovery.

I believe that the exclusion of the A5 could mitigate some of the economic impact of the levy. The A5 is of significant importance to the population of County Donegal because of its geographic position. It is the main arterial route from the north-west to Dublin city, its port and beyond. I, along with hauliers from the South, those who represent them, TDs and MLAs, have highlighted that the failure to exclude certain roads, in particular the A5, would have a detrimental impact on cross-border trade and the all-island haulage industry. However, we have been unable, to date, to provide any hard data to support this assertion. I have, therefore, been unable to convince DfT of the need to exempt the A5. However, I am pleased to report that, as a direct result of my engagement, DfT has given a commitment that it will consider what mitigating actions are needed to rectify any problems if and when firm evidence of adverse impact becomes available, and I will hold it to that.

The levy is generally supported by hauliers in Britain and in the North. It has long been the industry's view here that, since hauliers have to pay to use the roads in other European countries, including tolls in Ireland, hauliers from those countries should pay in the UK. Indeed, in response to my Department's consultation on the fixed penalty regime, the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association reaffirmed this view.

It is important to stress that all affected hauliers in the North are already paying the levy as part of their vehicle excise duty payment. There is also clear evidence that a significant number of Irish hauliers are already paying it, and, whilst I do not have the precise answer to Mrs Overend's question, I understand that around 51,000 levies have been purchased for around 7,000 Irish-registered vehicles in the six months since the levy became law.

Further engagement with DfT has allayed some of my concerns about potential financial implications for transport-related businesses in the North, for example, those who service and repair HGVs for Southern operators. I can confirm that hauliers who bring vehicles to the North from the South to have them serviced or repaired do not and will not have to pay the levy.

My decision to bring forward the fixed penalty legislation was not easy. However, I am satisfied that most affected drivers would prefer to pay an on-the-spot fine rather than become tied up with the courts, as that is not only time-consuming but costly. I should stress again that DfT must, under European law, ensure that the levy is enforced.

The decision about whether DVA will enforce the levy has been more difficult and one that I have not taken lightly, not least because of my continuing concerns about its potential impact. However, since the levy is now in place and, under European law, it must be enforced, I believe that, on balance, it is better that the DVA undertakes its enforcement rather than having DfT bring in its own enforcement agency. I believe that it will be better for the haulage industry as it reduces the risk that hauliers will be delayed on their journey. Multiple enforcement agencies could mean multiple stops and late deliveries or missed

boats, which would definitely impact on profit margins and business.

The Driver and Vehicle Agency is constantly engaged with the hauliers who use our roads, which means that stops will be undertaken more efficiently and safely and hauliers will be back en route more quickly than if a new enforcement agency were carrying out the work.

I have secured additional funding from DfT for a number of new enforcement jobs here. DfT will also commit to giving us £750,000 capital funding for new automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) camera equipment. That can be used not only for enforcing the levy but for ensuring that other transport laws that provide for road safety and fair competition are obeyed.

I listened very carefully to all Members who spoke during the debate, and I thank them for their contributions; some were longer than others. I would like to make the following comments on points raised.

I will start with Mr McElduff, who proposed the prayer of annulment motions. He started by setting out his party's view, which is not too far from that of my own. While this may be bad law, as Mr McElduff put it, it is law; it is law in many jurisdictions, and it is law here. He said that DfT had not listened, and I concur entirely. However, let me reiterate the fact that it was not for want of our trying. I think that it is fair and accurate to say that our efforts here perhaps superseded those of the Southern Government.

I appreciate Mr McElduff's recognition of my efforts and those of my predecessor, particularly with regard to the A5. As a north-west native, I am keenly aware of the plight of Donegal. However, I will not join Mr McElduff in going "Goodwill hunting". The specific example that he gave of the Lifford haulier and the impact that this would have on his business on a day-to-day basis is precisely the type of evidence that we will need to substantiate our case to DfT, and I will work with my officials, Members and hauliers to compile evidence as we progress to make our case as strong as possible.

Mr McElduff accused the DOE of proceeding with pace. That is a new one in the Chamber at least. He referred to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I am aware of BIPA's recent report on the levy. Like BIPA, I very much support the introduction of a British-Irish regional economic space with greater cooperation across a number of economic activities, including transport. BIPA's recent report echoes our concerns and my concerns about the impact of the levy and takes up my call for the A5 to be exempted.

Ms Lo gave a helpful account of the Committee's deliberations, particularly of representations received by the Committee.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for giving way. Just when you are talking about Committees: you said that this is bad law. You also said on several occasions that welfare reform was bad law. Your party is opposed to that, but it seems to be rolling over and accepting this.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his intervention.

Was it this time last Thursday that we were not the ones who rolled over? Coming from a party that has had more rollovers than the National Lottery, that is a bit rich. *[Laughter.]* It could be you.

6.15 pm

I am glad that Ms Lo also acknowledged our efforts to secure arrangements that would and could be more satisfactory, and, in her role as Committee Chair, she would know more than most about the efforts that have been made.

Mrs Cameron went into more technical detail around the statutory rules and quite astutely identified the fact that this is better enforced by DOE than DfT. It is better for us and, more importantly, it is better for drivers and operators.

Mr Eastwood injected a degree of reality into the debate and urged public representatives to be upfront about how little we can do about it in here. It was a very good contribution, but he will be worried to know that Lord Morrow thought so, too.

I addressed Mrs Overend's question earlier. She opposed the prayers of annulment also.

Mr Weir threatened to make an uncharacteristically brief contribution. He did make a characteristically informed one, and, although he questioned whether the motivation behind this is to embarrass me, I am certain that that is not the case. If Sinn Féin did want to assassinate me, I am sure that I would know all about it.

Ms Boyle referred to a number of party colleagues in Sinn Féin. It was like a who's who of Sinn Féin. In fact, I actually had to ask "Who?" a few times because I had not heard from many of them on this issue. I accept that this issue has been very close to Mr McElduff's heart for some time, but I am extremely surprised at the volume of contributions from Sinn Féin, whose members have been queued up to speak, some at great length, on this excepted matter. In fact, there were more of them than wanted to speak or ask questions on the draft Budget for Northern Ireland yesterday.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Minister share the view of many in the House that it was simply filibustering because they do not want to face up to the shame that awaits them in relation to how they have dealt with the Máiría Cahill case?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the intervention. It will be obvious to anyone in the Chamber and to anyone observing today's proceedings that there is certainly no rush to get on to the next debate in the Chamber. They have managed successfully to eat into the teatime news coverage of that debate.

Mr McAleer compared the levy to someone going from Leeds to Liverpool. Mr Maginness said that Sinn Féin wanted out of Europe. I want to get home in time to see Liverpool get out of Europe, so I will conclude very shortly.

Mr Brady asked about my view on parity and whether I had become wedded to it. This is the best that we can do, and anyone who thinks otherwise is living in fantasy land. Does that sound familiar?

Then we heard from Phil Flanagan, or is it Phil-ibuster? I was relieved to hear from Mr Flanagan that Sinn Féin is not out to attack me and that this has nothing to do with me. I very much look forward to seeing the press release that says that. Let me also reassure Mr Flanagan that I would not and do not sneer in any way at the £1,000 bill

for hauliers or for anyone. It is estimated that that £1,000 represents approximately 0·5% of the annual cost of running the HGV, but I am in no way dismissive of the cost.

Mr Maginness was clearly a red flag to Mr Flanagan's bull, and, in here, we are all familiar with Mr Flanagan's bull. *[Laughter.]* He has clearly spent a lot of time studying SDLP manifestos, but his party has been doing that for some time. I look forward to seeing the policies reflected in future manifestos from Mr Flanagan's party.

I will summarise my position: I remain committed to ensuring that the potential negative impacts of the levy on trade across this island are monitored and that prompt action is taken if any are identified. I am content that, due to the actions that I have taken, Transport Ministers will take mitigating action should firm evidence become available of an economic impact on this island from the HGV road user levy. I believe that the arrangement that I secured to enforce the levy is the best option available to us. Therefore, I do not support this motion.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I suppose, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, that I have only an hour and half to wind on all of this stuff, so maybe we will sit back and relax until 8.00 pm and see how it goes.

The point that I want to start with is that, as elected Members, it is our duty to protect the needs and interests of local people. The debate has been interesting, and I will get to some of the points made. Maybe I will refer to the boxing match between Mr Flanagan and Mr Maginness as well. It was a good wee bout that went 15 rounds. This is the only point that I will make about the SDLP, and maybe the Minister will answer on his party's behalf: if the prayers of annulment had come along and the SDLP did not have the ministry, what would it have done? To be fair to the Minister, he was quite positive during the previous debate on this matter and committed to looking at ways to move forward and to looking at exemptions and everything else. Nobody is jumping forward to answer the question, but I can safely say that his party would be voting with us on this matter.

I commend the proposer. He sat down, methodically thought this out and brought a very good presentation to the House today. Basically, all of this boils down to a load of enforcement notices. Enforce the levy, collect the penalties and be done with it. That is what it is. The reality, and this is a sad reflection for us, is that this Westminster legislation is being enforced here by DVA. The irony is that we cannot even enforce the Taxis Act, but, still and all, we can put a team together to stop people on border roads. I was hoping that the Minister would expand on how exactly he proposes to introduce enforcement measures on all of those roads. Maybe the Committee will receive that information in writing.

I enjoyed Mr Flanagan's contribution, which he made in response to comments from some of the parties. Members got away from the subject and were allowed some leniency, which was grand. I want to compliment the proposer and my colleague Ian Milne. We tabled the motions because we have genuine concerns. The impact that the levy will have on people was highlighted over and over again. To be fair, Donegal was mentioned a load of times. I live in a border constituency, and Louth, Monaghan, Donegal and all the other counties will be impacted by this. Those are the people who are trying to protect. This is nothing new to Committee members because we had this debate there.

I was a wee bit disappointed in Mr Maginness, who told us all about Europe. I would not like to pay the fees to travel around every European country that he mentioned in his contribution. I want to remind him about this point, which Mr McElduff brought up.

It is from Mr Seamus McMahon of Linwoods, which is a giant bakery to the south of Armagh. For those Members who do not know the area, it is on the Middletown road and it employs more than 250 staff. Mr McMahon said that it could affect southern hauliers bringing in packaging or ingredients, and that it could lead to pricier bread and other products. Throughout the debate, Sinn Féin Members were supporting hauliers, businesses and long-term business relationships, which have been built up for a long time and many a day in those areas. The reality —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Yes.

Mr Wilson: I am at a loss to understand Member's logic. If hauliers from the Irish Republic no longer find it profitable to deliver the goods that he is talking about in Northern Ireland, does it not give opportunities for Northern Ireland hauliers to take up the business, go across the border, lift the goods and bring them back into Northern Ireland? Surely, that would be a good thing?

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for his intervention but clearly the Member has not lived in the area, though perhaps at one point he got on the train and came across the border. He does not know the working relationships, and he is being very narrow in his thinking. These businesses have been built up and have gained experience for long and many a day. That is what we are talking about.

You have given this debate a fair hearing, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. You will be delighted to know that I am not going to speak until 8.00 pm. I just want to pick up on some of the comments that have been made.

I want to praise the contribution of Mr McElduff. His remarks about Mr Goodwill were entertaining. Mr Goodwill did nothing for us at all; he showed no goodwill. Mr McElduff complimented the Minister on his speech in the last debate. I was hoping that Mr Durkan would have picked up on that again and mention something about it. However, Mr Durkan said that he would strive to look at this issue again and look at other exemptions. He is committed to that, and we will hold him to it.

The key points from Mr McElduff's contribution were that DfT is not listening and this is bad law. He is absolutely right. We have sat in the Committee talking about European directives, and all the Committee members have known this point for a long time. It is up to the member state to derogate those directives, in whatever way, so that it can facilitate exemptions if they wish. So there is an opportunity here. I call on all Members to support that.

I have a couple of other points. Anna Lo, the Chair of the Committee, talked about having a level playing field, and that is grand. However, although we talk about level playing fields and all these businesses, at the end of the day, this charge is going to be put onto consumers and customers. Not one person — except Ian Milne, Mickey

Brady and Barry McElduff — acknowledged that, at the end of the day, the customer and the consumer will pay for all those charges. The reason why hauliers have come to us is that they are reluctant to put that charge onto the consumer.

Colum Eastwood is not in the Chamber at the minute. He said that he wanted to bring reality to this debate in that it is already dead and gone, it has been agreed, and we are only bringing forward the enforcement laws. He knows that the reality of the debate is this: he represents his constituents, just as I do mine, and our constituents are going to pay for this levy. It is as simple as that. So this is another tax on the people. So, if we want to talk about reality, let us get it right.

I picked up on the point made by Mrs Overend, who said that there are tolls in the South and across Europe. She said it is up to people and it is their choice. However, Mr Flanagan made a very good point about that when he said that cars and hauliers use the tolls and they pay. That is by pure choice; so I do not think, to be fair, that Mrs Overend has an argument.

Mr McAleer and Michaela Boyle spoke about their experience of how this would impact on businesses in their areas. They were contacted by businesses. Some Members across the House said that Sinn Féin Members kept using Donegal as an example, but at least Mr McAleer and Ms Boyle were contacted by people on how this would impact on them.

6.30 pm

Mickey Brady mentioned that, in his experience at shopping centres in Newry, all the money goes out of the country, so it is nothing new. He asked us to present a united front. I want the Chamber to consider that in supporting us to get this over the line.

Phil Flanagan also asked for a united front and articulated his points on issues in respect of the SDLP. I thank him for his contribution.

I appreciate that the Minister said that he would look at the issue again and that there may be mitigating measures. However, I previously asked why an economic assessment was not carried out before the legislation was brought forward, instead of talking about mitigating factors now, seeing how it impacts and how it is paid. Clearly, we did not get an opportunity. The sad thing about the process is that we never got an opportunity to debate or consult on any of it, and now we find ourselves just enforcing it. The message that I want to get across is that the consumer, unfortunately, will pay for all that. Once again, it will impact on border areas.

Interestingly, for some reason or other, a report was leaked to 'The Stephen Nolan Show' the other day, and there was a debate about the possibility of losing many public sector jobs, giving much money to DETI, growing the private sector and everything else. In this situation, we are taking money and charging private business more money to conduct business.

I want to use this point if we are serious about private industry. The sad fact is that most border areas — I will use Armagh city and district as an example — are totally reliant on public sector jobs. The infrastructure is not in place. How will we grow the private sector? Here is an example of taking money and charging more. If we want to get into a debate about how we support businesses, let us be realistic. I know that next week or the week after I will hear the same people who spoke today about opposing the prayer of annulment and introducing legislation fighting for ordinary individuals, housing and every other right.

I ask the House to support the Sinn Féin motions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that I will put the Question on each of the motions listed in the Order Paper separately.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 26; Noes 69.

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly negatived.

Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014: Prayer of Annulment

Question proposed:

> *That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*

Question put.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 27; Noes 68.

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly negatived.

Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014: Prayer of Annulment

Question proposed:

> *That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*

Question put.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement to dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 27; Noes 68.

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly negatived.

Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014: Prayer of Annulment

Question proposed:

> *That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*

Question put.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 27; Noes 68.

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly negatived.

Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014: Prayer of Annulment

Question proposed:

> *That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234) be annulled. — [Mr McElduff.]*

Question put.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 27; Noes 68.

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we move to the next item of business, I ask the House to take its ease for a few moments while we change the top Table.

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

BBC 'Spotlight': 14 October 2014

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and thirty 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 will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

Ms P Bradley: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly expresses concern at the contents of the investigation by the BBC 'Spotlight' programme broadcast on Tuesday 14 October into allegations of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Provisional IRA and covered up within the IRA, implicating senior members of Sinn Féin; notes Ms Jennifer McCann's admission that she was informed about the abuse that Ms Máiría Cahill suffered, yet inexplicably did not report it to the lawful authorities; further notes that Ms McCann, in her role as junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, has responsibilities in relation to policy relating to historical institutional abuse and children; and calls for a full inquiry into the junior Minister to establish any impropriety as well as any breach of the ministerial code of conduct.*

I say at the outset that the motion before the Chamber this evening brings me no pleasure, because it delves into the most heinous of crimes and the systemic cover-up of the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Féin. Rape is committed by the most vile scum of our society. It is a crime that should never be excused, it is a crime that should never be covered up, and it is a crime that should never allow the perpetrators to feel that they can commit it with impunity.

I applaud Máiría Cahill for having the courage to come forward and speak about her experience and bring to light the systemic failure of those in her community who were there to protect and support her. It is right and just that the case is now being reviewed by the PPS, and it is my wish that Ms Cahill will finally see the justice that she so rightly deserves. Part of that justice is also about holding those, including Jennifer McCann, to account for their role in prolonging Máiría's painful journey.

When any person is the victim of this disgusting personal violation, the decision to share their experience and report what has happened to them is one that takes a great deal of courage. There are often fears that they will not be believed by those they trust to tell, and this is magnified when the alleged perpetrator has a degree of standing in the community. Often, the survivor of such an attack will have to relive the event, and to a number of people, in order to see that justice is delivered. This has been described by many victims as reliving the attack over and over again.

As responsible adults, we need to ensure that when someone does disclose such abuse they are believed, that they are referred to the appropriate professionals, and that at all times the victim should feel safe, secure and supported. Failure to take those simple steps can lead the individual to believe that they are somehow to blame and that they are not believed. That is exactly what happened in this case.

Furthermore, when we look at child sexual abuse and rape, it should prompt us to act responsibly and immediately to protect not only the victim but any further victims who are in the sights of the predator. Although time and again Máiría was failed by those in her community who had been in the position to protect and help her, she is a remarkable young woman who is prepared to tell her story, not only to uncover the failures she endured but to empower others to come forward who have also been failed by those who they thought would protect them.

7.30 pm

Over the past number of years, we in the Chamber have been talking about religious and state institutions, amongst others, and the cover-up of a culture of child abuse and rape. Following this, it will not surprise me if, over the next weeks or months, we discover more of these stories from all sections of our community. Máiría, through her disclosure, has opened the door for other victims on all sides to come forward and, for that, she must be commended.

Sadly, Sinn Féin, in an effort to protect its cause, failed to act appropriately. It failed a vulnerable young girl and reinforced the message that child abuse and rape are to be tolerated in its community, and, as we are all aware, this is not the first time.

Máiría Cahill has alleged that she informed the Irish Republican Army and members of Sinn Féin of her ordeal. Jennifer McCann, by her own admission, was informed of Máiría's case back in 2005. This was not in the midst of the Troubles; this was when child protection policies and protocols were as sophisticated as they are now. This was less than 10 years ago.

Ms McCann, I am sad to say, failed Máiría. She failed to support her, failed to tell the relevant people of the allegations of abuse and failed to report the allegations to ensure that they could be investigated. Ms McCann, and anyone else with prior knowledge of the case, let a sexual predator walk amongst their community, free to carry out further crimes, and, let us not forget that this crime — child rape — is deemed by most right-thinking people to be the most depraved.

I believe, given what I have said, that Jennifer McCann's position is now untenable. Ms McCann has a responsibility, through her position in the Assembly, for policy on historical institutional abuse and young people. In relation to child abuse, historically, she has been shown to have failed to follow protocol to protect a vulnerable young adult. We know that she had no role in the initial incident, but, by her failure to act, she has shown contempt for the impact on survivors of past alleged abuse. She should have no further role in historical abuse policy.

How can any survivors of such abuse have any confidence in this junior Minister, when, by her own admission, she was informed of alleged abuse and did nothing? Máiría trusted Jennifer McCann, and that trust was abused by Ms McCann's failure to act.

It is only right that survivors of abuse should have policy designed by someone who does not have such a smear on their background when it comes to dealing with alleged incidents of child abuse and rape.

Sexual predators rely on their victims' silence in order to continue to satisfy their deviant desires. They rely on the shame that they place on victims to keep them silent, and they rely on the doubts of society to question whether the incidents really happened. However, this victim did come forward, and she broke her silence, only to have the Irish Republican Army and members of Sinn Féin silence her and, in turn, feed the deviant desires of Máiría's sexual predator.

When child abuse or rape is reported and nothing is done, the person who received the report is, by default, aiding and abetting any further incidents of abuse carried out by the predator.

Rape is one of the most disempowering things that can happen to any individual. It violates a person's very being, and the ramifications are felt not just by the survivor but by our society as a whole. The victim is left to carry a burden that impacts on all aspects of their life and, in many cases, for all of their life. Rape must no longer be a taboo subject in our society. We must talk to our daughters and our sons in the same way as we discuss other issues. We must send out a strong message that rape and child abuse are wrong — they are unacceptable — and that we as an Assembly will not be seen to tolerate the cover-up of child rape.

We must ensure that all victims know who they can approach to get help, and ensure that those whom they do approach actually do help. Jennifer McCann's involvement must be investigated to see whether any breaches of code were committed. She must, I believe, stand down as junior Minister as a result of her failure in Máiría's case. To maintain her position is a conflict of interest and sends the wrong message regarding rape in our society. Rape should never happen, rape should never be tolerated, and rape should never, under any circumstances, be covered up in our community. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Attwood: I beg to move the following amendment:

Insert after "Sinn Fein;"

> *"believes that the scale of the abuse perpetrated by members of the republican movement needs to be determined with accountability, both by those responsible and those with knowledge, and that victims be given individual and emotional support;".*

We must always remember what the debate is about and what it is only about: abuse, cover-up and accountability. Whatever attempts have been made to obscure, dissemble, unpick and deny those facts, the debate remains about abuse, cover-up and accountability. It was only a few weeks ago that the Chamber unanimously passed a motion in respect of the abuse at Kincora. What was the response of the British Government? In denying our unanimous request to have Kincora part of the abuse inquiry in London, the Secretary of State said that it should remain part of the Hart inquiry in Northern Ireland and said that there would be the "fullest possible degree of cooperation" by all of Her Majesty's Government and its agencies to determine the facts. That is code for resistance to truth and accountability.

Let us also remember that, in the last few hours, another of the disappeared has been identified. That is another example of the culture of abuse and death and cover-up and lack of accountability. Whatever comes from the debate, let us recognise that it is only about speaking for victims and survivors and speaking up for truth and accountability.

Máiría Cahill is the latest Irishwoman who speaks truth to power. She follows in the footsteps of Catherine McCartney and her sisters, of Margaret McGuckin and those other children abused in institutions. Máiría Cahill, despite the trauma of her experience and despite those who still seek to traumatise her, continues to speak truth to power. She is a fearless, resilient, formidable woman. Irish democracy in all its expressions should stand with her. Those who seek to diminish her with viciousness in social media or through the releases of a Belfast lawyer must not prevail.

In this Chamber in November 2009, Gerry Adams said in respect of the Ryan report just published in Dublin:

> *"A just society needs decency, fairness and equality alongside accountability and transparency." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 45, p22, col 2].*

Accountability and transparency were the standard that the president of Sinn Féin said should govern these issues that face Irish society. Fast-forward not 10 years, 10 months or even 10 days ago: fast-forward to an interview that Mr Adams gave on Irish radio yesterday morning. He was asked, "Where were abusers expelled to?" to which he replied, "'I don't know' is the direct answer to your question". Here we are in the eye of this storm, and the president of Sinn Féin when asked where abusers were expelled to replied, "'I don't know' is the direct answer to your question". We need to know where they were expelled to in order to assess the risk to people in this part of Ireland, across Ireland and on these islands in order to determine where they are and the level of risk. My question to Mr Adams, to Ms Ní Chuilín and to Jennifer McCann is this: is your answer to the question, "Where were abusers expelled to?" the same as Garry Adams's, which was, "I don't know is the direct answer"? That is unacceptable and is unacceptable to Irish democracy.

Later in the same interview, Mr Adams was asked, "Do you accept that Máiría Cahill was forced by the IRA to face her attacker?", to which Mr Adams replied, "I don't know. That's the truth of it". Máiría Cahill says that not only was she forced to face her attacker but she states:

> *"And you will remember watching as the rapist told me for hours, to my face and in front of you, that I was a liar, and that he didn't do those things to me."*

Given that that is her testimony, which has been repeated in many places over the last three weeks and privately many times before that, how can Mr Gerry Adams, the leader of the Provisional movement and the president of Sinn Féin, who says that he believes that Máiría Cahill was abused, say, not last year or last month but yesterday, to the people of Ireland in answer to the question, "Do you accept that Máiría Cahill was forced by the IRA to face her attacker?", "I don't know. That's the truth of it"? The question to Mr Adams, to Ms Ní Chuilín and to Ms McCann is: do they agree with Mr Adams's response to the question that she was forced by the IRA to face her attacker, which was, "I don't know. That's the truth of it". Do you believe that that is living up to the standards of transparency and accountability that Mr Adams articulated in this place in the Ryan debate in 2009?

There is a third question when it comes to transparency and accountability. In 1999, Gerry Adams told his ard-fheis:

> *"Scandals of child abuse have infected some of the main institutions, and the extent of the cover-ups have shocked many citizens."*

That was 1999, which was around the time when the IRA was carrying out its first inquiry and interrogation of Máiría Cahill. Shortly thereafter, Máiría Cahill met Gerry Adams, and the IRA ended its inquiry in March 2000. Three months later, the man who Gerry Adams and other people say abused Máiría Cahill was promoted to a post in Community Restorative Justice Ireland in west Belfast. He was given that post, which was published, publicised and promoted in Sinn Féin's newspaper, 'An Phoblacht', where people were advised that the person who abused Máiría Cahill was now working on domestic abuse. If there was ever a moment that proved a point about the culture that prevailed in that organisation at that time, that was it. Based on the statements from Sinn Féin and others since the 'Spotlight' programme, you have to conclude that, if an abuser, at that time, was given additional responsibilities and given all that has come to pass since, it has not yet registered with Sinn Féin.

This is the latest chapter of abuse on this island, and it revolves around Máiría Cahill. I fear that there are more terrible chapters in the story of abuse to come. On behalf of Máiría Cahill and all the Máiría Cahills — there may be many, many others — her words are the most fearless and enduring. Her work in speaking truth to power tells us all that we need to hear. She says:

> *"No amount of back peddling, or changing of stories, or bluster, or inconsistency now will wipe from the Irish collective consciousness the shameful way in which [Sinn Féin] treated me in public, once I found my voice and used the media to help me to highlight the wider issue."*

She adds:

> *"it will never go away. And you, by denying it, and by trotting out the party line in order to protect yourselves, made me relive it all over again."*

She concludes:

> *"And I'm going to do everything in my power to ensure that there is no hiding place for those monsters who the IRA moved around this country, any longer. Because that's the way you should really 'help' children, Sinn Fein. You should care about them enough to do everything in your power to keep them safe. They deserve nothing less."*

7.45 pm

Mr M McGuinness: The DUP motion before the Assembly and the accompanying amendment from the SDLP are not about helping or supporting victims of sexual abuse. Those behind the motion are solely and singularly interested in attacking Sinn Féin and are blatantly politicising this very sensitive issue in the most crass and self-serving way. The motion is a wholly unjustified and unfounded attack on the integrity and sincerity of one of the most dedicated and capable Members of this Assembly, my friend and colleague junior Minister Jennifer McCann. The motion is a disgrace. We have come to expect this type of gutter politics from some elements in the DUP. Gregory Campbell's insulting comments on the Irish language yesterday — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. The Member will resume his seat.

I want to make it clear that many Members have told me that they regard this debate as probably one of the most important that has taken place. I therefore appeal to all Members to allow those who are speaking to be heard.

Mr M McGuinness: Gregory Campbell's insulting comments on the Irish language yesterday and the derogatory comments of Jim Wells about the people of west Belfast are in the same vein. Therefore, we expect this type of insulting and personalised politicking from unrepentant bigots in the DUP.

Even more disgraceful, however, is the collusion between the SDLP and the DUP in their combined and cowardly attack on Jennifer McCann. The SDLP has sunk to new depths with this cynical exercise. It is attempting to exploit the difficult issue of sexual abuse for the most selfish and self-serving political reasons. The SDLP amendment is a disgrace, and the SDLP Members who tabled it should be ashamed of themselves.

What has to be remembered is that the allegations at the centre of the debate have been tested in court and that those accused were acquitted. Members are now arguing that due process should be set aside or ignored. They are doing so not out of concern for an individual victim but because they see her suffering as their political opportunity. That is a very sad reflection of the priorities of some in the Chamber. Let me be absolutely clear on this point: I have no tolerance whatsoever for abusers and nothing but empathy and sympathy for Máiría Cahill and those who have been abused, but there is a duty on all of us to confront the issue of sexual abuse in Irish society and to do so in a responsible way, and to do it in a way that enables all victims and survivors to access the support and justice that they need and are entitled to.

That is why I am proposing the establishment of an all-island initiative, resourced by and under the remit of the Irish Government and the Northern Executive, through the North/South Ministerial Council. It will ensure that victims and survivors have access to the professional support services that they need, and, crucially, it will be a channel through which complaints can be made to the appropriate statutory agency or police service.

Let me be very clear: in her contact with Máiría Cahill, seven years after the abuse occurred, Jennifer McCann acted at all times with care and compassion in attempting to support and assist a work colleague who, she believed, was the victim of serious sexual abuse. *[Interruption.]* Jennifer McCann did absolutely nothing wrong then or since. There is absolutely no basis or substance to any suggestion that she is in breach of the ministerial code. On the contrary, in her role as junior Minister, Jennifer has been the most effective and determined champion of victims, particularly in her work with the victims of historical institutional abuse. Jennifer will continue in that important role with my total support and confidence. *[Interruption.]* As long as I am deputy First Minister —

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

Mr M McGuinness: — Jennifer McCann will continue, as junior Minister, to assist me in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. Before I call the next Member, I remind Members that courtesy, good temper and moderation are the standards required in the debate. I am not happy with the number of Members who have been shouting from sedentary positions, and I will not allow it.

Mr Nesbitt: Deputy Speaker, I support the motion and the amendment. I also acknowledge your last intervention, when you made it clear that, in your view, this is a very important debate, notwithstanding the disgraceful remarks of the deputy First Minister, who questions the motivation for the debate.

Let us talk about the motivation that drives Máiría Cahill. Some people think she is very brave. I do not think she thinks she is very brave; I think that she is driven by justice and by doing the right thing, not just for herself, because she is not an isolated case. There are others. There are many, many others. A significant number have come forward since she put herself into the public domain. I commend her for that, because a lot of those people thought that they were on their own and that their experience was unique. Now they know that they are not the only ones and they do not have to travel this journey alone. Some even approached me. I think that that is remarkable. Once proud republican women came to a unionist and asked whether I could help to break the interminable mental torture that they are suffering because of this abuse. The motivation of Máiría Cahill is to do the right thing.

I first met Máiría Cahill about six years ago when I was a commissioner for victims and survivors. We met in the centre of Belfast, and she told me her story. That story is unchanged in the last six years. I believe it. I also know that she was aware, even then, of what she was taking on. She was taking on an organisation that purported to defend the nationalist community. It purported to defend its people, as it called them, but on its terms. What were those terms? "Do as we say, or it is tarring and feathering. Or it is kneecapping. Or it is torture — physically. It is torture mentally. It is abduction. It is murder. It is beyond murder: we will murder you and we will disappear your body and mentally torture your families for decades". That is who she was taking on, and now we discover that, to all those weapons, we have to add sexual violence and abuse. Máiría Cahill knew exactly what sort of organisation she was taking on.

Republicans say that they are for victims. As a journalist, I had to study republican literature. I read the writings of Gerry Adams. 'The Politics of Irish Freedom' is a very interesting book. I was stunned by his views on what he called "mistakes". I am thinking, for example, of an IRA bomb in Warrenpoint, where a young girl who worked in a shop was blown up. She was an innocent victim, or "a mistake", as Gerry Adams called it, but, rather than apologising for the mistake, he criticised the British Government and the media for, "cynically exploiting our mistakes". I mention that because it shows that this is an organisation for whom protecting the organisation, no matter what the cost to the victims, is in republican DNA. The organisation comes first, and that is what Máiría Cahill is taking on. Sexual violence and abuse is, therefore, a legacy issue and it should be in the talks that the Secretary of State is hosting. Not just republican violence but Kincora. For years and decades, we have heard that the British security services used vulnerable boys as sexual bait. Let us discover whether that is true or not, because if it is true, it is a national scandal.

The motion highlights junior Minister McCann's responsibilities in relation to the policy relating to historical institutional abuse. I have two questions for Ms McCann. We all know that there was more abuse outside of institutions than in institutions, but OFMDFM has not brought forward any process to match the HIA inquiry. Is that because to have an inquiry into abuse outside of institutions would expose the IRA? Are you protecting the IRA from an inquiry into abuse that took place outside institutions? There are many more victims outside of historical institutional abuse than inside it, and you know that. Mr Deputy Speaker, she knows that.

Secondly, Ms McCann went to London, in June this year, to a summit to end sexual violence in conflict. She said, according to the Executive:

> *"This is the biggest global meeting on this issue and it is both beneficial and important that women from the north of Ireland are able to contribute".*

Why did you not take Máiría Cahill? Was that not the story that needed to be told at the global conference?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I remind the Member that he must make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr Nesbitt: I apologise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Máiría Cahill should have been at that global summit on sexual violence in conflict. It is a disgrace that she was not given that opportunity.

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

Mr Lunn: We will support the motion and the amendment. First, I would like to offer my sympathy and support to Máiría Cahill. She is the victim in this matter, and I admire her determination and attitude through a dreadful ordeal. I have no reason to doubt the main thrust of her allegation, starting with the original rapes during 1996-97 when she was a girl of 15 and 16. Some of us are fathers of daughters, and I can just imagine the feeling that that would stir in me if it happened to my daughter.

Those allegations have long been accepted by most right-thinking people, even in the republican movement, right up to the highest levels. The man who committed the rapes was a prominent republican, Martin Morris, apparently a friend of the Cahill family, perhaps even a distant relative by marriage. Máiría eventually made a complaint to the police, but the case collapsed as she withdrew her evidence. The first question there would be why. I will come back to that.

There had been an IRA investigation of whatever kind. The words "interrogation" and "kangaroo court" come to mind, but it certainly seems to have included a forced confrontation between Máiría and Mr Morris in the year 2000. We have the version of Gerry Adams that he organised that and other meetings out of concern for Máiría's welfare; a suggestion that, frankly, would be

laughable if it was not so serious. To suggest to someone in those circumstances that some rape victims — by implication perhaps including Máiría Cahill — actually enjoyed it, is utterly disgusting, although if the records of Twitter and other media are to be believed, Mr Adams does hold views on those matters that the rest of us would not want to be associated with.

Plainly, the republican movement has tried to cover up those events and silence Máiría Cahill. It is very much to her credit that she is strong enough to carry on, and I wish her well.

There are questions. First, why would the IRA wish to protect a rapist, whose victim was a member of a very prominent republican family, just because he was himself a member and volunteer? Secondly, what would have happened to him if he had not been a member of the republican movement? I think that we all know the answer to that. Thirdly, why did Máiría Cahill withdraw her evidence? I think, by the time the police investigation came along, she was probably a girl of about 20, still very vulnerable and put under intolerable pressure by the republican movement. She buckled under that pressure and it is to her credit that she has come back again.

Turning to the motion, the main point being made is about the actions, or lack of action, by Jennifer McCann. Ms McCann was not an MLA or a junior Minister in 2005, when it seems she was in contact with Máiría Cahill, but she had, however, been a prominent IRA member, and it seems probable that she knew about the case long before that. I do not know the type of investigation being proposed, but there is enough in this matter to merit a fuller inquiry. We will, therefore, support the motion and the SDLP amendment, which makes a better job of the proposal entirely.

8.00 pm

Máiría Cahill has bravely shone a light into the murky world of a terrorist organisation; a world of silence, self-protection and misplaced loyalty.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Sure.

Mr A Maginness: The Member has referred to Ms McCann, and she has an important role in the historical institutional abuse inquiry. Yesterday, in London, a lady who was appointed to head a similar type of inquiry resigned because of alleged associations with Leon Brittan. Previous to that, Lady Butler-Sloss also resigned, given other associations with Lord Brittan. Given that they resigned over those allegations, would it not be appropriate for Ms McCann to resign as a junior Minister, given that she faces similar allegations — in fact, worse allegations?

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

Mr Lunn: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member has made his point; I do not have time to dwell on it.

As I was saying, Ms Cahill has shone a light into a very murky world. It is a world, evidently, where the rights of an innocent victim are secondary to the interests of the organisation, be it the IRA or Sinn Féin. I hope that she achieves the closure that she deserves. I hope that the PPS can find a way through this to fully investigate the whole sorry saga, including the violence perpetrated on other victims, because it is plain to see that there are a lot of other victims out there. I hope that they can use the opportunity to come forward and that we can bring some closure to a lot of people who deserve it.

Mr Givan: It is important that we treat this issue sensitively. It is a matter that should be above party political point-scoring. However, the contribution made by the deputy First Minister will, I think, stand in the public record as having brought shame on the office that he holds. It is disappointing that he has continued in the same vein as the president of Sinn Féin, and that is to undermine Máiría Cahill and to seek to discredit Máiría Cahill — and to do it when Máiría Cahill is in the Gallery of the Chamber is, I think, a callous disregard for victims and their feelings.

Consider how this issue has been dealt with by the republican movement: Gerry Adams has said, as others have, that he believes that she was raped. However, when it comes to the IRA interrogation — the kangaroo court that was established — he does not know whether that happened. That tells a story in and of itself. Sinn Féin is circling the wagons and using Máiría Cahill, in a way, to attack the SDLP, my party and others. Whilst this issue involves senior members of Sinn Féin, it would be wrong for all the political parties in the Chamber to ignore it just because Sinn Féin is involved in it.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will.

Mr Poots: A few weeks ago we had a debate on Kincora, and there was absolute unanimity in the House in its condemnation of what took place there and what needed to happen. I would love Sinn Féin Members to stand up in the same condemnation that they and we all engaged in a few weeks ago.

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

Mr Givan: I agree entirely with the Member. As we consider how we can take this forward, this motion having been passed, there will need to be an inquiry. The Justice Committee will consider this tomorrow, and we will have options that will need to be decided upon. However, I think that there is merit in our having an inquiry.

The Public Prosecution Service has announced that it is having an independent inquiry. The Police Ombudsman's Office has been put forward as an organisation that is having its own independent inquiry. I do not accept that that is appropriate and the best way for this to be dealt with. In and of itself, by all means, let them happen, but that does not go far enough. It does not go far enough because of how the PPS handled a similar case in respect of the president of Sinn Féin when it came to his niece Áine.

A press release by the PPS announcing the current review states:

> *"It is of concern to the PPS to maintain public confidence in our services and in the wider criminal justice system ... if there are lessons to be learned, we will do so, openly and transparently."*

I welcomed that press release, which was issued very quickly in response to the 'Spotlight' programme. In

response to the UTV 'Insight' programme over a year ago, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Barra McGrory, said that he:

> *"recognises that there has been considerable public interest surrounding the decision not to prosecute Mr Gerry Adams ... in relation to an allegation that he withheld information".*

That was over a year ago. The Attorney General produced his report, and I have a letter dated May 2014 stating that it was sent to the PPS and that it "contains recommendations". We do not know what the report's recommendations or findings are, yet the PPS is burying it. One has to ask why. It certainly is not in keeping with its most recent statement that it wants to be open and transparent about this issue. Indeed, the PPS has said in respect of the Gerry Adams case that the issue of publication of the report will be reviewed by the Public Prosecution Service after the Liam Adams Court of Appeal case is handled. There is not even a commitment to publish it, just to review whether it should be published.

This party will not stand for any whitewash which, I believe, is being engaged in by the Public Prosecution Service. It is of concern to me, given the role that the current director of the Public Prosecution Service had in representing senior republicans, that he has to step aside repeatedly because of that conflict of interest. The handling of this case in respect of Gerry Adams concerns me, and I believe that it calls into question his credibility. Public confidence in the PPS is critical for that organisation and the wider criminal justice system. It is vital that justice is not just done but seen to be done. I believe that Barra McGrory, given how the previous case was handled and his conflicts of interest, should consider his position as the director of the Public Prosecution Service.

The Police Ombudsman has not dealt with the complaint about the case in the UTV 'Insight' programme either. That is why there needs to be another independent inquiry, in which the public can have confidence that it will get to the truth. I hope that, at the Committee meeting tomorrow, members will come forward and seek to deal with that. I, of course, will be willing, as the deputy First Minister indicated, to have North/South cooperation in any inquiry that the Justice Committee might seek to establish. I support the motion.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

As someone who has dealt with and supported victims of domestic and sexual abuse, including women prisoners sexually assaulted by prison officers in Armagh and Maghaberry prisons during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, I am saddened that today's motion and amendment have little to do with helping or indeed supporting victims. Rather, some of the other parties have chosen to politicise the serious issue of sexual abuse and indulge themselves in a bout of political point scoring. None of this has anything to do with meeting the needs of victims. All the evidence and research on sexual abusers show clearly that they come from all walks of life, from all backgrounds and from all classes. The motion, however, seeks to turn all of that evidence on its head and instead focuses solely on one group. It demeans the suffering and pain of all those who have been abused, and it fails victims.

Part of the motion is targeted at Jennifer McCann, who did all that she could to assist a vulnerable young women who disclosed to her in confidence that she had been sexually abused seven years previously. The producers of the 'Spotlight' programme that triggered the trial by media of the Máiría Cahill case deemed the outcome of the judicial processes inconvenient facts in their attempt to get a headline-grabbing programme. In a bid to get better ratings, due process was ignored and key facts omitted to suit the bias of the programme's conclusions. It is one thing for a TV show to drive a coach and horses through the law and the right to a fair trial in open court; it is another altogether for some Members to set aside fairness and process in attempting to adjudicate on the case. Therefore, I ask Members whether they support due process. Do they have confidence in the PSNI? Do they have confidence in the PPS? Do they have confidence in the courts? It is the case that neither guilt nor innocence is to be determined by 'Spotlight' or indeed by anybody in the Chamber. They simply cannot have it both ways. Those Members, unlike Jennifer McCann, have offered no practical help to Máiría or other victims other than to use their distress to score points.

I would like to remind Members that the issue that we debate today is simply not a legacy issue. According to figures issued by NIACRO, 173 alleged sex offenders were referred between 2006 and 2012 for resettlement. Many of them were under threat from the same loyalist paramilitaries as the unionist parties are cosying up to in a pan-unionist front in their bid to force a loyalist march through a nationalist area. If the proposers of the motion and the amendment were truly serious about tackling abuse in our society, we would have a motion and an amendment that deal with abuse no matter what its source. The answer for victims and the wider public is obvious. Some people in the Chamber want to indulge in party-political point scoring. They do not care if it inflicts more hurt and pain on victims. I have to say that the SDLP's amendment and support for this DUP attack are shameful and disgraceful.

Let me finish by telling anyone out there who has been a victim of abuse to come forward and report it. If you need help and support, many organisations have the appropriate skills and training to assist. As for my party, we will support you in any way we can.

We will not support the motion or the amendment.

Mr Poots: First of all, I want to say that rape is always wrong. It does not matter whether it was carried out by a policeman in Kincora, a priest in Rubane or a Provo in Ballymurphy: rape is always wrong. Here we have, today, Sinn Féin going back to its old standards and adopting the mantra of victimhood. We have poor Gerry complaining that the Government are picking on him, and poor Jennifer complaining that the Assembly is picking on her. The victim here is not Sinn Féin; the victims are teenage girls who were raped, abused, bullied and subjected to kangaroo courts by the IRA.

I have no issue whatsoever with condemning anybody from the community that I represent, no matter how close they may have been to any of us at any stage. I think that Sinn Féin is failing and failing greatly today by not standing up and saying that what happened was wrong, condemning it and saying that it will do everything in its power to ensure that other young people who were abused

in this manner have the opportunity to have their case heard and properly interrogated and for the people who carried out the heinous crime of rape to be brought to justice. Sinn Féin really needs to do that. It really needs to stand up for and with the victims of sex abuse, irrespective of whether it happened in Kincora, west Belfast or the Creggan. Any less than that standard will diminish the party greatly as a consequence.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr Givan: Does the Member agree that, rather than asking for and seeking people to come forward, the message that has been going out from Sinn Féin and indeed in the Chamber from Martin McGuinness and Carál Ní Chuilín is a warning to those people not to come forward because they will be bullied and targeted by the republican movement? They are intimidating those people out of trying to come forward.

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

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Therein lies the problem. Mr Adams now uses the fact that his dead father was a paedophile.

In the papers a couple of weeks ago, we read an accusation that Joe Cahill was a paedophile. It seems that, for Sinn Féin, the organisation is sacrosanct, must remain intact and is more important than anybody else, including victims of sex abuse.

8.15 pm

We have deep concerns about how the authorities are handling these matters. The Minister of Justice does not intend to investigate the issue. That will be left to the Justice Committee, which I hope will have enough powers. The Minister has offered his cooperation, but he could have more powers than the Justice Committee to carry out such an investigation. The fact that the director of the Public Prosecution Service sat on a report carried out for him by the Attorney General for over a year causes us deep concern. As Mr Givan rightly pointed out, if the director has to keep stepping aside from issues, perhaps he needs to consider whether he is the right man for the job. We need to look at that and address it.

The Police Ombudsman has corresponded with Mr Givan, indicating that a report that that office carried out was completed and forwarded to senior managers for their approval. When was that? It was 10 April 2014 — seven months ago. The Police Ombudsman has hidden that completed report from public view. One has to ask: does Sinn Féin have its man in the Police Ombudsman's office? Frankly, it is not good enough to sit on something as serious as this for seven months without the public having their opportunity to hear what was said. I believe very clearly that we have not been well served by the Public Prosecution Service in these issues. The sooner it tells us the truth of what the report contains rather than hiding behind the Liam Adams appeal, the better for society in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin has covered up abuse for a considerable time. It stands to reason that, with young men on the run in safe houses with young girls, things happened that should not have happened. Let us some honesty and integrity for once —

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

Mr Poots: — in their lives.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Before calling the next Member, I remind Members again that you must address your remarks through the Chair. There must be no remarks from a sedentary position.

Ms J McCann: I am very aware that there is an ongoing review into this case. In recent days, two more victims have released a public statement in which they have expressed concern about how the case is becoming politicised. I certainly do not want to add anything that will cause further distress to any of the victims in this case. That said, I feel very strongly that my credibility not only as a junior Minister but in a personal sense as a woman, and particularly a mother, is under attack through a disgraceful motion. I totally refute what Members said during the debate and over the past few weeks. I totally refute any inference in the motion or in what has been said that I did anything improper in the actions I took in relation to this case. I would not cover up or protect anyone who has been accused of rape or sexual abuse; I would never do that.

Máiría Cahill was a young woman of 23 or 24 years of age when she disclosed to me that she had been raped when she was 16. She told me that in 2005, some six or seven years after the abuse took place. At the time, she had recently started work in the local community forum, where I worked as a community worker. She disclosed the information to me in confidence as a work colleague, and I sought to help her in whatever way I could at that time. Anyone who has worked with people who have been raped or who are victims of sexual assault will know that that is what you do. You help the person as best you can at that time. It was very clear to me that she was quite distressed, and I was very concerned about her safety and well-being. As she appeared to be very vulnerable, I advised Máiría to seek the help of a counsellor. I spoke directly to a member of her close family to tell them of my concerns about her vulnerability, and I advised them to seek help for her.

I was aware that her family and others who were much closer to her than I was — I had known her for only a couple of months — had been aware of it for years before Máiría told me. So, I totally reject the allegations that have been levelled against me here that I acted improperly in any way at the time. At no time did Máiría indicate to me that she wanted me to report this, and I did what I would do for anyone in those circumstances and what I felt she needed at that time: I advised her to seek counselling.

One night, she was particularly distressed and was on her own. I advised her to not stay on her own. I was concerned about what might happen, because she seemed extremely vulnerable. That night, I invited her to stay in my home, and, in fact, I took my young child out of her bed to let Máiría sleep in it, because I was afraid about what she would do if she were left alone.

When I first saw the motion, I was extremely upset, and I am still upset with some of the accusations that have been levelled at me. All that I did was try to help someone. I have not covered up anything or protected anyone who was responsible for sexual abuse or rape. That is not,

and has never been, the case. At no time since 2005 has Máiría or her solicitor or her legal team or indeed the police approached me to ask me to make a statement on the issue. Máiría herself did not report it until 2010. When I contacted the police, they told my solicitor that I am not required to make a statement in this case, so there has been absolutely no improper conduct in my actions.

I have worked for many, many years with victims of abuse and domestic violence, and I have accompanied them to the police, the PPS and the relevant statutory bodies for help when they have made that choice. It is their choice to do so. I would have taken the same course of action without hesitation had Máiría asked me to do so.

The other political parties in the Chamber have been very quick to come in here today and scramble over each other with accusations and engage in finger-pointing. Most people listening will question your motives and, like me, will see this motion, as my colleagues have said, as nothing more than an opportunity to use this as party politics. Shame on you for doing that.

Some Members: Shame on you.

Ms J McCann: I want to finish by saying — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. The Member will resume her seat.

Ms J McCann: All the victims in this case, including Máiría, are entitled to justice —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. The Member will resume her seat.

Ms J McCann: — and I hope that this review will enable them to do that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Is the Member finished?

Ms J McCann: — and to get the closure that they seek.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I asked for the cooperation of all Members to allow this debate to be conducted with dignity. I am extremely disappointed that one, two or three people on my right are persistently shouting from a sedentary position. If that continues, I will be forced to take action.

Mrs D Kelly: I am pleased to speak in this debate on behalf of the SDLP. I am pleased that today, once again, our party has shown that there is clear blue water between its principles and values and those of Sinn Féin. I make no apology for that, and it not the SDLP or any other party, bar Sinn Féin, that is politicising the debate. It has sought over the past number of weeks to trash the good name of Máiría Cahill. She is the victim in all of this, not Martin McGuinness, not Carál Ní Chuilín and not Jennifer McCann.

I listened with interest to what Jennifer McCann said in the last five minutes, because she said it with a degree of passion and emotion. Not once did she mention the name of her party president. Not once did she say that the principles that her colleague the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, applied to the then leader of the Catholic Church, Seán Brady, on the cover-up of clerical sexual abuse should apply to the president of Sinn Féin. Jennifer McCann has let herself down, as has Carál Ní Chuilín and all the women in Sinn Féin who have, throughout the island of Ireland, ridiculed Máiría Cahill and, instead of trying to support her, tried to bring her good name into disrepute.

You no longer have any right to stand on any platform on any feminist issue, when you cannot stand up for the victim of the most vile abuse imaginable.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs D Kelly: Others have talked about how the criminal justice system failed Máiría Cahill and other victims. I ask the Justice Committee and others, in their discussions and negotiations with the police and the PPS, to ask why there is continued delay in other cases, which will be high profile, where there are allegations of sexual abuse and cover-up by the republican movement.

For me, today was the day in which the IRA and Sinn Féin morphed into one organisation — they absolutely morphed. All that Sinn Féin has attempted to do over the last hour, and indeed the last number of weeks, is protect its institutions and organisation. Where were the words of condemnation of the kangaroo court and those who participated in it? Where were the words to say how the criminal justice system has failed Máiría Cahill and others? I did not hear them. All I heard was that Sinn Féin is the victim and the other parties are playing party political games with the issue. Nobody does victimhood better than Sinn Féin; nobody on this island. They are always the victims. Many of us in the House find a great deal to dispute in the definition that Mr Adams would give of "decent" people. I heard his reply to Enda Kenny in the Dáil. I can tell you this, Mr Deputy Speaker: his words chilled me to the very core.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Yes.

Mr Hussey: In the earlier debate, I am sure that the Member listened with interest as many of the Sinn Féin Members commented on people in Donegal and Louth and other counties in the Republic. Do you share my concerns that Sinn Féin and the IRA sent rapists to the Republic of Ireland to get them out of this jurisdiction?

Mrs D Kelly: I am coming to that point. Thank you for that intervention. My colleague Alex Attwood did ask where the abusers are now. What is the risk assessment? Has information been shared with the PSNI and an Garda Síochána about the whereabouts of those abusers? Are they working in community centres with young children, in the way that Liam Adams was able to? Are some of them, as I believe, across the water in GB? I have not heard anything from Sinn Féin that gives me any confidence that they take their obligations seriously in this matter. They certainly have not put the interests of children and women at the heart of their deliberations and comments in the last few weeks and months, nor today. They had ample opportunity today to clear a number of matters up and did not.

I welcome the introduction made by Paula Bradley. In her contribution, Paula acknowledged that this type of vile crime happened right across the community. I did not hear any other Member, other than those in Sinn Féin, relate this to the fact that, for any inquiry to be fulsome and total, it should look at all aspects, or that, regardless of where the perpetrator came from, all institutions should be treated the same. That, to me, is an Ireland of equals, not how some in Sinn Féin have been protected. Some people were shot, if not killed — there were certainly punishment

beatings and people were shot in the kneecaps — if they were alleged to be abusers, whilst others were able to get on the train to Dundalk. Sinn Féin has a lot to answer. I am really sorry that today, of all days, they could not rise above it. I pity many of them and wonder how they sleep at night.

Mr Elliott: It is with some trepidation, almost, that I speak in this debate. I know that you have tried to control the debate as best you can, Deputy Speaker. The debate is about two groups of people: the abused and the abusers. I believe that it is right that I should spend a little time dealing with both those groups and, first, the abused.

8.30 pm

We are rightly focusing this evening on Máiría Cahill. While there have clearly been more people abused in a similar way by the same abusers, I contend that Máiría Cahill is an extremely brave lady in what she has brought to the fore. Her story is torturous and painful. It is torturous and painful for me listening to it, and I can only imagine how torturous and painful it is for Máiría Cahill and others who have been abused as they have. I am certain that there are many people who have a huge sense of support for Máiría Cahill, people who have undergone similar abuse but who, for a variety of reasons, cannot go public in the way that Máiría Cahill has. While I have not had the opportunity to speak directly to or meet Máiría Cahill, I am sure that this process is not easy for her. She has not had an easy time so far, and I dare to say and contend that she will not have an easy time as we move forward.

What about the abusers and those who protect the abusers? Many of us in the House are very aware of the capabilities of the IRA as those who have been responsible for the torture of humans in our society. Many people in Northern Ireland, including Máiría Cahill, know at first hand of the IRA's actions. How have those in the spotlight viewed other abusers in the past? I am sure that people will join me in acknowledging how Sinn Féin members have described and pointed the finger at the Roman Catholic Church around the child sex abuse levelled against that Church. Sinn Féin representatives, including the Sinn Féin vice-president, Mary Lou McDonald, the Sinn Féin TD Aengus Ó Snodaigh, the Sinn Féin deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, and the Sinn Féin president, Gerry Adams, have lined up to lambaste the Roman Catholic Church and others who were linked to the sex abuse cases. Indeed, Mr Ó Snodaigh said:

> *"the Catholic Church in the Dublin diocese conspired to protect abusers of children. Especially damning is the conclusion that the State authorities facilitated the cover-up and allowed the Church to operate beyond the reach of normal law enforcement."*

He goes on to say that the position of Mr Adams and Sinn Féin is:

> *"in stark contrast to the attitude they took to Cardinal Sean Brady when he stood accused of failing victims of abuse. At the time, Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness called on the cardinal to quit."*

Maybe some of that should be reflected back on Mr McGuinness's party at this stage in light of what came out in the 'Spotlight' programme that we are debating this evening. There are many other quotes that I could use, but I am sure that they are available to everyone.

What we must ensure is that, following this debate, the matter does not close up and is not allowed to drift. This boil must be lanced. Over recent weeks, we have heard of ongoing investigations, inquiries and potential inquiries, but we must be careful that we do not have a piecemeal approach. I take on board Mrs Kelly's assertion on all this. We have heard of a review by the Public Prosecution Service, an investigation by the Police Ombudsman and a potential Justice Committee inquiry. I support all those, but what we need is an overarching mechanism to ensure that we end this and lance the boil. We cannot allow this to continue. We cannot allow it to drift. I think that there is a responsibility on the Justice Minister in the Executive to take overall control of this situation and ensure that each of those inquiries reports to him.

Mr Irwin: I will say first that at the very foundation of this debate is the well-being of a young woman who has been subject to sexual abuse; that must be remembered at all times. The fact that this abuse occurred within an organisation that has rained terror on a whole community for decades makes the suffering of Máiría Cahill all the more concerning. Máiría Cahill has brought to light her harrowing experiences, and no one can fail to be moved by the trauma that she has suffered and the obvious emotional upheaval that she experienced in bringing the matter into the public arena. Her allegations are concerning for the House, given that senior members of Sinn Féin have been implicated. We have witnessed, via the media, a shift in the stance of Sinn Féin elected politicians, who have gone from outright denial of her suffering to a guarded acknowledgment of the situation. However, they still refuse to come forward with the truth about the cover-up of that horrendous episode.

Máiría Cahill has been subject to further abuse and trauma since her story came to light. It is shocking to see the depths that people will stoop to on the Internet, with their horrific comments and such cold and callous disregard for the suffering she has endured. That, of course, is not unique to Máiría's situation; we have also witnessed Anne Travers's withdrawal from social media this week as a result of the tirade of online abuse she has suffered from militant republicans, who have an agenda to further abuse and attempt to discredit anyone who dares to shine a light into the darkest corners of the IRA.

It was against such a backdrop that the motion seeks to bring forward —

Mrs McKevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Irwin: OK.

Mrs McKevitt: Does the Member agree that the PSNI should be able to investigate comments that have been made on the Anne Travers and Máiría Cahill cases on social media, under the harassment and hate crime legislation?

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for her intervention. She is absolutely correct; the PSNI should be investigating that.

It is against such a backdrop that the motion seeks to bring forward a proposal for an investigation into the actions of a Member of the House, namely Jennifer McCann in her role as a junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. There are certain questions that

should be asked and answers that must be given about that very serious and important issue. That should be done within the correct framework of an inquiry that looks comprehensively at the concerns that have been raised by Máiría Cahill and the actions or inactions of Ms McCann as someone who was informed about the abuse.

On a wider theme that should concern everyone, in the recent past, we have witnessed senior Sinn Féin members publicly object to the continuance of Cardinal Seán Brady in his role following the child abuse scandal within the Catholic Church. Yet those same Sinn Féin members now show great hypocrisy by refusing to engage fully in explaining their roles within the IRA and the cover-up of the abuse of Máiría Cahill.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he agree with me that Sinn Féin has, for many years, claimed to be the bastion for the protection of women's rights? Will he further agree that, while Ms McCann remains in post and questions remain about her conduct and how she has dealt with the protection of a very vulnerable young woman, any future attempt by Sinn Féin to take such a stance would be utter hypocrisy?

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. He made a very important point.

The fact that, since Máiría Cahill has gone public in telling her story, other people have come forward to her with similar stories of sexual abuse at the hands of the IRA is a further cause for concern. In an age in which sexual abuse is the subject of the greatest scrutiny, it is vital that an inquiry is undertaken, given that Ms McCann MLA, in her role as a junior Minister, has responsibilities in the area of historical institutional abuse and policies regarding the protection of children. The revelation by Máiría Cahill of a kangaroo court system within the IRA is a further affront to justice and the victims of sexual abuse. As Máiría herself has said, the trauma of facing her abuser was immense and plunged her deeper into distress.

The issue shines a very bright light into the dark and murky world of the IRA. People were brought under great duress and had their grief and distress compounded in a way that is both distasteful and unjustifiable. Máiría Cahill has been courageous in coming forward with details of her trauma, and the House must do what it can to assist her and other victims of abuse in having their crimes fully investigated. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Alban Maginness, who has two minutes.

Mr A Maginness: The debate is primarily about sexual abuse and the cover-up of that sexual abuse by the republican movement in relation to Máiría Cahill, but it also involves standards in office. Therefore, there is a focus on Jennifer McCann. In her address to the Assembly, she failed to persuade me and, I believe, other Members. She failed to explain why she did not report the abuse and why she did not proactively do something to defend the interests of Máiría Cahill. She did not do that, and that reflects very badly on her personally, as an office holder. She holds the office of junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and has responsibility for the historical institutional abuse inquiry. She has a very sensitive role, yet she has been involved in what appears to be, if not a full cover-up, at least a suppression of that cover-up or a suppression of the allegations made by Máiría Cahill. That reflects badly on her.

Earlier in the debate, I mentioned that, in England, Lady Butler-Sloss and Fiona Woolf had resigned over what, I believe, are less serious allegations. Where are the standards in public office? Martin McGuinness rails at us and says that we are shameful, a disgrace and so forth. He impugns the motives of people in the House, but let me tell you —

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

Mr A Maginness: — that what is disgraceful and shameful is the collusion of the IRA and Sinn Féin in expelling people from Northern Ireland to the South in order to cover up their nefarious activities.

Mr Eastwood: I did not think that I could be shocked in the House, but I am genuinely shocked by the way in which the debate has moved. Earlier, when I saw Martin McGuinness's name on the list of Members to speak, I said to colleagues, "Finally, Sinn Féin has realised that this is out of control and that somebody needs to take it in hand, make a corporate apology and tell the whole truth". I really, really believed that that was what would happen today. I am shocked and saddened that it has not happened and that, again, we have heard a denial. We have seen a refusal to accept and deal with the issues surrounding the Máiría Cahill case.

When Máiría Cahill — I believe her, by the way — was abused, it was she who was investigated. Her story was covered up, and then, when it came out because she had the guts to tell it in the public domain, her story was denied. After that, her character was assassinated. Then, all of sudden, we saw the trolls — the nameless Internet trolls — unleashed, like something out of an MI5 playbook, to assassinate Máiría Cahill's character and portray anybody who stood with her and said publicly that they believed her as playing politics and engaging in political point scoring.

When Sinn Féin, rightly, along with a lot of other Members, condemned and challenged the Catholic Church on its abuse and cover-up in specific incidents across the island, it was holding people to account and rightly so. However, when anybody challenges Sinn Féin's account or the IRA's account of what happened in this or any other case, it is political point scoring. Do people really think that, when asked by an abuse victim, democratically elected politicians on this island will stay quiet about an issue of this magnitude? We will not. I do not feel one bit ashamed because my name is on an amendment calling for accountability and truth from an organisation that does not have a good record when it comes to accountability or truth — just ask the families of the bodies that are buried all across the border counties on this island.

8.45 pm

We have to make sure that we recognise that this is about victims. There have been many victims of sexual abuse, cover-up and denial and institutional abuse, cover-up and denial, not least from the state, from the security services, from the police, from the army, from loyalist paramilitaries and from the IRA. This is not the only case that people know of across our communities. It is very sad that the people and the communities that suffered most at the hands of the British state have suffered terribly at the

hands of the IRA as well, and, every day, we hear more stories of how that happened.

I do not know whether there is any point in making this point because today was an opportunity lost, but I will make it anyway: Sinn Féin and the Provisional movement need to take the next available opportunity to say it straight that they believe Máiría Cahill's full account of her abuse and the abuse investigation's cover-up, and they need to say it about all the other victims in my city, in this city and in communities across the North. They need to come forward and tell the communities in Donegal, Louth and Monaghan who the abusers are and where they are. Are they, like some others have been, working for community organisations or working for youth clubs? Is that what is happening? Are there still people in our communities whom people know to be child abusers and rapists who have been let run free to work freely in our communities? People with knowledge of those issues need to come forward fully, openly and transparently and tell the truth because this issue is not going away.

Mr Wilson: First, many of us would wish that we were not discussing this here this evening. When Paula Bradley was asked to lead off on the motion for us, she was reluctant to do so. I think that she has probably done it with great personal difficulty, but she did it because she honestly believed that it was an issue that she, as a woman, should speak out on. Having spoken to Máiría Cahill, she also knew that it was something that the victim wanted the Assembly to discuss here today. Rather than a political point scoring exercise, this has been a difficult issue for the proposer of the motion and for the victim whom we are discussing here this evening. The only people who have turned this into a political point-scoring exercise or thrown up the political defence have been Sinn Féin.

From the very start of this day, Sinn Féin has planned to make sure that it turned this into a political event. From delaying the debate to late at night so that it missed the news, to lining up its women along the Front Benches to show that it is woman-friendly — they were not too friendly to the victim that we are talking about tonight — to the accusations that this is just a political point-scoring exercise. They have tried to turn it around because we know that they are embarrassed on this one. Jennifer McCann, despite all that she has said in debates in the House when talking about historical institutional abuse, said that nothing measures a society more than the way it looks after vulnerable people. Then she went on to condemn with a broad brush people right across this island and to say that a lot of people knew about historical abuse but simply did nothing about it. When she became the person whom someone confided in, what did she do about it? By the criteria that she has set down for effectively dealing with victims, she has failed. Someone came along and spoke to her, and she told us that she did not go to the police on the basis that "I was not asked to". If she was a trained counsellor, as she claims to have been, she would have known that, when something such as this was reported, she had a duty to. She failed in her duty as a public representative, as a counsellor and as the confidante of a vulnerable person. She then tries to hide behind the excuse "I was only doing my best". By her own criteria, she did not do that.

She says, of course, that there was no cover-up. However, as Alex Attwood pointed out, she had ample opportunity at a conference at which they were talking about victims in a war situation — as Sinn Féin would have described the past 30 years — to give real life examples of what happened here in Northern Ireland, but she chose not to do so. If that is not covering up, what is it? That is why the motion is particularly pertinent. If we are to have a credible inquiry that victims can have confidence in, they must have confidence in the people who lead it. They cannot have any confidence in someone who put the organisation that she belonged to in front of those who were hurt by it.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes.

Mr Frew: Does the Member agree that it is not even the vile crime of rape and the subsequent cover-up, it is the actions of the republican movement in the interrogation and torture of victims and the actions of the so-called nutting squad?

Mr Wilson: That is why we must have the inquiry that we demand.

Let me finish with the words of Jennifer McCann:

> *"There is an onus on all of us who are part of that society ... whether we are in the Government, the religious orders, the churches or wider society"*

or Sinn Féin — she did not add that —

> *"to expose the ... horror and to try, in some way, to make redress to those who are victims and survivors." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 96, p232, col 1].*

On that criterion, Jennifer McCann is not fit to hold the position that she has at present, heading up the historical institutional abuse inquiry. She may have the confidence of the deputy First Minister, but she will not have the confidence of the Members of the House or of the people who will appear before the inquiry. For that reason, the motion is totally reasonable, and any action that comes from it is totally reasonable. Indeed, we would be failing in our duty as public representatives if we were not supporting the motion and demanding the action contained in it and in the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 68; Noes 27.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness and Mr Rogers.

NOES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Ms Ruane.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 68; Noes 27.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Ms Ruane.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly expresses concern at the contents of the investigation by the BBC 'Spotlight' programme broadcast on Tuesday 14 October into allegations of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Provisional IRA and covered up within the IRA, implicating senior members of Sinn Féin; believes that the scale of the abuse perpetrated by members of the republican movement needs to be determined with accountability, both by those responsible and those with knowledge, and that victims be given individual and emotional support; notes Ms Jennifer McCann's admission that she was informed about the abuse that Ms Máiría Cahill suffered, yet inexplicably did not report it to the lawful authorities; further notes that Ms McCann, in her role as junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, has responsibilities in relation to policy relating to historical institutional abuse and children; and calls for a full inquiry into the junior Minister to establish any impropriety as well as any breach of the ministerial code of conduct.*

9.15 pm

Assembly Business

Mr Elliott: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wish to apologise to the Education Minister, and to you and the other Deputy Speaker, for not being in the House today for my topical question on education. Things had run on slightly quicker than I had anticipated, but that is no excuse.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Thank you.

Motion made:

> *That the Assembly do now adjourn. —*
> *[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

St Columbanus' College, Bangor: New Build

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes to speak, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Easton: I should start the debate with a brief history of St Columbanus' College before going into the issues and problems that it is experiencing with its current building and how those must be addressed.

The foundation stones of the college were laid in August 1959. The college offered a wide curriculum when it was opened, and there was an emphasis on the teaching of vocational and technical skills. Many pupils left at the age of 15 to take up employment, though a small GCSE class remained to study for external examinations. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a significant growth in enrolment, which required a major extension to the original building. In 2001, the college established a sixth form, allowing post-GCSE pupils to remain and study there. The number of students completing A levels at the college is still on the rise, and there has been approximately a fourfold increase over the last three years.

St Columbanus' College has around 600 pupils from all types of backgrounds, with 50% from the Roman Catholic community and 50% from the Protestant and other faiths. There is quite a range of faiths in the school. It also has 39 members of staff. The college is 54 years of age and, in my opinion, was not built to modern-day standards of health and safety requirements. Its structures suffer from concrete cancer. As anyone who knows about that will tell you, it cannot be cured. It is also present in the Ulster Hospital. The only way to fix the condition is to knock down the building and rebuild it, in my opinion.

The story of a new build for St Columbanus' College is not a new one. It is rather worrying and disturbing to hear that, in 2006, the college was only 16 weeks away from getting a new build agreed by the then direct rule Minister, Angela Smith. That was pulled, in 2010, by the then Education Minister, Caitríona Ruane. Since then, £900,000 has been spent on the planning fees for the build, only for it to be scrapped. That was a scandalous waste of money.

The school, as we know, has a lot of major problems. As well as having concrete cancer, it needs a new roof and a new heating system to replace the current one. The response to an Assembly question on the heating bill was that, in 2013-14, the college had to spend £32,000 and, in the year before that, it spent £36,000. So you can see the amount being spent on heating a building that is not fit for purpose.

Also, we see from an Assembly question on maintenance figures that £254,000 has been spent over the last five years, which is a sizeable amount, but those maintenance figures do not tell the whole story. Health and safety work in the school has cost a further £1·5 million, and a further £180,000 has been spent on minor works, adding up to a total spend over the last three years of a staggering nearly £1·8 million.

Minister, as we know, St Columbanus' College is putting a development proposal to you that will include a growth in intake from the current 90 to 115. Last year alone the school attracted 130 applications for year 8, yet it cannot even get a temporary variation, which is endangering its inclusive education model. I hope that the Minister will look sympathetically at that.

It is now, in my humble opinion, time to stop throwing money at the concrete cancer of the school, because it is just not fit for purpose. That will not fix it; it will just get worse; it is crumbling. It is time for a new build, and this evening I call on the Education Minister to fix the wrongs of the past and do what is right for the future of St Columbanus' College. It is time to build a new school, as it is falling apart. It is time to put the pupils, the parents and the teachers at the front. It is time to honour the pledge from the direct rule Minister in the past.

Mr Rogers: I start by thanking Alex for bringing the debate to the Floor today. I know that he has listed it with the Business Office quite a few times, so it is great to see it here today.

St Columbanus' College provides post-primary education for over 600 children and serves Bangor and the surrounding areas. The college was built in the 1960s and has proved very popular with Catholic students and with students of other faith traditions and none. Its enrolment has increased steadily and, year on year, it is oversubscribed. The school is highly respected in the community, with parents expressing high levels of satisfaction with the pastoral care and support that is offered, the good academic standards and, basically, simply how happy and content children are to go to the school. To say that St Columbanus' needs a new school is an understatement. That was acknowledged, as the Member who spoke previously said, 10 years ago, and a new build was announced on 16 March 2006. After being taken through planning, various delays and so on, the project was pulled in 2010.

In anticipation of the 2006 announcement and subsequent appraisals, earlier proposed improvements were, as you would expect, put on hold to ensure the best use of taxpayers' money. The school estate has been well managed by school management and the board of governors, but basic health and safety requirements have resulted, as the Member who spoke previously said, in over £1·75 million being spent in the last three years to keep the school safe for staff and pupils. One could say that that is throwing good money after bad, but we are where we are. Lessons must be learned as we future-proof the whole school estate. With the hundreds of thousands of pounds that are mounting up and the current number of announcements that are not shovel-ready, it is like trying to fill a leaking bucket, not to mention the added budgetary pressures that we are under as well.

While many in our society promote sector-based education, St Columbanus' is a faith-based school; its number-one aim is to instil Christian values in its students and prepare young people to deal with moral issues as they lead their lives. I am glad to see that in places like London there is now even a stronger desire for children to have a faith-based education. I have no doubt that that is very important to the parents of St Columbanus'.

While St Columbanus' is considered as a core provider of Catholic post-primary education in the north Down area and is central to its further development, it prides itself on being a school that attracts half its population from other faith traditions. It is a model of shared education that works at the highest level — a model that we must encourage. That is something that was recognised in the 'Belfast Telegraph' Making a Difference award for best school in 2012. It is a really good example of young people of all religious denominations fusing together to form a vibrant learning environment where the academic, pastoral and spiritual growth of the students is equally valued.

However St Columbanus' cannot develop this model of sharing because it is constrained. It is constrained by the Department — the very body that is supposed to be promoting shared education.

How is it constrained? I think that it is in two ways. There is no bigger constraint, as the previous Member to speak mentioned, than the building. The lack of a development proposal is also a major constraint — a development proposal that will take on board St Columbanus' unique shared atmosphere. This school is oversubscribed year after year. The Department has refused to give it a temporary variation on admission numbers, while it allows that to happen in neighbouring schools.

Let us do the sums. St Columbanus' can fill its 90 places from the five traditional feeder Catholic primary schools, therefore automatically excluding children from a non-Catholic background. However, that is not what the board of governors and school management want. They are determined that this cannot happen because the school would lose its unique nature and contradict the building of this shared future.

Minister, there are really two steps needed: a realistic development proposal that will increase the year 8 admissions from 90 to about 115 to keep the unique nature of the school and, of course, the new school.

Finally, you may wonder why somebody from south Down is here at 9.30 pm. There are probably three reasons. First, I declare an interest as an old friend of the principal, and that is important. Reason number two is that there is a relationship between the SDLP and St Columbanus'. Mr Larkin, who is now a priest, has written a great book on St Columbanus. Thirdly, and most importantly, this is a first-class school, a great example of shared education that really works and we need to get it up and running.

Mr Cree: I will resist the temptation to rehearse the arguments again about the history of the school, because that has been done adequately. I was wondering about Columbanus and I thought that Mr Rogers was going to cover that as well, but the only thing that I am left to say there is that Columbanus was probably Comgall's greatest student. There is a story that there were 2,000 monks in Bangor Abbey at that time and they grew a lot of their own produce. However, because of the size of the group, they had to buy some from a local farmer. It is recorded in the annals, quite amusingly really, that Comgall put a mild curse on the farmer because they could not agree on the price. I see Gordon Dunne laughing; he knows about this one. Ironically, the farmer's name was Cree in old Irish, whatever that is.

However, to get back to the subject: St Columbanus' College in Bangor has demonstrated over a long time that

it is viable and sustainable. Again, as has been touched on, it is a very good example of a shared campus and a cross-community school, but it is old and does not meet modern educational needs. That was recognised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board in its area plan for 2013-18. The board also supported CCMS in identifying the school as an urgent priority for major capital investment in order to support the school's continued development.

I am pleased to see the Minister here this evening. Minister, you will remember that you are on record as stating that St Columbanus' deserves a new school; but when will it get it? This matter has been the subject of many questions over the years and it is time that the issue was decided. This morning, in the House, Minister, you told us that you are a man who makes decisions. That warmed my heart because that sort of suited this evening's debate. When, therefore, may we expect a positive decision from you to proceed with plans for a new school build for St Columbanus'?

I know that there were plans for Mr Perry, the headmaster, and some of the governors to come here and perhaps meet the Minister this evening. I do not know whether that happened. If they did, and it looks like they did, hopefully, they will have received good news from you. I look forward with anticipation to your response.

9.30 pm

Dr Farry: I, too, welcome the debate this evening. I will spare the House from any more anecdotes except to say that, when Mr Rogers said that he was familiar with St Columbanus, I was for one minute worried that he would say that he knew him personally rather than express familiarity with the school.

Beyond stressing the history of the school in Bangor, it is also worth stressing how central and valued it is to the community as a whole. There is strong support for the school from all shades of opinion in the town and much further afield. It is also marked out by its status as an all-abilities school and has many successes in that regard including the quality of education provided and the strength of its pastoral care. You will hear that through the testimonials of quite a lot of the students who have passed through the school; for example, the outgoing Mayor of North Down, Andrew Muir, and a number of people who work in my Department.

The school is also well-characterised by its mixed enrolment. While it is unambiguously part of the Catholic maintained sector, it has historically stood out for its mixed and shared enrolment and the very inclusive approach that it takes to ensure that all students are welcome and cherished as part of a single school family.

The Minister and other Members may associate me as being a strong advocate of the integrated sector in Northern Ireland, which, indeed, I am, but it is worth stressing that I regard integrated schools as one part of a spectrum of opportunities for shared education, all of which have value. St Columbanus' is definitely on that spectrum as a school that practises a form of shared education, which is a somewhat different concept to that of integrated education. It is worth recognising that different sectors are set to continue to operate in Northern Ireland for the foreseeable future, and, in that respect, it is important that we seek to invest in fresh buildings for existing and successful schools, particularly when they meet the objectives that have been set by the Department.

The college is also worth referencing in the wider context of schools in north Down. The Minister will be well aware that virtually all of the primary schools and, I think, every single post-primary school is either oversubscribed or full. We also have one of the strongest area-learning communities locally, so there can be strong confidence in the sustainability of each of the schools, including St Columbanus', as well as in the north Down school system as a whole.

Other Members have discussed the history of the potential redevelopment of St Columbanus' and the history of announcements, approvals and disappointments. The school was, at one stage, very close to proceeding with a new build — it was only a matter of weeks away — only to have those hopes dashed. There has also been £1 million spent on planning, which will be dead money if it is not fully utilised. The numbers in the school are more than sustainable. The sad fact is that we are talking about figures of around 450 in years 8 to 12, but that is artificially capped. The fact that the school can support over 600 students quite comfortably indicates that meeting the 500 threshold for years 8 to 12 would not cause any difficulty whatsoever. There is no prospect of a new build at St Columbanus' undermining any other post-primary school within quite a large catchment area.

In some respects, the history of St Columbanus' mirrors the situation at Priory Integrated College, about which an announcement was made and subsequently withdrawn a number of years ago. It also had artificial restrictions placed on it that caused difficulties in its ticking boxes when we all know that it was sustainable. I note that the Minister said earlier that he believed that Priory was now fully sustainable, but that there was now no money in the kitty for its capital build. It is a pity that we missed that opportunity several years ago.

Hopefully, we can return to Priory in the very near future. There is no doubt that Gordon Dunne, in particular, as a Holywood-based MLA, will be keen to see that happen.

The same goes for St Columbanus' College. It has proven that it meets every single objective of the Department, including being a key partner in shared education. It meets all the tests of sustainability. There is ample space for a rebuild. It will be easy to do and for that to be accommodated. It passes all the tests. All that we need is the formal go-ahead and money for redevelopment.

Mr Weir: I welcome, as others have, first of all, the Adjournment debate tonight. I obviously welcome the Education Minister. Indeed, such is the fame and celebrity of St Columbanus' College that we have even drawn in a supporter from South Down. He is very welcome as well.

Mention was made of the centrality of the figure of Columbanus to Bangor. Indeed, as Mr Cree will testify from our old school, Bangor Grammar School, Columbanus is even mentioned in the first line of the school song. That level of centrality that the saint has is very much reflected in the school. It is something that is very much at the heart of the community.

It has been mentioned that, while the school building and level of repairs could at times be mistaken to almost date from the time of Columbanus, it dates back to 1959; a very

auspicious year in which my colleague Gordon Dunne was born. He may not have received much renovation work, but St Columbanus' College is long past its sell-by date with regard to the need for additional renovation work and, indeed, a new build.

The level of expansion of the numbers at St Columbanus' College has been mentioned. The growth in the school over the years is a very strong reflection of the great pastoral and, indeed, academic work that is done by the staff there, which has an excellent reputation, as well as it celebrating an ethos that is both Christian-based and very welcoming to all who are there. Often, particularly when we deal with various items of education legislation, we spend a reasonable amount of time in this House debating differences and distinctions between classifications of integrated or shared education. While St Columbanus' College is ultimately under the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), it is the prime example — a flagship leader for Northern Ireland — of a school that is truly shared and integrated. The fact has been mentioned that, without having that formal status, it draws 50% of its pupils from a Roman Catholic background and 50% from a Protestant or indeed other tradition. Such is the school's success that, in its broad catchment area, it draws pupils not simply from the locality around Bangor but many from Holywood and, indeed, Newtownards and the surrounding areas.

Whatever excellent contribution is made by staff, pupils and parents, there is a massive restriction on the school, as Mr Rogers indicated, on two grounds. We have a situation across North Down, perhaps uniquely in Northern Ireland, in which there is a tightness of numbers in both the primary and secondary sectors, which means that the vast bulk of schools are either oversubscribed or at least at full capacity. I think that all of us who are representatives in North Down will see that annually when we are quite often confronted by parents who have been unable to get their children into any one of the schools of their choice locally. Therefore, there is a need for new provision to allow an expansion of numbers.

The sustainability of enrolment has been mentioned. Again, there are those of us who have seen locally the pressures on primary-school numbers, particularly in the last two to three years. North Down as a whole and Bangor in particular have been attracting additional new and younger families, the end result of which is clear: the demographics are such that, if you project ahead by four or five years, you will see that there will probably be an admissions crisis in the secondary sector. Therefore, there should be a bit of pre-planning at this stage. An expansion of numbers at St Columbanus' College is vital.

It is also the case, as has been indicated, that the fabric of the school, like any 55-year-old — I look to my left here at this particular point — is bound to crumble after 55 years. As was highlighted by my colleague Alex Easton, the situation at St Columbanus' College is that, due to concrete cancer, more and more money has got to be poured into it simply to sustain it from a health and safety point of view.

One of the things that government was always supposed to embrace was the idea of invest to save; making capital investment on the basis of actions that would lead to a reduction in the costs on the resource base. This is a prime example. A new build would provide that from the educational point of view and from the point of view of the needs of the school. That is a positive way forward.

Mention was made of the Holywood schools' project and Bangor Central, which are equally deserving of new builds. I hope that, in the spirit of Mr Cree's contribution, our decisive listening Minister will today be able to provide, on the basis of a little bit of flattery from other Members and, all joking aside, based on the strength of the argument for St Columbanus', a true investment in a secondary school that is the epitome of sharing, integration and a good ethos. I hope that he shows that confidence in it by today indicating progression.

Mention was made of one of the original proposals dating from 2006. It was discussed that long ago at the South Eastern Education and Library Board in a pre-commissioner stage. I think that I was on the South Eastern Board when that was discussed. That gives an indication of just how long ago that was. For a lot of the parents and staff, it is long overdue. Therefore, I urge the Minister to respond sympathetically to the debate today and give light at the end of the tunnel for St Columbanus'.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome this debate, which was brought forward by my colleague Alex Easton. We also extend our thanks to the Minister for his attendance today. We look forward to his announcement later.

The school, which has over 600 pupils, no doubt covers a range of backgrounds in the Bangor area and beyond. I know that a number of young people travel from Holywood and beyond to the school. It has progressed extensively in recent years. Indeed, it has outgrown its existing buildings. There is no doubt that a replacement is needed. I am aware of the very positive relationships between the school and other local schools, and of the work it does with those schools in the neighbouring area. There is a sharing of facilities and skills in the Bangor area. We also recognise the high attainment levels. As a former mayor, I am very much aware of the many excellent speech days that I attended in the school.

We need to see further investment in our schools in north Down. It is right that we acknowledge the significant investment that there has been in the Bangor area in the last 20 years. However, there is still need for improvement and investment in other school estates, such as St Columbanus' College. It is not fit for purpose, and it is long overdue a new build.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the ongoing campaign for the Holywood schools. The Minister has certainly shown interest in that, and we acknowledge that. We look forward to his commitment to starting work in Holywood in the not-too-distant future.

I certainly endorse all that has been said in relation to St Columbanus'. It is important that we lobby for the provision of such a school. I am proud to support the proposal this evening.

Mr Agnew: At the outset, I declare an interest as a director of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). However, as always in the Chamber, I speak as a representative of the Green Party in Northern Ireland.

My colleagues from North Down and South Down have outlined well the reasons why St Columbanus' needs a new school build. It is a successful school, and it is a growing school in terms of demand. We heard that, back

in 2006, St Columbanus' College was sufficiently near the top of the list for new school builds that it was given a commitment that it would receive the finance to progress a new school build.

9.45 pm

I understand why, in 2010, due to cutbacks, a number of planned school builds were not progressed. However, what we have seen since then bears some scrutiny. There have been three funding rounds for capital build programmes since the 2010 announcement, when the money was allocated to those schools that could move the quickest with their new builds. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, there have been funding announcements, but the criteria each time have changed.

The Minister knows that I have asked a number of questions about the criteria, and I have done my own research where I have not fully got the answers that I have been looking for. We have seen a picture of shifting sands. Indeed, in answer to one of my questions, the Minister said that the criteria have evolved based on learning from past experience. That is acceptable, but he has also said that the criteria have changed to meet his priorities. That is where I find, having spoken to principals, that schools get concerned and ask why they have not met the criteria.

Schools plan for the future, and they know the criteria. We will all lobby for schools in our constituencies: every Member will do that, and I am happy to lobby on behalf of St Columbanus' College for the reasons that have been outlined. It needs a new build, because the building that it has is old and needs replaced.

What principals, boards of governors, parents and pupils need is some certainty. I ask the Minister whether the criteria set out in his most recent funding announcement will be the criteria used in the next funding announcement, or will they be changed again? Also, what consultation has taken place when he has changed the criteria, and what evidence base has he used to justify those changes? We need those answers, as politicians, to hold the Minister to account for his decision-making, to ensure that decisions taken are fair and to ensure that schools are selected for funding on the basis of objective criteria, rather than criteria that change to suit the Minister's priority areas in terms of which schools he would like to see progressed.

I welcome that the Minister met representatives of St Columbanus' College today. Having spoken to them earlier this evening, I know that they appreciated his time. They believe they had the opportunity to put their case, and they are hopeful — perhaps that is the best way to put it — of a future announcement. They stressed to me that time on these issues is key, and the Minister will be well aware that many parents will be making decisions on where to send their children to school next year. So, whilst we want the right decision, it is important to get it within the correct timeline.

I look forward to the Minister's response. He did not give an answer to the school today, so I doubt he will give an answer to us today, but I urge him, in his next capital funding announcement, to recognise the need of St Columbanus' College, reinstate its place at the head of the queue and give it the funding it so desperately needs.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the capital project for St Columbanus' College, Bangor. I congratulate Mr Easton on securing the debate, although I have to say that my heart sank slightly, given the late hour, when he started off in 1959 and proceeded to work forward. It sank further when Mr Cree went back to St Columbanus, but I found his story very interesting, and that was a bit of knowledge that I did not have. I was delighted that Mr Weir did not sing the school song. *[Laughter.]*

I will move to the seriousness of tonight's debate. As Members said, this evening, I met the principal and representatives from the board of governors of St Columbanus' College, Bangor. That provided me with the opportunity to listen to their plans for the school and their views on the development proposal, which was published on 2 October and seeks additional places at the school from September 2015. I was very encouraged by what they had to say and by the clear commitment of the school to secure the very best for their children and, indeed, the community. However, Members will appreciate — I am sure that Mr Agnew will appreciate — that I am not in a position to comment on any detail associated with the development proposal, as the two-month objection period does not end until 2 December. I want to hear the views of all interested parties, including the young people, their parents and their elected representatives, so that I can shape the education provision to meet their needs. Therefore, I encourage those with an interest in the development proposal to make their views known to my Department over the next few weeks. I reassure Members that the Hansard report of the debate will form part of that evidence. At the end of the objection period, my officials will present me with a submission on the proposal. At that stage, I will make my decision, taking account of all pertinent issues associated with the proposal, including those expressed during this Adjournment debate and at my meeting with the school this evening.

I turn now to the capital build. My Department's strategy for capital investment into the foreseeable future remains focused on supporting the development and delivery of a network of viable and sustainable schools, set firmly in the context of 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools', and shaped by the outworking of area plans. My priority and focus remain on the needs and interests of children and young people, and I remain committed to embedding the area-planning process, with the aim of ensuring a network of strong, vibrant schools.

As Members said, and as the school raised with me today — I also visited the school in, I think, February 2012 — the school was very close to the point at which it was ready to commence building programmes. Other schools have told me that, in times gone by, they were on a list for new builds. I have now made three announcements on capital projects, and I have taken the view that I will announce only capital builds that are at a stage that will move forward in the foreseeable future and are area-plan proofed. Until recently, the north Down area, in relation to the maintained sector, was not area-plan proofed. The area-planning process is now engaged, a development proposal has been published and, when a decision is made on the proposal, I, as Minister, will have a better understanding of the sustainability of the school or schools serving the maintained sector in that area. Therefore, I will be able to make decisions on capital builds on a firmer basis than they were made previously.

Members will understand that the development proposal process currently in play is a vital part of this capital build jigsaw, and that will outwork itself. I have said to the school that I will endeavour to make a decision as quickly as possible. However, the consultation does not close until 2 December. I wish to be in a position to have a decision with them before mid-January, when the school has its open evenings, so that it can give information to parents. I will endeavour to do that. It is, therefore, as I said, vital that, for all the capital build announcements in the future, once the development proposal process is complete, and whichever way the decision goes, the area has been area-plan proofed. The sectors will know, and I will know as Minister, what the sustainability of each school in the area is. I will know what size of school I am required to build for St Columbanus'. The debate has never been whether St Columbanus' needs a new build; it is beyond doubt or question that it does. The question that has to be answered by area planning is this: what size of school is required?

In response to Mr Agnew's comments about whether the criteria and the rules will change, I will say that I have been developing an open and transparent system for the announcement of new schools and how those new schools were chosen. Previous to that, I, as Minister, could have picked them simply by throwing a dart at a board. I have decided to publish the methodology and the weighting mechanisms that I use in selecting schools to give openness and transparency. We have been developing it over a number of stages. I do not see any significant changes being made to that process in the future.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. I just want to say that I appreciate that, in response to a question for oral answer, he made a commitment to furnish me with scores etc in relation to the schools chosen for new school build programmes. I thank him for doing that and for his transparency in that regard.

Mr O'Dowd: I am attempting to reassure all sectors that they are being treated fairly and that there is openness and transparency in this matter. It was raised with me again today during Question Time in relation to the Holywood schools. I have confirmed that Priory is a sustainable school. That answers part of that area-planning equation too and allows me to make decisions on capital build.

Now comes the crux of the matter: money. Members will be aware that we face a very difficult budgetary period. I have committed to engaging with the Finance Minister and other Executive Ministers around my budget. I want to engage with them on resource certainly but also on capital for education. I believe that with limited resources, as we had in previous years, we have made a significant input to improving the schools estate through minor works and major capital investments. I believe that investment in new schools is beneficial not only to the immediate school but to the local community, education and to the economy through construction jobs and investment.

I will be engaging with the Finance Minister and with other Executive Ministers, particularly around the Department of Education's capital budget. Hopefully, that will result in some success for me and an increase in that budget. If I get an increased capital budget, it will allow me to build more schools in future. I assure Members that, once the development proposal issue has been resolved, North Down will be area-plan proofed in this matter, which gives a great advantage to St Columbanus as regards my making any decisions about new school builds.

Adjourned at 9.58 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 10 November 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

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I received a letter from you last Tuesday about events in the Assembly on Monday. I am not in any way challenging your ruling. In fact, I have circulated the content of your letter to all MLAs so that they can see it.

Will you and the other Deputy Speakers examine the Hansard report from the Monday? I asked a question of the Sinn Féin Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister, and she refused to answer it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is not a valid point of order, but it does concern a matter that has been dealt with by the previous Speaker, who made it clear that the Speaker has no role in or control over the content or manner of response. In the particular instance, there can be no doubt whatsoever that the Minister gave you a very direct response to the question and how it was presented. I think that it would be sensible to let the matter rest.

Committee 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.

Ms Ruane: Moved. Bogtha.

Resolved:

> *That Mr Alex Maskey be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir replace Mr Chris Hazzard as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and that Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir replace Mr Raymond McCartney as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. — [Ms Ruane.]*

Mrs Foster: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Is it not the normal practice in the Chamber that, when someone speaks in a language other than English, they translate into English what has been said, because that did not happen a few moments ago?

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I did translate. I said, "Moved" and "Bogtha". I actually translated.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members should use the usual guidance that the Speaker gives about good order, good temper and moderation. I asked the person named to move the motion. If there was any possibility of confusion about what transpired, it would amaze me; I think that it was fairly straightforward.

Mrs Foster: We have to guess.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I wish to move on.

Executive Committee Business

Pensions Bill: First Stage

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to introduce the Pensions Bill [NIA 42/11-16], which is a Bill to make provision about pensions and about benefits payable to people in connection with bereavement; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Insolvency (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

> *That the Second Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill [NIA 39/11-16] be agreed.*

There are several types of insolvency procedures available to individuals and companies. For individuals, there is bankruptcy or debt relief, and, for companies, there is administration, which is intended to facilitate company rescue, or liquidation, which is to allow for the orderly disposal of a company's assets if it has to cease trading. In addition, individuals and companies can enter into voluntary arrangements. Behind all those procedures, however, lies a complex, detailed and highly specialised body of legislation. The purpose of the Bill is, therefore, to update and amend some of that legislation.

We are all familiar with the way in which new technology has, within a short time, revolutionised the way we communicate and conduct business. One of the key purposes of the Bill is to allow the increased use of electronic communication within insolvency procedures. At present, the validity of documents communicated by electronic means is recognised in law in only very limited circumstances. The Bill will extend that recognition and, by doing so, give the insolvency profession the opportunity to exploit new communications technology more fully, thereby driving down costs and increasing returns to creditors.

Clause 2, therefore, will give documents that are communicated and stored electronically in all types of insolvency proceedings the same status in law as paper documents. That will be subject to a small number of listed exceptions where the use of electronic communications would not be appropriate, such as the service of a statutory demand for payment on a debtor.

In addition, the Bill will permit the use of two novel forms of communication. Clause 1 will give insolvency practitioners the option of communicating notices and documents by displaying them on a website. Those entitled to see the notice or document will be given a password permitting them to see it. The potential of modern communications will be further exploited by clause 1, which will, for the first time, permit the holding of virtual meetings in insolvency proceedings. That will enable creditors and others entitled to take part in such meetings to do so from their own homes or offices and save them the expense and inconvenience of having to travel to somewhere else.

In making those amendments, I am mindful that not all citizens have access to electronic means of communication. There will, therefore, be safeguards for people who do not have access to computers or the Internet. Insolvency practitioners, for example, will be required to obtain the consent of the intended recipient before using electronic communications, and recipients will have the right to ask for hard copies of documents, free of charge. Creditors with claims totalling at least 10% of the total owed and, in the case of companies, members with at least 10% of total voting rights will be able to insist on a physical meeting instead of a virtual one.

The second main element of the Bill deals with reform of the licensing system for insolvency practitioners. It is a legal requirement for individuals to be authorised in order to act as insolvency practitioners. Acting as an insolvency

practitioner when not authorised to do so is a criminal offence that is punishable by a fine or imprisonment. The majority of Northern Ireland's insolvency practitioners are authorised by one of seven professional bodies recognised by my Department for that purpose.

My Department, in its role as competent authority, can also directly authorise insolvency practitioners, and two are currently authorised in that way. I consider that it would be preferable for all insolvency practitioners to be authorised by the recognised professional bodies. Those bodies have available to them a tailored range of sanctions that can be used where the professional standards of insolvency practitioners fall below that which is required.

The sanctions available to my Department are limited to the issue of non-binding improvement notices or complete withdrawal of the practitioner's authorisation, which, in most cases, would be a disproportionate remedy. I consider, therefore, that there is no need for my Department to continue to be engaged in direct authorisation. Arrangements will be made to accommodate the two practitioners currently authorised by my Department. Articles 351 to 354 of the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which provide for authorisation of insolvency practitioners by my Department, are therefore repealed by clause 14 of the Bill.

Clause 14 also ensures compliance with the EU directive on services in the internal market. The directive requires individuals who are authorised to provide a service to be free to provide that service throughout that member state and not be limited to a particular region. Compliance with the directive has, up to now, depended on the fact that the majority of bodies responsible for authorising insolvency practitioners were recognised by the Secretary of State in Great Britain and by my Department in Northern Ireland. The amendment made by clause 14 of the Bill is intended to ensure full compliance. That will clarify that a person is qualified to act as an insolvency practitioner in Northern Ireland if he or she is authorised to practise by the Secretary of State in the United Kingdom or by my Department.

The third main element of the Bill relates to the qualification of insolvency practitioners. The current legislation is framed in such a way that insolvency practitioners can only be authorised if they are qualified to take both individual and corporate cases. That obliges the aspiring insolvency practitioner to study and pass exams in personal and corporate insolvency. Clause 14 of the Bill creates the option of partial authorisation so that practitioners can opt to act only in individual or corporate insolvencies. That will allow individuals to study and qualify only for personal or corporate insolvency examinations if they wish to specialise in one area. A consequence of that approach will render the option of authorisation limited to acting as nominee or supervisor in voluntary arrangements redundant. Article 348A of the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which provided for that, is accordingly repealed.

Another issue dealt with by the Bill is the difficulty undischarged bankrupts can encounter finding a bank that is willing to let them operate an account. Banks usually close a customer's account on their becoming bankrupt and are, in general, very reluctant to let an undischarged bankrupt have an account. That can create major problems for individuals who are bankrupt, as wages and benefits invariably have to be paid through a bank account, and much of modern-day commerce is conducted online. Research in Great Britain has identified that a key factor behind banks' reluctance to let bankrupts have accounts is concern that doing so could place them at risk of retrospective claims by trustees in bankruptcy. Current legislation allows trustees in bankruptcy to claim any assets that the bankrupt acquires during the period between becoming bankrupt and discharge. The Bill, therefore, restricts the circumstances under which such claims can be made against banks, with the aim of encouraging them to allow undischarged bankrupts to have accounts. Clause 13 of the Bill, therefore, removes trustees' rights to claim against banks, except where they have served notice on the bank in relation to a specific transaction.

The UK Enterprise Act 2002 and the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 reduced the period for which bankruptcy lasts from three years to one year. However, both went even further by providing that discharge from bankruptcy could take place before the end of the first year if the official receiver concluded that the investigation of the conduct and affairs of the bankrupt was unnecessary or had concluded.

The early discharge procedure has been thoroughly reviewed in England and Wales. It was found that early discharge did not represent good value for money and that the cost of administering the scheme far outweighed any benefit to individuals through being discharged prior to their automatic discharge after one year.

The outcome has been the repeal of the Great Britain provision for early discharge. The early discharge procedure has only ever been used twice in Northern Ireland, and I consider that there is no need to keep such a provision in this jurisdiction. Accordingly, the corresponding provision has been repealed by clause 12.

12.15 pm

The Bill also does away with certain provisions that are no longer needed. Clause 10 removes references in the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to a form of holiday arrangement that is now illegal. There have been no deeds of arrangements for over 20 years, and their place has been taken by individual voluntary arrangements. Clause 11, therefore, repeals the deeds of arrangements provisions.

Certain procedural requirements are also being modified to make them less burdensome. Clause 3 does away with the requirement to hold annual meetings in voluntary liquidations and provides instead for the issue of progress reports.

Clause 4 will allow the notice that has to be issued to creditors about meetings in a voluntary liquidation to be sent to them in ways other than through the post.

Clause 5 does away with the requirement for nominees in individual voluntary arrangements, which do not involve the court, to send the report on the debtor's proposals to the court.

Clauses 7 and 8 will give liquidators and trustees in bankruptcy the freedom to exercise their own professional judgement as to whether to reach compromises over payments of debts due to companies and bankrupts' estates without having to seek sanction from creditors or the Department.

Other provisions serve to clarify the law. Clause 9 redefines liability in tort in liquidations and administrations

in line with a similar amendment that was made to the corresponding GB legislation following legal advice. There are also provisions to amend errors that have been discovered in the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. Clause 15 puts right the omission of power to make regulations to give effect to Part 12. A correction to article 185 will result in the principal place of business of any unregistered company being wound up in Northern Ireland being treated as its registered office. Paragraph 13 of the same schedule corrects a mistake in a provision barring companies entering administration, by providing for it to apply in the case of companies that have a principal place of business outside the United Kingdom.

Clause 16 gives my Department power to make orders enabling credit unions, registered under the Credit Unions (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, as well as ones registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, to enter a company arrangement or administration.

Finally, there are a number of other minor amendments that do not fall into any of those categories. There are provisions in various pieces of Northern Ireland legislation that disqualify individuals from holding offices or positions as a consequence of bankruptcy or becoming subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order. Current legislation allows Departments to have the discretion to create a right of appeal to such disqualifications. At the request of my colleague the Minister for Justice, provision has been included at clause 17 to give the Lord Chief Justice the right to be consulted where the right of appeal is to be to a court.

To conclude, therefore, the Bill is chiefly aimed at modernising insolvency legislation and makes a number of positive changes to the law as it affects those who have the misfortune to be affected by insolvency and those charged with responsibility for administering insolvency procedures. I believe that these changes will be to the benefit of all concerned, and I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as an léargas chuimsitheach sin. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive overview.

The Committee welcomes the introduction of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill for Second Stage consideration and thanks the Minister for bringing it to the Assembly. It has been a lengthy process to get the Bill to this stage. It was in March 2012 that the Committee first received a written briefing on the original proposals of the Bill and September 2012 when the Committee received an oral briefing on the outcome of the first consultation. I thank the Minister for keeping the Committee informed throughout the long process.

The Minister advised the Committee in November 2012 that it was intended to include a clause to repeal article 253(2) of the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 on the basis that the provision had been little used in this jurisdiction and that the corresponding provision applying in England and Wales was to be repealed.

The Minister wrote again in October 2013 to inform the Committee of the need for an amendment to safeguard banks against claims by trustees in bankruptcy and to also inform the Committee of the need to put right an error in article 10(2) of the Insolvency (NI) Order 2005.

In August 2013, the Minister advised the Committee that amendments to the licensing system for insolvency practitioners needed to be made in consequence of the Deregulation Bill. The Committee considered a written briefing on the revised Bill in June 2014. This included the minor amendments to correct the errors and anomalies in the existing insolvency legislation as well as the additional measures included in the Westminster Deregulation Bill that are to be replicated in Northern Ireland and are being dealt with through this Bill.

I will deal first with the original proposals of the Bill. The Committee welcomes the intention that the legislation will keep Northern Ireland insolvency legislation in line with that applying in England and Wales. The Committee agrees in principle with the overall objective of the original proposals to make the administration of insolvencies faster, more efficient and less expensive. Further, the Committee is in favour of measures that will modernise the administration of insolvencies by permitting greater use of electronic communications by establishing that documents stored and transmitted in electronic form are as good and as valid in law as paper ones. The measures should prove beneficial to the environment in respect of the carbon footprint and, according to the Department, will be of no cost to the public purse.

At the oral briefing in September 2012, the Committee sought assurance from the Department that safeguards would be put in place to ensure that those who need or, indeed, prefer to communicate using traditional paper-based methods should still be able to do so. The Committee received assurances from the Department that those who wish to change over to using electronic communications and those who wish to communicate in the traditional way can both be accommodated without any need for interference with the rights of either group. The Committee will consider that in detail during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

I think it relevant to note the Northern Ireland broadband improvement project that is currently being rolled out by the Department. That scheme will provide basic broadband services in certain areas of Northern Ireland for the first time. That is to be welcomed. However, there will, as the Minister knows, be areas in other parts of the North where the broadband will maybe not work so well. The proposals are intended to facilitate the use of modern methods of communication during insolvency proceedings and to modernise some of the processes involved such as, for example, prescribing circumstances in which communication by website can be used. The Bill highlights how important it is for government to ensure that broadband services are available to households and businesses alike throughout Northern Ireland.

The Committee welcomed the views of some consultees that measures such as allowing creditors or company members to attend meetings by way of technologies such as a video call and teleconferencing, which the Minister referred to, rather than attending physically may encourage greater creditor involvement in the insolvency process. At the oral briefing in September 2012, the Committee asked the Department why the proportion of creditors or company members that can request a physical meeting is set at 10%, which seemed low. The Committee accepts in principle the Department's view that such meetings are generally attended by large companies

but, should the occasion arise that an individual desires a physical meeting, this protects their right to have that.

The Committee agrees in principle with measures aimed at addressing procedures that have become outdated and pointless. At the oral briefing from the Department in September 2012, the Committee also asked officials about the Crown Solicitor and the chancery and probate liaison committee's stated concerns about a proposal to do away with the requirement for the court to be notified of the outcome of the creditors' meeting in certain individual voluntary arrangement cases. The Department informed the Committee that it was in discussions around that matter. The Committee notes that the Department decided not to proceed with that particular proposal, and similar proposals concerning fast-track voluntary arrangements were also subsequently removed.

When considering the revised draft of the Bill in June 2014, the Committee commissioned research to compare the amendments proposed to insolvency law in England and Wales. The research stated that the Bill includes amendments in law equivalent to measures existing or due to be introduced in England and Wales with the exceptions of three provisions that make corrections to existing law in Northern Ireland for which no corresponding changes in England and Wales could be found. Incidentally, the research states that article 8 of the Legislative Reform (Insolvency) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 2010 removes the requirement to submit a report to the court in those individual voluntary arrangement cases where no application has been made to the court for an interim order.

The Committee looks forward to further scrutiny of those original proposals over the coming weeks.

On the further amendments, the Committee noted that, in the informal consultations carried out by the Department with Northern Ireland's insolvency practitioners and their recognised professional bodies on the proposed changes to the licensing system for insolvency practitioners, mixed views were manifest on the proposal to create the option of being authorised to act as an insolvency practitioner solely in personal or corporate insolvencies. However, the Committee understands that the Department will have no option except to proceed with partial authorisation for insolvency practitioners if that passes into law through the proposed Deregulation Bill. This is because authorisation will be restricted to a specific part of a national territory only if doing so can be justified by an overriding reason relating to the public interest.

The Committee noted that those consulted strongly supported the proposal for a legislative amendment to prevent trustees in bankruptcy bringing retrospective claims against banks in respect of payments made out of bankrupt accounts. However, the chairperson of the Chancery and Probate Liaison Committee expressed concerns about the possibility of cheques issued by bankrupts not being honoured; banks not being responsible for the loss incurred by those receiving cheques that were dishonoured on presentation; and the withdrawal of trustees' rights to take action in respect of moneys passing through bankrupts' accounts, leading to banks failing to exercise necessary control over bankrupts' accounts. The Committee will consider the Department's view that not going ahead with the amendment in Northern Ireland would deny to bankrupts here the benefits of a measure taken to assist those in similar circumstances in the UK, assuming that the Deregulation Bill, inclusive of a similar amendment, becomes law.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has drawn up a list of stakeholders with whom it will consult, and it looks forward to receiving written and oral evidence over the coming weeks during Committee Stage.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill.

Insolvency is a very complex and technical issue, and I commend the Minister for introducing the Bill and the Department for its work on the matter to date. Unfortunately, insolvency has affected quite a number of businesses. Therefore, it is important that measures are put in place to make the process as simple and effective as possible and ensure that we have a modern, fit-for-purpose system in Northern Ireland.

One of the main purposes of the Bill is to allow for the electronic transfer of documents, which is a welcome step forward. The development that electronic documents will now have the same standing as hard copy documents is a positive step that will, hopefully, help to improve the insolvency processes.

The other developments, which authorise the use of websites to communicate reports electronically and the use of video conferencing and other types of remote meetings, are further steps in the right direction. The introduction of those measures should allow for more efficient communication and help to reduce delays in the completion of transactions involving insolvency cases. However, I feel that it is important that those without access to electronic IT equipment are not put at any disadvantage by this process. Obviously, IT is the way forward, and the vast majority of people now use it, but we cannot forget those who do not have such access to it, and they need to be reassured. Perhaps the Minister will also clarify whether the requirement for manual final sign-off of documents will still be needed or whether an electronic signature will be acceptable.

I believe that those measures will help to streamline a difficult and technical process.

All in all, I welcome the progress and the work undertaken to date in this field. I thank the Minister for introducing the Bill and trust that it will continue to progress.

12.30 pm

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, for no other reason than to hear Gordon Dunne say that IT is the way forward. That is a huge acknowledgement from Mr Dunne, and I welcome it.

In principle, we support the Bill's progression to Committee Stage. Most of my brief comments will focus on the main areas that I think we should focus on through the Committee scrutiny of the Bill. It is clear that the insolvency legislation that applies here needs to be updated to allow for the use of modern means of electronic communication and to do away with certain procedures and requirements that have outlived their usefulness.

In relation to clause 12, on the repeal of provision for the early discharge from bankruptcy, through the Committee we have been informed that that provision has been little

used in this jurisdiction. I think that the Minister said that it has been used twice. Through the Committee Stage of the Bill, we want to gain a greater insight into why the provision was included in the first place, what its raison d'être was, and to explore what circumstances it was used in. When it was used, did it prove beneficial? What are the potential cost savings that have been referred to through the making of the repeal? Or are we merely repealing it because a similar move was made in England and Wales?

There is also reference to fast-track voluntary arrangements. We should learn more about those proposals through the subsequent stages of the Bill, because I am sure that not too many of the 108 of us here are experts in the insolvency process, thank God, although it does feel like it on an ongoing basis.

The Minister informed the Committee in June that the original clause 14 of the Bill would be removed to comply with an EU bank recovery and resolution directive that is close to being adopted, we are told. However, as the provisions originally included in the removed clause will now be included in a statutory instrument that the British Treasury plans to make under the European Communities Act, it would probably be appropriate for the Committee to consider the provisions in some way.

The original clause 14 referred to bank deposits covered by the financial services compensation scheme. It seems to be the case that, in the event that a financial institution becomes insolvent, individual customers will be compensated up to £85,000 and the financial services compensation scheme will be reimbursed before the British Treasury can claim any further funds. However, what is not clear is whether the Treasury can claim against the remaining funds in preference to the customers who hold deposits in excess of that £85,000. We will try to get clarity on that matter through the Committee Stage of the Bill, unless the Minister can provide it today.

The new clause 14 includes provisions to create the option of being authorised as an insolvency practitioner solely in a personal or a corporate capacity. Under current legislation, it is only possible to be authorised for both. The Bill will do away with the authorisation of insolvency practitioners by competent authorities and enable recognised professional bodies to authorise insolvency practitioners to take only personal or corporate insolvencies as an alternative to being authorised to deal with both. We want an assurance that that will not create the risk of a lack of provision in future should practitioners opt for one or the other.

Also included in the Bill, at clause 17, is the proposal, at the suggestion of the Minister of Justice, to require the Lord Chief Justice to be consulted about the making of any order, including the right of appeal, to a court. We want to establish the rationale behind that and why it has been considered necessary at this stage. Provision is also made for statutory demands to be made in writing. During the scrutiny stage, we should seek to explore what the current arrangements are and what the potential benefits of making such a change would be.

In conclusion, we do not find a pile wrong with the Bill; it is largely a technical exercise. We will have a number of questions through the Committee Stage, but, at this stage, we are more than happy to support the Bill progressing.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the chance to speak. I am, of course, new to the Committee since all this started, but I will make one or two points and observations. As we have already heard, it is very important that the whole system works slickly and well, particularly for those who are suffering under the threat of insolvency.

I note that one of the briefs mentions that there are only two practitioners here. I wonder whether we should look at whether there should be more, not because I would encourage more people, but just to make sure that it is a cheaper process for people to go through. When we look at the use of electronic means and all the other means, it is eminently sensible, but will the Bill be written in such a way that, as new technologies that we may not have even thought about come on board, instead of legislation, we will be able to do it with other means so that we can open up?

I am impressed that we are looking at having remote and virtual meetings, but I am equally impressed that we are protecting those who do not have IT. Many of us here may not be as good as we might be, but it is very important that everybody is protected and feels part of the system.

I think that the point that you cannot survive without a bank account is vital, and that seems eminently sensible as well. The Bill seems to have been well consulted on, and I congratulate everyone on that so far. There will, of course, be queries about definitions and jargon as we all learn our way through the Bill. I am particularly pleased to see the right of appeal to the Lord Chief Justice coming on board.

In one further and last comment, when we look at allowing individuals, other than qualified insolvency practitioners, to act as nominees and supervisors in voluntary arrangements, I note that the Minister said that the Department and the Secretary of State would authorise them. I wonder whether we should be looking at allowing some other independent body that might be better placed to do that so that it is not part of the Department or loaded on to the Secretary of State. We support the Bill as it is.

Mr McCarthy: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill and will say a few words on the issue.

Insolvency is a very difficult process for business people and can have a significant financial and, indeed, emotional toll on those who are affected. Like other areas, Northern Ireland is emerging from a recession. As a result, we have seen the impact that insolvency can have. Sadly, we have also seen deficiencies in the law highlighted more often as a result. I see this Bill as largely tidying up and updating, as the Minister said, the insolvency laws in this region.

This is in part about restoring parity between the laws in England and Wales and those here at home. Although there is no financial cost to having different laws, there is a good case to be made to harmonise some of these rules among the increasing number of businesses that operate across both or all jurisdictions.

There are nine objectives in the Bill, and Alliance is content that the broad thrust of the Bill is well intended and will improve the insolvency process. For example, the abolition of the little-used clause relating to early discharge is welcome. That has been demonstrated in England and Wales to be costly and of little benefit to justify the cost involved.

I am interested to hear the Minister's views and to hear whether further consultation on restricting practitioners to personal or corporate insolvency is intended. I understand that the initial consultation presented views either way,

and I will be interested to hear, at Committee Stage, what further views emerge during consultation.

I also support clauses 1 and 2, which allow modern business practices to be used on insolvency issues, such as authorising electronic means etc rather than printed references and correspondence, which will be very useful.

As others said, clause 1 also authorises online meetings, and those are timely and sensible changes. In conclusion, Alliance will support the Bill at this stage. We will, of course, follow the Committee scrutiny carefully and consider any issues that are raised at that stage. However, we support the passage of the Bill at Second Stage and agree with its provisions.

Mr Anderson: I will speak on the Second Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill as a member of the ETI Committee, and I thank the Minister for bringing it before the House.

The Bill is largely technical and covers a highly complex field of legislation. It will, therefore, perhaps be mainly of interest to practitioners and the legal profession. However, the whole area of insolvency can and does affect a wide range of individuals and businesses, and it is important that the law is kept up to date to reflect changes in society. It is also important that persons in businesses who are affected by bankruptcy are able to avail themselves of a system that is up to date, efficient and effective.

I thank the Minister for setting out the thinking behind the Bill and for explaining its key provisions so clearly in her opening speech.

I welcome the fact that this amending Bill is designed to streamline the law and bring it broadly into line, as far as is possible, with that in England and Wales. It is an area in which there has been parity in the past, and it is good that such parity is being maintained.

The Bill addresses a number of aspects of insolvency law and procedures, and I am particularly glad to see that it will provide for the use of electronic communication, which other Members have already mentioned. That is an area of life that has undergone a major revolution in a fairly short space of time. It is vital that the use of electronic documents, such as emails and websites, now be placed on a statutory footing as far as insolvency practices are concerned.

However, I am aware that not everyone will have easy or regular access to electronic communications and that some older folk still find email, and so on, something of a mystery and a challenge. There need to be stringent safeguards for those who still have to rely on what we would call old-fashioned paper communications.

Finally, as far as I am aware, the Bill was not subject to full public consultation. In view of its technical nature, I understand the rationale behind that, but perhaps the Minister can outline just how consultation was targeted and what sorts of responses were received.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill.

It is important to note that great strides have been made in giving necessary support to those who have come into financial difficulty. Since its inception, Debt Action NI has dealt with nearly £215 million of debt, and nearly 13,000 people have benefited. More than 7,500 of those people have availed themselves of that support since August 2012. There are a record number of individuals here who have to take drastic action to manage their debt, and almost 11 individuals a day, to update the present statistics, have declared insolvency, including bankruptcy, over the past three months. There were 975 insolvencies between July and September this year. Those are staggering figures and are a real reflection of the legacy of the recession.

Against that backdrop, it is imperative that the Insolvency Bill be as accessible as possible, and its proposals will enable a faster, more efficient and less costly method of communication. The Bill is a welcome step in making the necessary changes aimed at modernising the administrative process by permitting greater use of electronic communications. For example, of particular benefit will be the option to attend meetings virtually, as has been outlined, and to use websites for the transmission of documents. The proposals include establishing the view that documents stored and transmitted in electronic form are as good and as valid as paper ones. The Bill also offers office holders involved in insolvency proceedings the ability to communicate information by displaying it on websites, albeit with the protection of a password.

We must welcome the proposals, which bring insolvency procedures into line with the modern era and help to streamline the process. However, we must ensure, as colleagues have mentioned, that no detriment attaches to those who do not have such access, and I welcome other comments that were made in that regard.

It is a great incentive that there were no objections to the legislation during public consultation. There are, however, a number of other issues that must be addressed. Earlier, reference was made to bank accounts for bankrupts. It is currently difficult for them to get bank accounts here, and the proposed change would go in some way to removing barriers. Without that change, there would be a detriment attaching to the people of Northern Ireland, who would be unduly disadvantaged compared with colleagues across the water.

In the light of the increasing figures surrounding insolvencies, it is important that we do more to promote greater awareness about finance and financial products available to the public. We need to ensure that they have the necessary information, structure and support available. In that regard, it is important to ensure that changes in the legislation do not limit access to services for clients, particularly those who are vulnerable, such as the elderly or those who live in rural communities, as Mr Dunne said. We need to ensure that proper safeguards are in place to protect these individuals. In this regard, I would support a request for a thorough and in-depth impact assessment to be undertaken to ensure that those individuals are not disadvantaged in any way as a direct result of increased digitalisation of the insolvency procedure.

12.45 pm

Mr Allister: This Bill is largely non-contentious. It deals with modernising and technical issues. In that regard, I have no issue with it. I am a bit disappointed, though, that the opportunity maybe was not taken to bring a degree of more effective supervision — indeed regulation — to insolvency practitioners.

I say that from the basis and experience of the case of a constituent — not of my constituency, in fact, but of Upper Bann — who, some time ago, brought me some matters

concerning a complaint that she found it necessary to make about how an insolvency practitioner conducted themselves when they came into her business. Indeed, at one point, the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal — an infrequently used institution — made a finding that that particular insolvency practitioner had treated this lady in a most oppressive and unfair fashion. It transpired, for example, that assets of her business had been used to pay money to someone who was not even a creditor, such was the mismanagement by the insolvency practitioner. Yet that insolvency practitioner can retire and walk off into the sunset, as he has done, leaving that lady with a very justified sense of grievance and complaint; a complaint that she brought to the Department in January 2012, almost three years ago, and which is yet to be resolved.

The Minister knows about this case. I have been in correspondence with her about it for over a year. She has advised, for example, in a letter of 7 November 2013, that the Insolvency Service has learned a number of lessons from this case and that she understands from her officials that internal procedures with regard to how complaints made against insolvency practitioners are handled are being reviewed and that improvements will be made. That is good, but is there not in this Bill, I ask the Minister, an opportunity to tighten the controls in respect of insolvency practitioners?

We are now in the situation where they are to be appointed solely and exclusively by their own professional bodies, but in those professional bodies, there does not appear to be the degree and mechanisms of control when an insolvency practitioner falls below the expected standard of operation. As I understand it, this particular insolvency practitioner, whom I will not name, has had complaints in respect of other businesses as well. Is there not a case for this Bill to make statutory provision for a code of conduct in respect of insolvency practitioners? Would that not give some comfort, opportunity and assurance to those who, by the operation of insolvency practitioners, feel badly done by? I ask the Minister to consider that possibility.

I also ask the Minister to assure us that all of the professional bodies that are capable of appointing insolvency practitioners have, in fact, got a continual professional development (CPD) programme. Are they all operating CPD? Part of the lessons I draw from the case that I have referred to is that an insolvency practitioner had maybe been doing it for such a long time that he thought that he knew all the answers. In fact, he was deficient in his up-to-date knowledge and in how he applied it. If those professional bodies are to be left to self-regulate insolvency practitioners, as they do at present, is there within each of them an adequate, efficient and effective CPD scheme? I do not know the entire answer to that, but I suspect that, in respect of some, there may not be. I ask the Minister to check that out, either today or on another occasion, and return to us on that matter.

I note that the Committee Chairman is not presently here. In the Committee's consideration of the Bill, it should take the opportunity to hear evidence from the young lady to whom I have referred — I am quite happy to facilitate it with the information — to see whether it is persuaded that there is a case for, for example, a statutory code of conduct in respect of insolvency practitioners. I am not saying that that is the entire answer. Perhaps it requires more than that. However, I suggest that something needs to be done so that, in the supervision of insolvency practitioners, there is something with effect and teeth.

In this case, I think that it was last October when the Department received the report of its investigator; it is called the Hastings report. That report, to this very day, still has not been released to the complainant. I understand that insolvency is complex and technical, and that a lot of legal advice probably needs to be taken, but having a situation where a report has been sitting with legal advisers for over a year and the complainant is bereft of even a copy of that report does nothing to build the confidence of those affected. I say to the Minister that, if opportunity in the Bill can be made to exist to broaden it to bring some comfort to those affected by the workings of insolvency practitioners, that should be taken. I respectfully suggest that the very basic step that might appropriately be taken is the consideration of a statutory code of conduct for insolvency practitioners so that we do not have a situation again where someone, as in this case, makes a less than professional job of the matter and simply retires and walks off into the sunset. There has to be accountability.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. I definitely do not argue with his point; it merits looking at. However, one of the arguments that we hear for these changes needing to be made to the legislation is to keep it in line with that offered in England and Wales. Is the Member content for us to deviate from what they are doing over there in terms of the inclusion of a statutory code of conduct for practitioners?

Mr Allister: I do not think that a statutory code of conduct would fall foul of the essential parity of arrangement to be maintained as to who appoints insolvency practitioners etc and the compliance with the pending EU directive. I do not think that any of that would fall foul of that. If we can better the legislation, we should take the opportunity to do so. We should proof it more against the needs of those who interface with the insolvency practitioners in the way that I have suggested. I trust that, in the spirit in which it is offered, the Minister will consider the suggestions of how we can better proof the actions of insolvency practitioners in circumstances where there seems to be a deficit of supervision, control, accountability and regulation of how they conduct themselves and that lessons will indeed be learned that will be translated into this legislation.

Mrs Foster: I am grateful to Members for their consideration of the Bill. I am pleased with the level of support for its introduction. As has been acknowledged, there are a number of very technical issues in it, but there are a few issues that I want to reflect on after the debate. The Bill will be welcomed by members of the insolvency profession, and I believe it will be of benefit to those members of the public at large who have the misfortune to be affected by it.

The Chair of the Committee welcomed the provisions for electronic communications and indicated that the Committee would be engaging in further scrutiny of the additional amendments. He expressed some concerns about the fact that insolvency practitioners could apply to be personal practitioners or corporate practitioners, which is a point that I will address in a second. He also indicated that he was pleased to see that people would still be able to apply for bank accounts in the future.

Mr Dunne expressed concerns in relation to IT and the fact that some people cannot access broadband. His colleague took it a bit further, saying that there are many old-fashioned people who did not want to use IT. I did not know whether he was speaking about himself at that point.

Mr Anderson: Who was that?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely not.

He is right: there are a number of people who do not want to avail of IT, but there will be a number of safeguards put in place to ensure that anyone who is not able to, or does not want to, receive communications electronically will not be put at a disadvantage. Provisions will be included in subordinate legislation that make it essential to obtain an intended recipient's consent to the use of electronic means to send them notices or other documents. That will very much be put in place to safeguard those people.

In relation to the manual sign-off of documents, which is a very specific point that Mr Dunne asked me about, there will be a set of rules made to accompany this legislation. They will provide for the authorisation of signatures by electronic means. So the answer is, "Yes. In due course that will be allowed for as well."

Mr Flanagan mentioned early discharge from bankruptcy and asked what cost savings could be made if we did away with that provision. If someone applies for early discharge, obviously you have to have the administrative system to deal with that, whereas, if it is not allowed for, you do not need that and you would be saving money in that respect.

On the issue of the appeal to the Lord Chief Justice; at present, you have to consult with the Lord Chancellor. The Minister of Justice asked that I add in, "and the Lord Chief Justice", so not only will we have to consult the Lord Chancellor's office, we will also have to consult with the Lord Chief Justice. That is in relation to the disqualifying of individuals from occupying certain office. If there is discretion involved, there will be an appeal process, and the Minister of Justice has asked for the Lord Chief Justice to be included in that.

Mr Kinahan said that there are only two practitioners in Northern Ireland, which is not correct. There are around 50 practitioners, but only two are authorised by my Department: the others are authorised by the professional bodies across Northern Ireland. The two insolvency practitioners authorised by the Department will, if the Bill is passed, need to seek authorisation from one of the seven recognised professional bodies. We will assist them with that and will allow them to remain authorised by the Department for up to a year after the measure commences to give them some time for transition.

1.00 pm

Mr Kinahan made the point that it is very difficult to exist without a bank account. That is absolutely right. He made mention of the Secretary of State. To be clear, it is the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills who has the residual power, not the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr McCarthy asked about the business of being qualified for personal insolvency and corporate insolvency. I actually think that that will allow more people to become qualified. I think it was Mr Flanagan who suggested that perhaps fewer people might be qualified. However, I think that it will allow more people to be qualified, because some will choose to qualify as an individual, while others, perhaps larger firms, will want to be involved in corporate insolvency as well.

Mr McKinney welcomed the proposals and very much wanted to emphasise that no detriment should be attached to those who do not have Internet access. Again, I make the point that it will be very clear in the rules that we have to gain the consent of the intended recipient before we can proceed.

Mr Allister is right: it is largely a non-contentious issue. He raised a specific issue, and I am very conscious and aware of the facts behind that case, which I acknowledge has been going on for far too long. It comes from the fact that it was the first case of its type. As I indicated in my speech, we had very specific powers to intervene. If it goes down to the seven professional bodies, they will have a range of powers with which to intervene. I could only disqualify the insolvency practitioner; I did not have other ways of intervention. Therefore, it will help that the insolvency practitioner bodies — the authorised bodies — will be able to intervene.

I take his point in relation to a code of conduct. That is something that we could certainly look at and explore. I hope that the Committee takes the opportunity, through its evidence sessions, to look at that. I am very happy to engage on that issue as well. What we want to achieve is that, if a complaint is made, it is dealt with quickly and effectively, but also in a meaningful way, and the appropriate sanction is put in place.

He asked a specific question about whether the professional bodies engage in continuing professional development. I do not have that answer here, but I am happy to come back to him, and indeed the Committee, on that issue. Again, he made a very fair point in asking whether those bodies that are engaged in authorising insolvency practitioners make sure that, as is the case with lawyers, accountants and everybody else, they continue to keep up to speed in their professional qualifications.

All in all, the House has expressed a desire to move to the next stage in the legislation. I am grateful to those who contributed to the debate. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Second Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill [NIA 39/11-16] be agreed.*

Committee Business

Standing Order 71

Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

Leave out Standing Order 71 and insert

> *"71. Oath*
>
> *Where an oath is to be administered it shall be in the following form -*
>
> *'I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest, and that I will give the Committee/Assembly all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities';*
>
> *but where the person giving the evidence objects to being sworn, he or she shall be permitted to make a solemn affirmation in the following form -*
>
> *'I, _____ do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest, and that I will give the Committee/Assembly all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities'.".*

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring the motion to the House, which proposes an amendment to Standing Order 71. Standing Order 71 sets out the form of the oath administered to witnesses. However, the current wording is not consistent with the Oaths Act 1978. The Act states:

> *"Any person who objects to being sworn shall be permitted to make his solemn affirmation instead of taking an oath."*

Standing Order 71 is somewhat different, as it does not require a person to object to being sworn but refers to a person who "prefers to affirm". To reflect the wording of the Oaths Act, it is proposed that the wording is amended to read:

> *"where the person giving the evidence objects to being sworn, he or she shall be permitted to make a solemn affirmation".*

The Act also prescribes the form of a solemn affirmation. However, this has not been precisely replicated in Standing Order 71, which omits the requirement for the person affirming to give their name and the words "and affirm". Today's motion will rectify this and ensure that Standing Orders reflect the requirements of the Oaths Act. On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I commend the motion to the House.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

Leave out Standing Order 71 and insert

> *"71. Oath*
>
> *Where an oath is to be administered it shall be in the following form -*
>
> *'I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest, and that I will give the Committee/Assembly all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities';*
>
> *but where the person giving the evidence objects to being sworn, he or she shall be permitted to make a solemn affirmation in the following form -*
>
> *'I, _____ do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest, and that I will give the Committee/Assembly all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities'.".*

Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Inquiry Report

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to wind. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel on its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues, to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. At the outset, I point out that the Committee's inquiry findings and recommendations are both timely and germane given the public expenditure pressures that we face. Essentially, this is about how our public sector can work smarter to achieve desired outcomes while using less resource and taking account of the needs of both the business and the employees.

I do not underestimate the challenge that full implementation of the inquiry recommendations will present to the Department and the wider Executive. Given the cross-cutting nature of the change measures required, I expect, and know, that resistance will emerge and that the silo mentality will come into play, including amongst senior managers. Organisational culture is also notoriously difficult to change. However, it is clear from the international evidence that we are behind the curve in exploiting the benefits from a strategic and coordinated application of flexible working in the public sector. The prize is too great and the medium-term budgetary outlook too severe for us to flinch from meeting this challenge.

I shall refer to the case for a strategic approach to flexible working in a moment, but, first, let me explain what exactly we mean by the term "flexible working". As stated in the evidence, it is about:

> *"being able to achieve desired outcomes in a range of ways, being flexible about how, when and where people work."*

Flexible working covers a wide range of options: for example, people working part-time, job-sharing, working from satellite offices, working in virtual teams using mobile devices and sharing offices. While the inquiry considered all aspects of flexible working, it focused on the further opportunities associated with the flexible place or location options. Drawing on international lessons and expert evidence, the inquiry makes key recommendations to the Department and the wider Executive on how flexible working could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in our public sector.

I want to make it clear that this is not simply about homeworking. Some Committee members had much to say about that option, and I am sure that they will wish to highlight the necessary safeguards recommended in the report. Rather, this is about people working smarter, be that in hub offices in rural locations, mobile working, sharing office space or using the full potential of modern technology, such as Internet conferencing and bespoke software solutions. The underlying aim is to match the way of working with business needs and the needs of those doing the work.

The Committee's evidence focused on five broad themes: the case for flexible working; existing flexible working practices in the local public sector; lessons from other jurisdictions; how we could implement flexible working successfully; and the relevance to other Executive policies and priorities.

Clear evidence was found of potential benefits for the employer, the employee, the economy and the environment. These included reduced office accommodation costs; increased productivity; better work/life balance; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; promotion of gender equality in employment; and environmental benefits from reduced carbon footprint and congestion.

There was an abundance of literature and case studies demonstrating that such benefits can be realised, and that relates to both the private and the public sectors, including in comparator bodies such as local councils and Whitehall Departments in Britain. I will reference just a few. There were the case studies in the Recruitment and Employment Confederation report, highlighting that employees who, when given increased control over where, when and how they worked as well as the tasks that they performed, were more motivated, more engaged and had higher productivity as well as benefiting from a better work/life balance. The Bain review highlighted improved service delivery, increased public sector efficiency and effectiveness and reduced traffic congestion and carbon footprint.

Statistically, the evidence speaks for itself. For example, a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development survey in 2012 found that three quarters of employers reported a positive impact on talent retention, motivation and staff engagement. In financial terms, members noted the evidence on substantial savings potential. The Whitehall Department for Culture, Media and Sport achieved property savings estimated at £2·5 million per annum by all staff, including the permanent secretary, moving to open-plan offices, together with a consolidation of buildings and an increase of people working from home or at locations other than the traditional office. Similarly, the Department for Children, Schools and Families implemented a desk-sharing policy, which increased building capacity occupancy, resulting in a £10 million per annum saving in property costs.

Members also noted the office rationalisation achieved by Salford City Council, which, with a complement of only around 4,000 office-based staff, resulted in cumulative savings of £6·5 million per annum and savings of more than £5 million in capital receipts. Similarly, flexible working enabled Hertfordshire County Council to move its 4,500 staff from 51 to five offices and achieve annual operational cost savings of £3·8 million and property disposals totalling £40 million in addition to reductions in travel and in environmental pollutants and increased staff satisfaction. Evidence from further afield presented a similar picture, showing how comparable federal agencies in the United States achieved substantial cost savings from closing offices as a result of teleworking.

On this key issue of office accommodation savings, I point out that we do not yet have firm figures from the Department for potential savings here in the North. The Committee has discovered that only 20% of Civil Service office space meets workspace utilisation targets and that the traditional office is typically occupied only about 45% of the time. This points clearly to the possibility of significant savings being made with a more strategic approach to how public servants work. While figures of between £30 million to £50 million were suggested to the Committee from the reform of property management plan, the Department needs to provide clarity not only on what are the potential total savings but on how and when they will be achieved. There is also a need to establish the total potential savings from the wider public sector, including arm's-length bodies, the health and education sectors and local government. To date, the Department's focus has been on the Civil Service estate, for which it has lead responsibility, but that represents only a small proportion of the overall government property portfolio.

I will not labour the evidence point any further. Suffice it to say that the case for flexible working confirms the assertion from Professor Bain in his initial briefing that:

> *"it is more a question of how one should do this rather than whether one should do it."*

The Committee's cross-departmental survey highlighted the ad hoc and uncoordinated nature of the flexible location working arrangements pertaining across Departments. To address this and to ensure that we realise the full benefits, the Committee makes the following interrelated recommendations. The strategic direction and guiding principles must be set at the highest level in government, namely in the Programme for Government, with Departments and other public bodies provided with a menu of flexible working options from which they can tailor solutions to meet local business needs.

There should be an onus on all Departments to ensure that the work styles and tasks relating to each job role are assessed at the local level to determine the applicable flexible working practices. There should be a coordinated extension of the work hub or satellite office network involving collaboration by public bodies to improve the geographical spread of the facilities and to allow a greater number and range of public servants to work remotely. DFP should have a lead role in proactively identifying opportunities for exploiting technological solutions to enable mobile or agile working in a wider range of public sector job roles.

To maximise savings from reduced business-travel costs, Internet-based programmes or videoconferencing, which the Committee looked at in some detail, should be the preferred methods for civil servants participating in meetings that would otherwise involve significant travel. DFP needs to take on a central coordinating role in guiding and monitoring implementation, and there should be a duty on all Departments and arm's-length bodies (ALBs) to provide the necessary data in that regard.

1.15 pm

While I will not go into the detail now, probably the most important part of the inquiry report is the section that outlines a good practice approach to implementing flexible working, including establishing the evidence, providing the vision, managing resistance, leading change, engaging staff, assessing jobs for flexibility, managing performance by results, providing appropriately designed workplaces, embracing new technology and training for change.

In closing, I emphasise that there will need to be determination on the part of the Executive and the Department to ensure a truly joined-up approach to implementation. For the benefits to be maximised, a corporate approach is needed not just in and across the Civil Service Departments in the lead functional areas of human resources, property and IT divisions but in ALBs and local government.

Finally, as highlighted in the report, the coordinated roll-out of flexible location working should be seen as an invest-to-save measure that will support the delivery of a range of other government policies and priorities, not least the reform and modernisation of the public sector.

I look forward to hearing Members' contributions and commend the report to the House.

Mr Girvan: I think that this is a body of work that needed to be done. This culture is alive and well in the private sector. One area that came out through the evidence that we received was that, in the private sector, a very strong business case is made each time it is brought forward and flexible working is put in place. Unfortunately, I did not have the confidence to believe that the same was the case in the Civil Service, and management would need to ensure that it is following what technology is available to ensure that individuals can and do work when they are supposed to be working flexibly.

I appreciate that this was an extensive piece of work that the Committee undertook, and many evidence sessions were brought forward. We even engaged in what is termed "videoconferencing", which is something that I believe could probably be used on many occasions to make savings, as opposed to flying people halfway round the world to speak to individuals for a very short time. The videoconferencing seemed to be quite effective and worked quite well.

Another area that I believe we should be looking at is the hubs that are available in the Civil Service and their usage. There should be feedback to ensure that a proper business case is being made for the rationalisation of the estate. As was mentioned in the report, the estate is used 45% of the time. From an efficiency point of view, that does not make very good business sense. I think we need to seriously look at how we can ensure that we get that.

Unfortunately, there are certain areas in the Civil Service that cannot avail themselves of flexible working; for example, those who are maybe delivering services directly to the public. One example is that those who want to empty the bins for a council cannot engage in flexible working, otherwise the bins would not get lifted. So, for some, the opportunity to avail themselves of flexible working is ruled out. I appreciate that flexible working seems to be more geared to administrative staff and management. That needs to be looked at to ensure that we get proper delivery from those areas.

The satellite-office opportunity is definitely there, as is hot-desking. We should ensure that people make use of them.

Unfortunately, some believe that flexible working is and has been alive and well in the Civil Service for many years.

That may be just my view, and it may not necessarily be that of the Committee, but there have been occasions on which individuals have come into the office in the morning, put a coat over the back of the seat and disappeared for the rest of the day. People think that colleagues must not be too far away as their coat being there means that they will be back. I use that only as an example.

I believe that we have to use technology. The technology is available, and the private sector makes use of it. Those in the private sector know when people are on their computer and what they are doing. Unfortunately, I do not think that we are implementing that technology to the same degree. I am not sure whether special negotiations are needed with the unions to ensure that a snooping approach is not taken, but the situation does need to be looked into. The software is available and can be used to ensure that people are working and not turning on their computer in the morning, going off to do their shopping and coming back and saying that they were logged on all day. There is an opportunity to ensure that work is being undertaken. The outcomes are measured in the private sector, and I would like to think that we can ensure that the same protections can be put in place in the Civil Service and the wider public sector.

Savings can be made and productivity can improve. As long as people know that they have a job to do and a certain amount of time in which to do it, they will do it. On a number of occasions, flexible working has been demonstrated to be very effective and far more efficient for individuals.

As it stands, the body of work and the report as presented is a very true reflection of what happened in Committee. I support the recommendations. The report is helpful and means that we have a body of work that ensures that civil servants and those in management step up to the mark and ensure that we get delivery.

Mr Cree: The report before the House represents over two years' work on flexible working by the Committee. The early evidence showed that the Northern Ireland Civil Service did not have a formal strategy or policy on most aspects of flexible working but did have several connected human resources policies. At the outset, the Committee was satisfied that the inquiry would aim to investigate how flexible working practices in all areas could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the Northern Ireland public sector.

Most people have an opinion on what is meant by "flexible working". Indeed, there are many definitions. The Committee decided to look at the broadest range of factors, and that is reflected in the report. Evidence was gathered from a wide number of sources, and videoconferencing and Internet-based video links were used. It was particularly helpful to be able to speak to and question experts in the field and practitioners directly involved in flexible working.

The Chair referred to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's recent survey, but I will do so again. The survey of over 1,000 employers and 2,000 employees found that three quarters of UK employers surveyed felt that implementing flexible working practices had had a positive impact on talent retention and that 73% reported a positive impact on motivation and staff engagement. More than half of the employees surveyed felt that flexible working helped them reach a better work/life balance generally, and almost a quarter said that flexible working had helped them with their caring responsibilities for children. More than one third of those who responded believed that flexible working made them more productive, while around a fifth said that it reduced the level of sickness absence.

The Committee noted that, as part of the Civil Service reform programme, the Cabinet Office adopted the Smart Working policy approach for Whitehall Departments.

The purpose is to change the way work is carried out by focusing on the achievement of certain benefits. I will mention those benefits, quickly: increasing the effectiveness of the activities; reducing the financial costs of running an organisation; focusing on outcomes rather than processes, which is a very important one; meeting the aspirations of staff for an improved work/life balance; creating office environments that facilitate collaboration and innovation; and reducing the environmental footprint of working practices. So, it is not just about working from home as opposed to working in an office. Sir George Bain summed it up when he said that it was more a question of how rather than whether flexible working should be involved.

The Committee carried out its own survey of flexible working in the various Departments, as no meaningful information was held centrally. That survey produced evidence that the Northern Ireland Civil Service uses part-time working, flexitime, term-time working, career breaks and other alternative working patterns. However, it was also clear that there was an absence of corporate policy and guidance, which was reflected by incomplete data on existing working practices. Evidence was also gathered from other parts of the world where flexible working had been introduced successfully. However, culture change was a vital part of the overall change management process in most places.

The Committee firmly believes that the strategic implementation of flexible working, facilitated by appropriately designed workplaces, will maximise the property savings from the rationalisation of government office accommodation. That should be a key priority for the Department at this time of tight budgetary pressures. However, the main reason for flexible working is about doing things better, whilst cutting out waste from existing resources and embracing new technology. Unfortunately, the public sector in Northern Ireland appears to lag behind other jurisdictions in adopting new technology to support working practices. That is despite the fact that we have high-profile, local software companies in this market.

The implementation of the inquiry recommendations will also support the delivery of a range of the Executive's existing policies and priorities, such as the 'People Strategy 2013-16', the reduction of levels of sickness absence, the measuring well-being initiative, the consolidation of the Northern Ireland Civil Service estate and the wider public sector reform agenda.

I support the Committee's report and commend it to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mrs Judith Cochrane. I hope we did not disturb you. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to add comment to the debate on the report on the inquiry into flexible working in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

The context for the inquiry has already been set and stated by others. It is important to note that whilst the Committee examined the full range of flexible working opportunities, there was a particular focus on flexible working locations, such as satellite offices and shared office space. That is the area which potentially creates the greatest opportunities for savings but also benefits for staff. It is also important to note that a one-size-fits-all policy approach on the matter is not appropriate, as any flexible working practices need to be designed in line with business need. Therefore any progress on the matter could face some stumbling blocks early on, as there is often a drive for uniformity over and above considering actual business need.

There is no doubt that the need for flexible working is growing. We are no longer a nine-to-five world, and demands for access to services and information are increasing. The public sector has a role there to consider how it is delivering its services. During the evidence session, we heard of many of the benefits of flexible working arrangements, including increased employee productivity, better business continuity, reduced work-related travel, greater retention and more women in senior roles. All of those are worthy outcomes. However, even when the benefits of flexible working arrangements are clear on paper, the ability to successfully embed them can be hampered by a number of barriers.

The most commonly cited barriers tend to be cultural in nature and, unfortunately, public sector culture is probably the most difficult to crack in comparison with other sectors. That can be due to low staff turnover, which is often seen as a positive workplace trait, however it also means that work patterns have often become entrenched over the years. That problem of a stagnant corporate culture can be further compounded, as there are few opportunities for entry at all levels into the Civil Service. We are, therefore, losing the opportunity to bring new, fresh thinking to challenge the old ways of doing things.

1.30 pm

If we are to achieve a culture of flexibility, public sector organisations need to become more agile so that they are able to constantly innovate around employee working arrangements. I believe that the Minister understands that, and it is one of the reasons behind him setting up the public sector reform division, which has a specific aim to help stimulate innovation in service delivery and policy design.

Current working practices often dictate the need for allocated desk space. However, the need is often based on the amount of staff-owned paperwork, and, in many cases, the spaces can be unoccupied for a significant part of the day. There is a real opportunity to rationalise workspace requirements across our public sector, but at the same time capitalise on the benefits of staff not always having to travel to specific office locations, which are often Belfast-centred. Indeed, we could be losing out on vital talent who live further afield but are not able to travel every day. Therefore, we need to fully explore and embrace technology so that we can deliver flexibility. I believe that we are still some way off where we should be on this, but it is not that easy to achieve in practice.

In a previous role, I was involved in implementing the electronic document record management system in the Civil Service. Although many will agree that it is good practice to save your work into a shared space, first for business continuity purposes but also to allow quicker information sharing, it was met with a lot of resistance. If we are to succeed in this area, lessons need to be learned from those types of projects. Often, project staff are more concerned with ticking boxes at project board meetings than actually ensuring that the technology is configured to take into account the various idiosyncrasies of different business areas. Having project team staff who have the skills to draw out information from staff and feed that into the development process makes it more likely that the technology will succeed. At the end of the day, technology like that will better allow for flexible working in the future. If we are going to invest millions of pounds in it, we need to make sure that we utilise its full benefits.

The inquiry has raised a number of interesting issues and opportunities for change. Our goal should be that the Civil Service and the wider public sector should strive for operational excellence. We therefore ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine the recommendations in the report and implement any changes that will create maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion as a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Previous Members have mentioned that different groups and organisations came and gave evidence to the Committee on flexible working in the public sector. One of the earliest briefings to the Committee, which, unfortunately, I was not able to attend due to a family bereavement, was from Andy Lake of Flexibility.co.uk. I have looked back at Hansard, and he gave the Committee a step-by-step guide to what flexible working can look like. That was one of the earliest evidence sessions. When I look at that, it is clear that there has been a lack of understanding from many organisations and Departments on exactly what flexible working patterns can look like.

Mr Lake's organisation produced a document entitled, 'The Smart Working Handbook'. I looked at that document after he came to the Committee, and it was customised to suit many of the organisations and Departments that his company was working with and was used as internal guidance on flexible working patterns across many Departments and organisations. He also spoke of the overall emphasis in Whitehall around how this is part of the efficiency and reform programme under which flexible working sits.

One of the many driving factors of the Government across GB is to reduce property costs, and we heard the Chair of the Committee speak about that today. In our public sector workforce, there are many practical ways in which time can be managed better, and each Department or organisation has its own mechanisms in place, as we have heard, on how it can deal with that. People spend a lot of time doing things in their working day that they feel are not entirely necessary, as they have been involved in a system and in a process that has been designed, adopted, put in place and passed on throughout their working life, and some continue to do that. They have always done things the same in the way that they work. We need to challenge that. We can challenge it so that we can manage our time and our worth ethic and improve on our work output.

Committee members asked numerous questions, and I think it was Mr Cree who asked how managers know that members of staff are working when they should be working and not doing other things. There was a lot of talk in Committee about how this could be addressed, including the satellite system, shared space and all of that, and putting work guidance and templates in place to make sure that people are doing what they are supposed to be doing. Reduced property costs, a good working environment, health benefits with less stress, better motivation of staff and an overall improved work/life balance were all discussed in Committee during many of the evidence sessions that we took.

The report is a culmination of all the good work undertaken by the Committee over a couple of years. Many respondents to the inquiry were very positive. It struck me how well flexible working suited families, as it helped with childcare arrangements and reduced costs. It is fair to say, thinking from a rural perspective where I come from, west of the Bann, that civil servants who travel from west of the Bann would welcome these reforms on flexible working. They would be willing to engage in that from a sub-office in my area. It would prove to them that it is not all Belfast centred, and that Strabane could avail of it.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that she, as someone who frequently gets stuck on the M2 or the M1 in the morning, would also benefit from flexible working. I do not know the Minister's view on flexible working for Members of the House.

The Member touches on a good point. Frequently, we face issues in the Assembly on transport infrastructure and congestion. If we implement flexible working, surely that would forgo the need for more money to be spent on infrastructure in the future and would address congestion on our roads.

Ms Boyle: Absolutely. I certainly agree. Maybe the Minister might take into account a sub-office of Stormont west of the Bann, as that would certainly help me and other Members who have to travel two hours every day to get here.

Mr A Maginness: Strabane.

Ms Boyle: Absolutely. An onus has to be placed on Departments and organisations as to how they would facilitate or accommodate people coming from a rural area and those with a disability. I commend the Committee for the work it has done on this and the clerks for the research they have done. I commend the report to the House.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Looking around the Chamber this afternoon, it appears that many of our colleagues are adopting a flexible working approach to the debate. In the spirit of flexible working, I had, at one stage, contemplated giving my contribution by teleconferencing while I remained at home today, or, alternatively, I could have read three fifths of my response and given Mr McIlveen the remaining two fifths. However, given that we are trying to work flexibly here in the time left before Question Time, I will proceed conventionally.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. As Members know, I am a firm believer in exploiting new ideas and technologies to ensure that we deliver the best possible service in the most efficient way. If the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the wider public sector can achieve additional benefits through the increased use of flexible working practices, I feel that it is important that we evaluate and implement the proposals where it is appropriate and cost effective to do so.

However, the report on flexible working highlights a wide range of issues and contains a number of associated recommendations. In order to fully respond to the debate, I would like to set out and address the key points separately.

First, it is important to highlight the range of working practices that are currently available in the Northern Ireland Civil Service to support staff in the balance between their work commitments and life responsibilities. I was pleased to note that the Committee's report commends the Civil Service for being at the forefront of the introduction of flexible time working practices and acting as an exemplar organisation in that respect. The potential benefits of flexible working are wide-ranging, and my Department acknowledges those identified in the report. From a purely HR perspective, they include improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; improved work/life balance; wider recruitment talent pools; and the promotion of gender equality in employment.

In recognition of those benefits, the Civil Service has implemented alternative working patterns under the umbrella of flexible working, including flexible hours or flexitime; compressed hours and personalised hours; part-time working, including job-sharing and term-time working; and partial retirement. The majority of Civil Service employees can avail themselves of at least one of those schemes, and there is no doubt that they have a positive impact on the work/life balance of staff. For example, the results of last year's staff survey showed that over 60% of staff agreed that they achieve a good balance between their work life and their private life.

In addition to the alternative working patterns on offer, my Department has been extremely proactive in exploiting new technology to support flexible working practices. I was therefore disappointed to note and must take issue with the report's assessment that the Northern Ireland public sector appears to lag behind other jurisdictions. On the contrary, the Northern Ireland Civil Service is very much a leader in this respect. Not only has it identified the opportunities presented by new technology, it has implemented several as proof of concepts or live running. They include satellite working, homeworking, videoconferencing, instant messaging, mobile devices and Wi-Fi.

In particular, my Department has supported the Civil Service in different ways to enable flexible working. They include making it easier for staff to work from different locations by implementing Network NI across all Northern Ireland Civil Service sites; providing a BlackBerry service that provides secure access to the Northern Ireland Civil Service services, such as email from a smartphone or tablet device; and developing and supporting unified communications, which includes a range of tools to enable flexible and agile working. We have introduced business zones or hubs to enable staff to work remotely at a location that is more suitable for them while still meeting their business objectives. The business zone in Marlborough House, Craigavon, for example, is well utilised by a wide range of public sector staff. On average, it had around 200 visits each month in the first half of this financial year. There is also a hub at Castle Buildings and a small

facility for laptop users at Academy House in Ballymena. We have supported flexible and agile working across a number of Departments, including school inspectors in the Department of Education who are home-based; planning staff in the Department of the Environment who use videoconferencing to manage teams in remote locations; and staff in a range of Departments, such as DARD, DOE, DRD and DFP, who use mobile technology to help with their day-to-day job, including surveys, assessments and enforcement.

In my Department, IT staff have adopted an element of teleworking, including NI Direct, which has daily team meetings between staff in Belfast and Londonderry, to allow them to work closer to home. The evaluation of the teleworking initiative, which was initially run as a pilot, demonstrates that it has been a success. Benefits include an enhanced work/life balance, increased flexibility in working arrangements to meet business needs and a contribution towards some of the aims of the Government's green transport goals and objectives. My Department introduced a centralised video conferencing service at the beginning of 2012. That service continues to grow, and, although some stand-alone facilities still exist in Departments, a large number of units have been migrated into the central structure. In the last year alone, almost 4,000 meetings were hosted by the service.

The report expresses the view that Internet-based conferencing should be the preferred method for civil servants participating in meetings that involve travel outside Northern Ireland. I would like to advise that Internet-based web conferencing is already supported and has been available for some time in the Northern Ireland Civil Service using the WebEx product. We continue to improve the service, and plans are well advanced to introduce an internal web conferencing facility that will also have the capability to include people from outside the Northern Ireland Civil Service. I believe that that approach will help address any security concerns in relation to the current product and will result in a more extensive use of the facility.

The examples that I have just given show that the technology and security controls are already in place in the Civil Service to support flexible working. In addition, the new performance management system supports the principle of flexible working, as staff productivity and performance are measured by outputs and objectives that should not be influenced by where a person is located. However, in all the flexible working options that I have noted, there is a guiding and overriding principle that cannot be ignored, which is that flexible working solutions should only be implemented where there is no adverse impact on the service provided to the public or on the overall efficiency of the Department concerned.

1.45 pm

I note that the report recommends that DFP take the lead responsibility for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of flexible working measures. However, it is widely acknowledged that some areas of work, particularly front-line jobs, are not suitable for flexible working arrangements. That point was made by Mr Girvan in his contribution, and it was recognised by the Committee, which reported that a one-size-fits-all approach was not appropriate and that the focus should be on selecting the appropriate working options and technologies to meet business needs.

I was interested to learn, in researching this, that a number of private sector companies, most notably Yahoo, have moved in the opposite direction. It ended flexible working as recently as February last year, in part because it believed that some of the best ideas and decisions came in places such as the cafeteria and the hallways and as people bumped into one another throughout the workplace. Its feeling was that impromptu team meetings were not happening and that there was reduced creativity and less camaraderie among staff as a result of flexible working.

Individual Departments are in the best position to examine the feasibility of enhanced flexible working for their business processes. They are also best placed to assess the costs and benefits of additional flexible working practices and to develop the associated business case. If we add an additional monitoring and reporting role for DFP, there is a danger that we could introduce an additional level of unnecessary bureaucracy into the process. Therefore, I feel that the proposal needs further consideration in order to develop the most appropriate approach. Likewise, the proposal for a new Programme for Government commitment on flexible working needs careful examination. I recognise that flexible working is an important issue that should be considered and addressed. However, I am not sure that a PFG commitment is an appropriate mechanism for that. PFG targets should be about the level of service delivered to the people of Northern Ireland, not the internal processes used to deliver those services.

I acknowledge the Committee's view that there is potential for savings to be made by utilising a more flexible or agile work style. However, those savings will be achieved only if there is a net reduction in office accommodation space. We should not have a situation in which one person holds a workstation in their normal office base as well as in a remote location.

The Chair mentioned the need to reduce the carbon footprint. The asset management strategy, which he is familiar with, tries to do that on an ongoing basis. We are putting in open-plan office accommodation to Workplace NI standards. The Member knows that I have an open-plan office in Clare House. Even though I sometimes look out and see Mr McIlveen looking back at me, it is a price worth paying to lead by example. *[Laughter.]* It should be the responsibility of each Department to evaluate how enhanced flexible working can benefit its business and make an informed decision on whether to support a more flexible or agile work style. DFP will certainly provide the technologies to support that work if a suitable business case has been produced. We will also continue to promote staff awareness of Civil Service flexible working practices through ongoing staff communication.

The flexible working report contains many useful observations and proposals. My Department has already introduced a range of schemes and technologies to facilitate flexible working in the Civil Service and has addressed some of the issues highlighted in the report. I assure Members that we will continue to keep pace with developments in the area and introduce new policies and technologies in relation to flexible working as the need arises.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Dominic Bradley, the Deputy Chair of the Committee, to conclude the debate. I remind him that we will stop for Question Time at 2.00 pm. If he has not concluded his remarks, he will be called immediately after Question Time.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

This, indeed, has been a useful debate on the Committee's inquiry report, and I thank Members and the Minister for their contributions. As the Chair said, the recommendations aim to help DFP and the wider Executive to implement flexible working successfully and strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector here. However, that will require a joined-up approach within and across Departments and the wider public sector.

It has been acknowledged that the challenge of this task is considerable and that we can expect resistance to the change. Given the need to work beyond the silos in a collective and coordinated way, we can expect that perceived barriers will be identified and plausible reasons offered for why the project cannot progress as envisaged. The short answer, of course, is that comparable public sector bodies in other places already reap the rewards of the successful implementation of a strategic and comprehensive approach to flexible working. Nonetheless, it is important that I close today's debate by reflecting on some of the barriers that may arise, some of which have been referenced in today's debate. We need to be clear on how those can be addressed. While the inquiry report outlines the good practice steps and change measures required, there is plenty of detailed guidance and literature available to support public sector managers in this regard. In particular, I point to the 'Guide to Smart Working in Government', which was prepared for Whitehall Departments last year.

As has been identified, probably the greatest barrier or challenge is bringing about the necessary cultural change in public bodies and managing resistance, including at senior and middle-management level. If we are serious about achieving the benefits and savings, Executive Ministers need to be clear and determined in setting this as a priority for the Senior Civil Service. Senior managers must lead the change by effectively communicating the vision and benefits; by leading by example; by meaningful and early engagement with staff and their representatives; and by providing the necessary training and support. Everyone must be clear that it offers a win-win outcome.

We have noted that there can be opposition to open-plan offices, which are a necessary element of smart workplace design. We have seen from the evidence on best practice design that there needs to be a mixture of spaces, with each addressing the particular needs of workers: for example, meeting spaces, break-out rooms, quiet rooms and multipurpose areas to ensure the most effective use of space.

We have seen that there also needs to be give and take on the part of employees, as the new way of working involves a change of mindset. Gone are the days when people could expect to go into work to their own dedicated desk or office, which, as we have noted, are typically occupied only about 45% of the time. In return for the personal benefits of flexible working, including improved work/life balance and reduced travel, employees will need to demonstrate flexibility on their part.

Another perceived barrier is that only certain types of public sector job are suited to flexible working. The evidence shows that that can be used as a cop-out. It has been shown that, by assessing and breaking down the work styles and tasks of job roles, flexibility can be applied to certain aspects of public sector roles that are less obviously suited to flexible working, such as teachers and doctors. In such cases it may only be parts of a job that are suitable, but no assumptions should be made about people or roles before undertaking a transparent assessment of the job tasks.

We have heard how there needs to be a cultural shift away from management by presence to management by results. The argument that the performance of remote workers can be too difficult to manage is another fallacy. In fact, one could argue that performance management should always be based on results and outcomes. Irrespective of the job role or where it is undertaken, the manager and the jobholder should be clear on what quantity and quality of work is expected or what output is to be delivered, and appropriate measures should be in place.

We have noted that having more people working in different places and at different times should be seen as an opportunity to tighten things up and get more systematic on performance management. We have also heard about how safeguards can be applied to new ways of keeping in contact with staff, including teamwork protocols such as shared calendars. Modern technology means that monitoring is possible no matter where an employee works.

When considering the perceived barriers regarding job suitability and managing the performance of remote workers, it must also be remembered that flexible location working, including homeworking, already happens in the Civil Service.

The difference is that this is not being controlled or monitored centrally. The laissez-faire approach, whereby arrangements are left to be agreed at line-management level, arises from the absence of corporate policy and guidance and is reflected by incomplete data on existing practices. It is not evident that any safeguards are in place to ensure fairness and consistency of approach or for effective performance management. The implementation of the inquiry's recommendations would serve to address that weakness and would mitigate the risks while maximising the benefits.

A further barrier that has been noted is the cost of implementing the proposals. The Committee has acknowledged that those could be significant, including the costs of property design, new equipment, facilities and project management.

We are all too aware that Departments are under severe budgetary pressure that, according to the Finance Minister, will continue for some years to come. The Committee has emphasised, however, that the initial outlay should be seen as an invest-to-save measure in view of the longer-term resultant savings and other significant benefits. Consider the annual savings in office accommodation costs and capital receipts that Whitehall Departments and local councils in Britain have realised, as was indicated in the Chairman's opening remarks. Those could be

replicated here, together with other benefits for public sector employers and staff, but only if the consolidation of property and the roll-out of smart workplace design is accompanied by a strategic and coordinated application of flexible working practices.

In launching the draft 2015-16 Budget, the Minister referred to the change fund, which is tailored specifically toward reform-orientated projects that are innovative, involve collaboration between Departments and agencies or are focused on prevention. That may perhaps offer an appropriate source of funding for some costs associated with the proposals. Moreover, we should be mindful that there is less pressure on the capital side of the Budget and that the potential of longer-term savings cannot be ignored.

In conclusion, I emphasise the point, made earlier, that we are lagging behind other jurisdictions in exploiting the benefits of a strategic approach. In particular, Whitehall Departments are stealing a march on us. We now have the opportunity through this inquiry report to exploit the synergy with other Executive policies and priorities, particularly the Minister's public sector reform agenda.

The Committee looks forward to receiving a formal response to the inquiry report after the Department has reflected on the evidence and recommendations therein. I, therefore, commend the report to the House and ask for support for the Committee's motion. A Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, gabhaim buíochas leat, agus iarraím ar na Comhaltaí tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel on its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues, to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The House will take its ease as we prepare for Question Time.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Questions 1 and 14 have been withdrawn.

Fiscal Powers

2. **Mr Brady** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with their counterparts in Wales and Scotland on the devolution of fiscal powers. *(AQO 6970/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): We met the First Minister of Scotland on 20 October in Belfast and the First Minister of Wales on 22 October in Cardiff to discuss opportunities for seeking additional devolved powers. Discussions were wide-ranging and constructive and had a major focus on the devolution of fiscal powers, including corporation tax, air passenger duty, landfill tax, the aggregates levy, bonds and borrowing. We also touched on the benefits of devolving welfare policy and administration and on the continued use of the Barnett formula.

During the initial discussions, it was apparent that each Administration has different devolved arrangements and powers, so the focus for each will clearly be different when it comes to adopting further fiscal powers. However, there was a will to use our collective strength to work together where we have common aims and to support each other when we have different areas of interest and focus.

Since the Scottish referendum in September, we have made clear our expectations regarding further fiscal devolution for our Administration. Securing the powers to lower corporation tax is a key priority for the Executive. As part of our economic pact, which we signed last year, the UK Government indicated their intention to make a decision on the devolution of corporation tax powers no later than the coming autumn statement on 3 December. That has involved discussions with the Secretary of State, and we have also written to the Prime Minister to press him to come to a decision quickly and ensure the swift devolution of corporation tax powers.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. What economic benefits can be expected from the transfer of corporation tax powers? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr M McGuinness: Work done in 2011 estimated that 58,000 jobs could be created, but, since then, we have seen the British rate fall from 28% to 20%, so a large reduction has already been achieved. However, we do not believe that the reduction to 20% goes far enough, and there are still significant improvements to our competitiveness to be achieved from reducing the rate of corporation tax further. That could give us an all-Ireland rate of 12·5%. The NI Centre for Economic Policy at the University of Ulster has been commissioned to provide an up-to-date assessment of the economic impact of cutting

corporation tax to 12·5%, and that work is expected to be completed in November.

Mr McCallister: Will the deputy First Minister tell me whether he will build into the research that was done and the fresh look that is being taken the possibility that Scotland will receive the power to vary the rate of corporation tax? That could have a fundamental impact on the projection of 58,000 jobs and, indeed, on what rate we may set.

Mr M McGuinness: The Member raises an important issue. We are all very conscious that, over the next while, serious discussions will take place between the Scottish Government and Westminster about increased powers as a result of the referendum debate. Obviously, in the previous engagements that the First Minister and I have had with David Cameron, he has at all stages emphasised the uniqueness of our situation here regarding the land frontier with the South, which has a 12·5% rate of corporation tax.

Therefore, that is an unknown at the moment. It is a valid point that we will have to take into consideration as we further develop the process.

I think that it is important to point out that, in the course of the engagements with Downing Street and David Cameron, he made it clear that his decision would come prior to Christmas. I doubt that there will be a decision on Scotland's situation prior to Christmas. We will have to deal with that situation as it develops. We are working on the basis that, as David Cameron has said, our situation is much more unique than that which presently confronts Westminster in relation to Scotland.

Mr Kinahan: In his answer, the deputy First Minister mentioned corporation tax. Many feel that it is not the silver bullet by itself: there is a mass of other things that have to happen. Does he have a hit list of all the other things that should happen, not just in each of our Departments, but in Wales, England, Scotland and indeed Ireland? We need to place ourselves in the best position so that we can really thrive on it in the future.

Mr M McGuinness: I think that the Member will remember that our 'Building a Prosperous and United Community' document, published in June 2013, included a commitment by the Government and the Executive to examine the potential for devolving specific, additional fiscal powers. Our officials are examining a range of issues to consider what can be devolved in the context of ensuring that there is a clear economic benefit for us from increased powers. The different issues that are being considered are things like VAT, income tax, National Insurance contributions, landfill tax, stamp duty, land tax, tobacco and alcohol duties, fuel duties, aggregates levy and short-haul air passenger duty. I suppose that, from our perspective, the key test will be whether there is an economic benefit for us. I think that there is considerable agreement among the parties that are presently involved in discussions that very serious exploration needs to take place on whether we can enhance our fiscal capability against the backdrop of the swingeing cuts, particularly to our block grant, that this British Government have been engaged in over the last four years.

EU Commission: Liaison

3. **Mr Flanagan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Executive's strategy for liaising with the new EU Commission. *(AQO 6971/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: LeasCheann Comhairle, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer this question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): We welcome the appointment of a new European Commission. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have written to new Commission President Juncker and the new commissioners to congratulate them on their new appointments in agriculture, financial stability and regional policy, respectively. They have invited them to visit, when we can show them what has been achieved with EU help and what we can offer to others by way of our experience. We will engage fully with other commissioners in due course. We had a productive relationship with the last Commission, facilitated greatly by the Barroso task force working group, in particular Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn in her research, innovation and science portfolio. Our relationship with Phil Hogan as agriculture commissioner will be equally important.

After last week's publication of the report of the European Commission's task force on the North, we welcomed the comments of outgoing President Barroso on the positive impact of this initiative. He stated that the task force had helped the region to participate more fully in the network economy, which is essential to building regional prosperity in the 21st century. Given the significant importance of the task force, the First Minister and deputy First Minister have pressed for the continuation of our structured relationship with the Commission. We very much welcomed the recent comments of Commissioner Creţu when she committed to maintaining the work of the task force.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Given the continuing constraints on budgets here, can the junior Minister update us on how we are progressing on our drawdown of EU funds and efforts to increase them by 20%?

Ms J McCann: Obviously, we want to have the maximum benefit of any drawdown of funds. That is obviously what we are always looking at. Departments continue to make good progress towards meeting the 20% target. In 2011-12 — year 1 — Departments drew down £23 million, and in 2012-13 — year 2 — they drew down £18·3 million. At the halfway point in the Budget period, £41·3 million has been drawn down, which represents 64% of the target. Departments are well on track to exceed the total drawdown of £64·4 million by the end of March 2015. Figures for 2013-14 will be published as soon as they have been completed. There have been some difficulties at the European level with confirming drawdown in some programmes, which has led to a delay in the validation of the year 3 figures. We are always about trying to maximise and use to the best benefit the moneys that can be secured and accessed at EU level.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answers. In relation to Horizon 2020, which is very important to research and development here in Northern Ireland, does

the Minister agree that a less modest and more ambitious target could be achieved by us? Do the Minister and her Department have any plans to revise the target figure?

Ms J McCann: As I said to the Member who asked the previous question, we are looking at how we can maximise to the best of our advantage the drawdown of funding. The Barroso task force working group has been working on the production of a set of European priorities for 2014-15. We are going to look at those priorities when they are published to see what we can do. A lot of work is also getting done in committing to the benchmarking performance. Again, we will be looking to maximise whatever benefits there are. If that means raising the targets, we will look to do that also.

Mr Elliott: I thank the junior Minister for the detailed answers, particularly to the first set of questions. I wonder whether she can tell me in detail what financial income has come from the Barroso task force so far to Northern Ireland.

Ms J McCann: With the Barroso task force, we have to look at not just the financial benefits but the networking and all that has been done. When we look at the report in detail, we see that it said that a lot of networking has been done, particularly around health, agriculture, education and other issues. That type of integrating policy and looking at policy and how best models of practice can be applied here is beneficial, as is the financial drawdown.

Sexual Abuse: Victims and Survivors

4. **Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the importance of maintaining the trust and confidence of victims and survivors of sexual abuse, particularly in light of the ongoing Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. *(AQO 6972/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann: It is incredibly important that we have the trust and confidence of victims and survivors of abuse. We listened very carefully to victims and survivors' wishes when we set up the inquiry into historical institutional abuse, and we ensured that those were accurately reflected in its terms of reference. The emotional and physical well-being of victims and survivors has been at the heart of all decision-making. Since January 2012, arrangements have been in place with Lifeline to provide ongoing face-to-face and telephone crisis counselling. From August 2013, Contact NI has also been contracted to provide a bespoke support service for victims and survivors, with a wide range of provision. A coordinator oversees the delivery of the service. In addition, OFMDFM funds a drop-in counselling facility in Derry and Belfast. Support is also provided by the inquiry's dedicated witness support officers, who provide support for victims and survivors attending the acknowledgement forum and oral hearings in Banbridge.

Mr Moutray: The focus of my question is on the importance of maintaining the trust and confidence of the victims. Given the role that you have played over the past number of weeks in relation to sexual abuse and the comments of the deputy First Minister in the debate last week, how can victims have any confidence in you to deliver?

Ms J McCann: I wish that I could say that I am surprised that the Member has sought to use the historical institutional abuse inquiry for party political reasons.

Mr Moutray: All abuse.

Ms J McCann: I expected it —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. The Minister will resume her seat.

I have said repeatedly that I will not accept any shouting from a sedentary position. I must also point out to Members that they should not use the term, "You". All remarks must be made through the Chair.

2.15 pm

Ms J McCann: Last Tuesday, the DUP, the UUP and the SDLP lined up to attack me because, in offering help and support to Máiría Cahill, I respected the confidentiality of my conversations with her and her decision at the time to not report her abuse to the police.

The leader of the UUP, Mike Nesbitt, who is not in his seat, was more than vocal in the contrived outrage he directed at me. The hypocrisy of his comments was underlined on Thursday when he admitted that he did not inform police when Máiría Cahill told him about the abuse in 2008. The difference is that I was a work colleague and had no authority at the time I was told. Mr Nesbitt, in contrast, was a victims' commissioner when he became aware of it.

Victims and survivors of abuse deserve our support and help, not the petty, political and personalised point-scoring that marked the debate in the Assembly last week and is marking Question Time today.

Mr Moutray: No answer.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): If I hear any more remarks from a sedentary position, I will move on to the next question.

Mr Maskey: Has there been any action to address the tracing or assessing of victims' records?

Ms J McCann: Yes, there has been. We are working very closely with the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) inquiry . For instance, the page on the NI Direct website contains a series of helpful links to guidance on searching for those records. That includes a link to the website of the Public Records Office (PRONI), which is the main avenue for record searches. I met representatives of PRONI, who offered to put a room aside for victims. Some victims who are taking part in the HIA inquiry asked me to make representations on their behalf, and PRONI said that it would set aside a room for victims to look at the records.

The inquiry can only provide records to a relevant party when it considers it necessary to do so to further the inquiry's purposes. However, where a document is used and an applicant is unaware of the source, they will be told the source from which it was obtained, and the individual can then pursue the matter fully with the relevant body.

Mr Lyttle: Given the increasing scale and seriousness of allegations of conflict-related sexual violence, what progress has OFMDFM made on its consideration of

constituting a public inquiry into non-institutional child abuse?

Ms J McCann: The Member is aware that we have been looking at extending the scope of the inquiry to people who were over 18 and were in institutions at the time of their abuse and those who were in the mother-and-baby homes.

Last week, one of the better contributions to the debate came from the deputy First Minister, when he proposed the establishment of an all-island initiative, resourced by, and under the remit of, the Irish Government and the Executive, through the North/South Ministerial Council, which will ensure that victims and survivors have access to the professional support services they need and, crucially, a channel through which those complaints can be made to the appropriate statutory agency or police service.

Civil Service: Gender Inequality

5. **Mr Lynch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their report into gender inequality in the Civil Service. *(AQO 6973/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann: A research study entitled, 'An Investigation of Gender Equality Issues at the Executive Level in Public Sector Organisations', was published by our office on 22 October. The published report presents stages 1 and 2 of the findings. Stage 1 contained a literature review and an analysis of publicly available data. Stage 2 comprised a survey delivered to current and aspiring executives in 143 organisations. Stage 3 is a series of interviews with male and female executives. A final research report, including the findings from stage 3, is ongoing. That will be published in February/March 2015. The findings from those reports will help to inform the new gender equality strategy that is being developed.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister outline how the findings of the report will influence the development of a new gender equality strategy? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms J McCann: The gender equality strategy 2006-2016 sets out an overarching framework for Departments, their agencies and other relevant statutory authorities to promote gender equality. One of the strategic objectives of the gender equality strategy is to achieve a gender balance on all Government-appointed committees, boards and other relevant official bodies. In our new gender equality strategy we aim to adopt a positive approach to identifying, understanding and responding to the different needs of men and women; develop the actions to address under-representation, including reconsidering policies that act as barriers; and ensure that gender stereotypes do not influence policy development and decision-making processes.

Mr McGimpsey: We have 11 Departments headed up by 11 permanent secretaries, who are 100% male; 77% of grade 3s are male; 58% of grade 5s are male. In the past, the deputy First Minister has agreed with me that that situation is totally unacceptable. Bearing that in mind, when can we expect to see balance among the permanent secretaries to properly reflect the gender balance in the Civil Service?

Ms J McCann: The under-representation of women in the Civil Service, particularly at the higher levels, is well known. The gender equality strategy tries to set out an overarching framework for all Departments, their agencies and other relevant statutory authorities to promote gender equality. We have a focus on tackling those inequalities. However, the barriers and structural inequalities in wider society are reflected — you have only to look around the Chamber to see the under-representation of women in political and public life. That is also true in the Civil Service, particularly its upper echelons. We are working hard to try to challenge that in whatever way we can.

Mr Campbell: The junior Minister will be aware that, up until four or five years ago, there was a significant imbalance in the Civil Service, particularly at AA and AO level, which are by far the most numerous, that affected young Protestant males and young Protestant females. Given that the situation has improved somewhat in the past three or four years, will she undertake to keep that under review?

Ms J McCann: I will undertake to challenge inequality no matter where it exists or comes from. Respect, tolerance and challenging inequality has to be the ethos of any Government or Executive. I take that job of work very seriously. As I said, where inequalities exist, I will look to challenge them and try to do something constructive to make the workforce more equal.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

6. **Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. *(AQO 6974/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann: The historical intuitional abuse inquiry has now completed the oral hearings in respect of the first two modules: the Sisters of Nazareth homes in Derry and the child migrant programme. The oral hearings in respect of De La Salle Boys' Home at Rubane House commenced on 29 September and are scheduled to finish by the end of November.

On the basis of the inquiry panel's experience of the first module, the chairperson, Sir Anthony Hart, made a very persuasive and compelling case for a one-year extension to the inquiry time frame. We agree with Sir Anthony that the inquiry must provide every opportunity for those impacted by the allegations of institutional abuse to be heard in open forum. A small piece of enabling subordinate legislation is required to extend the time frame for the inquiry. The Executive have agreed to the making of an order, subject to the approval of the Assembly. The order will be subject to draft affirmative resolution procedure and will come before the Assembly very soon.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the current financial uncertainty, will the Minister give a commitment that any future decision around reparations for victims will be unaffected by the current financial difficulties?

Ms J McCann: The Member will be aware that we are looking for all forms of support for the victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse. It is an independent inquiry

that will make a number of recommendations. We hope that those recommendations will include reparation for victims and survivors. We will have to wait to see what the inquiry says and recommends. However, I would certainly like some sort of reparation to be made to people who have gone through the inquiry.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline whether there is scope for improvement in the support available for victims and survivors?

Ms J McCann: This is an area that we have discussed quite frequently with victims and survivors. They sometimes feel that the support that they get is not adequate. We are always trying to do things better. As I said, I have consistently met victims' groups and individuals in relation to their experience at the inquiry. I have taken on board issues that they have raised about how things could be improved. Junior Minister Bell and I will review the services constantly to address those issues. I will do everything in my power to ensure that the support services are delivering for victims. That applies across the board and to whatever type of support services that they need.

Mr Allister: How far, if at all, does the Minister expect the historical abuse inquiry, within its confines, to report on the important issue of the withholding from the police of information about sex abuse? If it does, would the Minister be at all embarrassed, given her own wilful withholding of information in 2005, contrary to her legal obligation, in respect of Máiría Cahill?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Can we have a question, please?

Ms J McCann: I reiterate — I do not know how many times I have to say this — that I did nothing wrong in relation to the Máiría Cahill case.

Mr Allister: You did — section 5 of the Criminal Law Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. Will the Minister resume her seat? For the third time, I have to ask a Member not to make remarks from a sedentary position and to give the Minister the respect that she is due in answering the question.

Ms J McCann: I have said that I was told in confidence by a work colleague. I respected that confidence. At no time did Máiría say that she wanted me to report that. If you want the answer, read Hansard. Last week, I set out very clearly what I did, and that is in Hansard. I did nothing improper.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Ms Megan Fearon is not in her place.

Welfare Reform: Executive Consensus

8. **Mr Spratt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their proposals to find a way forward and build consensus within the Executive on welfare reform. *(AQO 6976/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: It is hoped that, through the current inter-party talks process, the five Executive parties can resolve all outstanding issues, including budgetary and financial matters, in a way that protects the most vulnerable.

Mr Spratt: Given the deputy First Minister's answer, would he agree with me that it is imperative that the whole issue of welfare reform is sorted out because, if it is not, it will affect the most vulnerable, the very people whom he spoke of, in the very near future?

Mr M McGuinness: The responsibility of everybody in the House is to work collectively to do the best that we possibly can to protect the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged, the most disabled and the most marginalised. That represents a real challenge against the backdrop of the strategy employed by the coalition Government at Westminster since they were elected four years ago. Of course, since then, we have seen our block grant being critically undermined to the tune of over £1 billion. That, in itself, has had a very dramatic impact on the Departments in this Administration. Of course, in the aftermath of putting together and agreeing a Programme for Government amongst the five parties that are entitled to membership of the Executive, we had the hammer blow of welfare cuts, which have been directed at the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. So, in the context of the present discussions that we are involved in, I think that it is fair to say that a very serious investigation is taking place on how we can resolve the challenges to this Administration as a result of policies that are being directed at us from London. Over the course of discussions that the First Minister and I have had, particularly with the First Minister of Scotland, I think that, if there is a route to resolve the issue of the welfare cuts that are impacting on us at this time, that is one area that is worthy of exploration. I think that we are —

2.30 pm

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

Mr M McGuinness: We are committed to doing just that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Irish Language: Mocking Comments

T1. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, given the disparaging and mocking comments made about the Irish language last Monday, they agree that such comments have no place either in this House or elsewhere. *(AQT 1701/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: I have to say that I found the remarks made by the Member very disappointing indeed, and I think that they were not befitting of membership of this House. There has been considerable public debate about them, with many people asserting that they were racist. They were certainly bordering on the racist, and I think that there can be no place for them in this Chamber. We are all very conscious of the contributions of the particular Member over the lifetime of the Assembly. I come from the same city as the Member, a city that is determined to move forward and where all shades of political, religious and community people have worked together to improve the lifestyle of people in the city and to bring important gains for the city, which provide, I think, a solid foundation stone on which we can all move forward.

The one politician in the city who is out of sync with that is the Member who made those remarks. I am very

conscious that there are, particularly among the unionist Benches, people who have a terrible hatred of the Irish language and, in fact, a hatred of all things Irish. I think that that is sad because I do think that also on the unionist Benches are people who are progressive and who recognise that working together represents the best way forward for all of us. Therein lies the hope. What we have to do is recognise that we need to work closely together to build a better future for all the people whom we represent. I think that, ultimately, people who harbour the sort of comments that were made last week are, effectively, those who will be left behind by that approach.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad-Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Does he agree that we should lead by example in cultural and linguistic tolerance and diversity?

Mr M McGuinness: Nobody has anything whatsoever to fear from either the Irish language or from Ulster Scots. On many an occasion in this Chamber, Jim Shannon, when he was an MLA, spoke Ulster Scots. Not one person on this side of the Assembly laughed at that or made fun of it because we all recognise that we should have respect when people are speaking in a language of their choice.

I remember a number of years ago, when Rhodri Morgan was the First Minister of Wales, he came to the Assembly and spoke in Welsh in the Senate Chamber. Nobody made a laughing stock of that or was in any way derogatory about it. That is where we need to get to. We need to recognise that we all have a responsibility to give leadership. I think that there are many politicians in the House, on both sides of the forum, who give leadership; unfortunately, there are still some who do not believe in giving leadership, and that is sad.

Desertcreat Community Safety College

T2. **Mr Sheehan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister believes that the Desertcreat Community Safety College project should go ahead. *(AQT 1702/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: I think the First Minister is content for me to answer this question.

Obviously, people will be conscious that the Executive met on Thursday. We did so on foot of the information that came out the previous weekend about the suggestion that the project be discontinued. The decision on the future of Desertcreat will have to be made by the Executive; it will not be made by anybody else. It is a Programme for Government commitment, and there is a huge responsibility on all of us to deliver on those commitments. Something like £12 million has been invested in the site, and there has been for some time a very reasonable expectation from the people in the area that the Community Safety College would be delivered in Cookstown, which, of course, would make an enormous difference to the economy of Cookstown and that part of mid-Ulster.

I also think that we are all very conscious that we have seen quite a lot of the institutions of the state centred in the Belfast area. The decision by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, for example, to relocate the DARD headquarters to Ballykelly sends the important message to people west of the Bann that we recognise the challenges that face us in the ability to site important projects in those areas, as is also the case with Desertcreat. The political message that it sends about the acceptance of policing is one that we should not ignore.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Leas-Chéad Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the deputy First Minister for that answer. Has the funding for the construction of the college been secured in next year's Budget?

Mr M McGuinness: Next year's Budget has catered for the £53 million that is allocated to the project. The statement that was issued on behalf of the Executive last Thursday is a very clear commitment that the construction of the Community Safety College is a huge priority for our Administration. I say that against the backdrop of comments that have been made on the requirements of the essential services that we depend on, such as policing, the Prison Service and the fire and safety authorities.

I think that, in all probability, the scale of the college will not be as originally envisaged, given the requirements and needs of the emergency services. The review that will take place over the next while will obviously have to deal with that. At the end of the day, the money has been allocated in the 2015-16 Budget. It is £53 million. The sooner we get on with the project, the better, because, as far as I am concerned, it has taken far, far too long.

Social Investment Fund: Delay

T3. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, given the debacle around the delay in delivering the social investment fund, they have considered whether it is worth protecting the fund when other Departments are facing major cuts. *(AQT 1703/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann: The social investment fund (SIF) was created to try to tackle poverty and disadvantage. A group was set up to plan ahead, and that group chose the projects for the particular zones and the allocations for the zones.

Some 23 letters of offer have gone out. The people on the ground and those who were part of the social investment fund board in the local zones chose what important projects the money should go into, so it is important that they go forward. In community planning and all of that, those on the ground deal with the issues every day and know what is needed to tackle poverty and disadvantage.

Mrs McKevitt: Will the junior Minister explain what independent and robust monitoring and reviews of the SIF have taken place?

Ms J McCann: As I said, a board decided what projects the money would go to.

The Member's colleague made an outrageous statement about the SIF funding, I think, last week. He said that it was going to pet projects of republicans and loyalists: there is nothing further from the truth. That is insulting to those who decided on the programmes and on where the money would go. They have worked for years in the community and are from the statutory bodies that are on

the board. They decided what programmes and projects would be taken forward.

Scottish Welfare System: Merger Possibilities

T4. **Mr Gardiner** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what options might be available to merge services with the Scottish welfare system under OFMDFM's improving public services brief. *(AQT 1704/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: In an earlier answer, I dealt with the reality that the First Minister and I and, indeed, others involved in the talks are exercised about the need to find agreement in this area so that we can move forward. It was, I suppose, encouraging to some that the Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, clearly indicated over the weekend that the British Government also had a contribution to make. I think that she actually used the word "compromise".

In dealing with the whole issue of how we provide for our people through a welfare system that is credible, does not increase child poverty, does not increase hardship for people with disabilities, does not further marginalise the already marginalised and does not further disadvantage the already disadvantaged, there is a huge responsibility on all parties involved in the talks to focus on the very real impact that the cuts that are coming from London will have on our Administration. There is also considerable frustration that, sometimes, when there is a debate on local radio, it almost gives the impression that the Executive are imposing the cuts. We can fund only what is within our means to fund. If we are continually to be hampered by the ongoing predictions of more austerity coming down the line, that represents a real challenge that we all have to rise to.

Mr Gardiner: The deputy First Minister touched on some of my question, but I will ask the rest of it. Will he tell us whether any savings of scale might be effected by other strategic mergers with UK regions outside Northern Ireland in the area of health?

Mr M McGuinness: That is primarily a question for the Minister of Health. From our perspective, our focus at the minute is on what represents our biggest challenge, which is how we can resolve the difficulties around welfare.

2.45 pm

The Member raises the issue of how we can, in many ways, work with people in England, Scotland and Wales in relation to the health service. It is significant that he omitted to talk about how we can work on the island of Ireland with another health service that is much closer to us. The ongoing construction of the radiotherapy unit and indeed the new wing at Altnagelvin Area Hospital, for example, will bring huge benefits for everybody. Clearly, you can see that there is much more to be gained by us working on an all-island agenda as opposed to anywhere else. I am conscious that, prior to Michael McGimpsey standing down as Health Minister three years ago, he had in his possession a comprehensive report on how savings could be made on an all-island basis. I am not sure if that report has ever seen the light of day.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Question 12 has been withdrawn.

Wild Atlantic Way: Tourism

1. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the tourism opportunities presented by the establishment of the Wild Atlantic Way Coast Route. *(AQO 6984/11-15)*

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The promotion of coastal routes is an important activity for Tourism Ireland, as research confirms that visitors who come here by car or hire one while here tend to tour more widely, stay longer and spend more on their trip.

I recently had discussions with the chief executive of Tourism Ireland and expressed my disappointment about how the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way stops at the border. I have asked that, in future, the Wild Atlantic Way and the Causeway Coast and glens coastal routes be marketed together by Tourism Ireland and given equal prominence.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister agree that an important economic interest may have been missed in that this has not been developed as a single route that would have stretched from Youghal in County Cork all the way round, perhaps, to Ballycastle?

Mrs Foster: I was rather disappointed, and that was one of the reasons why I asked to speak to the chief executive of Tourism Ireland about the issue. The Causeway Coast and glens route has received many accolades from across the world in relation to its beauty. I was disappointed that it was not added on to the Wild Atlantic Way. The two of them together could have been a very good promotion, and it would have allowed people to travel wherever along that route and, as I am sure he would welcome, given them the opportunity to stay in different areas and spend money. As I said, I have asked that the two be promoted together, and I hope that that will be the case.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her response. On a wider issue, please can the Minister advise us on what discussions she has had with Executive colleagues around the reduction of VAT for the hospitality sector? What correspondence or discussions have been had between the Executive and the Treasury on the issue?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. It is a big issue for hotels across Northern Ireland, particularly hotels, restaurants and other providers that operate along the border. They feel that they are at a competitive disadvantage in relation to the VAT rate charged in Northern Ireland as opposed to that charged in the Republic of Ireland. You can see how important it is to the tourism industry in the Republic of Ireland by virtue of the fact that it has stayed in the recent budget for another period.

I very much support the Hotels Federation's campaign to have a VAT reduction, not just here in Northern Ireland but across the United Kingdom. Again, it is an indicator

of the fact that we have London and the rest of the United Kingdom. It does not matter what VAT London charges; tourists will continue to visit. The rest of the regions outside of London, however, have a different problem. Therefore, I believe that government needs to look at the issue of VAT in relation to tourism provision. I strongly support the ongoing campaign by the Hotels Federation and colleagues in this House and in Westminster to push that issue to the top of the agenda.

Ms Sugden: I understand that the Minister is working with other Executive Departments to promote a strong tourism strategy on the north coast. How will the route play a part in that?

Mrs Foster: Apart from the driving route, the Causeway Coast and glens is generally a significant destination for our tourism promotion for Northern Ireland. It plays host to two of the top visitor attractions in Northern Ireland, namely the Giant's Causeway visitor centre and the wider world heritage site and the Bushmills distillery. Those are both in the Causeway Coast and glens area and remain a key part of our tourism promotion right across the world. In that context, I welcome the engagement that I have had with the new owners, through Diageo, of Bushmills distillery. I look forward to meeting the new owners in due course after they have been through some legal processes. I welcome them to Northern Ireland as an inward investor, and we look forward to doing business with them.

Go For It: Upper Bann

2. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many new business starts in Upper Bann were supported through the Go For It programme. *(AQO 6985/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The Regional Start initiative has delivered a total of 1,224 business plan approvals for the southern region, including Upper Bann, for the period October 2012 to September 2014. That is against a two-year target for the southern region of 1,280.

The Regional Start initiative is delivered on behalf of Invest Northern Ireland by Enterprise NI and provides individuals who wish to start their own business with advice and the capability to produce a business plan. The business plan will provide a template for the new entrepreneur to plan and access sources of funding. The programme has been successful across Northern Ireland, and we are on track to achieve our contractual targets.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for her response. Can she give us an update in relation to the amount of business that Invest NI has carried out in the Upper Bann constituency over the past two years?

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has been very active in the Upper Bann constituency. We have had 583 offers of support, totalling £18·18 million of assistance, contributing to £81 million of investment in the region. We have had nearly 1,000 new jobs promoted. That includes the Regional Start initiative jobs. Their assistance per head of population compared with the Northern Ireland average, which is 161, is 174, so Invest is very much involved in the Upper Bann area. I want to pay tribute to the business owners in Upper Bann for their positive and forward-looking approach to dealing with not only Invest NI but others in the area. I know that they work hard with the council to promote themselves as a region for investment, and I am thinking particularly about Craigavon. I will continue to work with the business owners, the council and all the other partners in the Upper Bann region.

Mrs D Kelly: Are there any specific measures or targets that could be introduced or are already in existence to encourage more women and people from an ethnic minority background to participate in the programme?

Mrs Foster: There are specific targets — I am sorry that I do not have them to hand, but I am happy to share them with the Member — in relation to female entrepreneurship in general. I am not sure if it goes down as low as constituency level, but certainly on a Northern Ireland level we have very good working relations with particular bodies. There is a lady in Invest Northern Ireland who takes the lead on this called Sharon Polson, and I will share the rest of the information with her when I have it to hand.

Invest NI: Financial Support

3. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the total financial support for investment announcements made by Invest NI in this financial year. *(AQO 6986/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: In the first six months of this financial year, Invest Northern Ireland offered a total of £126 million across its full range of services, including investment announcements. I am pleased to advise that Invest NI will be presenting full details of its mid-year performance review to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee tomorrow — 11 November.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. She outlined the considerable financial commitment that her Department has made to support Invest NI job creation announcements and she will be pleased, no doubt, with the proposed budgetary uplift that her Department will be receiving next year. However, does she share my concerns that a lot of the recent Invest NI announcements have come from promises of R&D support from the Department for Employment and Learning, which is seeing its budget face a major cut?

Mrs Foster: I am not sure which R&D project she is speaking about. I know for sure that Invest Northern Ireland has supported a number of R&D projects going forward. I am thinking most recently of the Seagate announcement in Londonderry, where a very big announcement in the region of £38 million was made on research and development. That will not only secure those jobs at Seagate but make it a very sustainable company moving forward for the next five to 10 years. It was a very significant announcement for us, and, indeed, we are having discussions with other firms across Northern Ireland in relation to research and development.

Normally, research and development inevitably involves a lot of money and, because of that, we have a situation that the Finance Minister referred to as "good pressures" on the Budget. I may, in future, have to bring those good pressures to the Executive table so that I will get the support of colleagues to try to facilitate those pressures, because we are reaching a situation where we are moving away from selective financial assistance as a tool to help companies and moving more into the remit of research and development. As we do so, the amounts of money tend to

grow, and that will put a lot of pressure on my budget and on the Budget generally.

In relation to the draft Budget, the Member is right to mention that we have been able to have an additional £37·7 million to cover existing inescapable pressures brought about by the success, mainly, of Invest Northern Ireland. However, I also have to apply a 15·1% reduction to the Department's baseline, and that is a £27·9 million cut to areas that are already significantly committed. There is good news in the draft Budget as far as I am concerned, but there are also pressures.

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

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. These are questions rather than congratulations. The Minister has outlined a stunning series of investment coups by Invest NI in recent months. How do we maintain that momentum, how do we surpass the spectacular achievements, especially in the run-up to the summer and during the summer, and, in particular, how important is political stability and political progress to maintaining that momentum?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question and welcome him to the House. I hope he continues with his positive outlook on the economy.

We have had a very good period of time, and Invest Northern Ireland will give those results to the ETI Committee tomorrow. However, we have to be realistic and respect the draft Budget. I will be in bilaterals with the Finance Minister on the allocations in the draft Budget, but we have to live within our means.

I think it is important that we continue to send out a very positive message about Northern Ireland as being a good place to do business and as a good place with good people to do business. We should not forget the political stability we have here and should continue to make it a lasting political stability, because what has come from that has been of tremendous benefit to everybody. I know that sometimes there is frustration with this place, but when you look at the difference and the companies that are investing here now as opposed to 10 years ago, I think that we should very much relish the political stability that we have.

Mr Lunn: What does the Minister think the impact will be on Invest NI's ability to attract jobs in the future if budget cuts force the local universities and colleges to shrink in size?

Mrs Foster: I congratulate the Member on getting a DEL question in during ETI questions; however, I will still take it. We need to ensure that we have a supply of young skilled people coming forward for the jobs market. We realise that the draft Budget is in front of us and that it is a draft Budget. We need to look at all the consequences of the draft Budget and work through it with the Finance Minister and the rest of the Executive. It is vital that we send out a message that we are open for business, and that involves having young people and older people with all the appropriate skills. I hope that that is the answer that he wanted.

3.00 pm

Energy Costs: Manufacturing Sector

4. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she is supporting the manufacturing sector in meeting their energy costs. *(AQO 6987/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Energy costs are determined by the market, subject to regulation. The Executive's strategic energy framework balances our need to provide security of supply and address carbon emissions at the lowest cost to all consumers. I have supported that through promoting competition, innovation and investment. For example, we are putting over £30 million into extending gas to the west to benefit consumers with greater fuel choice. On electricity, I will take account of ongoing work by the regulator and my Department, covering all elements of costs as we go forward. In particular, I have been considering the costs of the Northern Ireland sustainable energy programme and recently wrote to the regulator about that.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. We all welcomed the news last week of a new agreement between the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) and AES, which is a generator, on extra generation capacity for Northern Ireland. Can the Minister elaborate on the significance of that in relation to security of supply for Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his comments in relation to the recently announced agreement between SONI and AES to put in place a contract that will provide extra generation capacity to meet projected shortfalls over the coming years. There will be an additional 250 MW of generation capacity from January 2016 for an initial three years so that we can assess whether that is enough or whether we need to look at it again. That, together with short- and longer-term repair of the Moyle interconnector, will provide a sufficient safety margin in the medium term. We are dealing with pressures that have been identified, but, in the next decade, we very much need to see the implementation of the second North/South interconnector. I know that I have talked quite a lot about that subject in the House, but we really need to see progress on that.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí. With a planted question from her colleague, I thought that we were going to hear something new or positive. It is not good enough that we have announcements from SONI or AES on new supply with no details of the cost. I know that this is not the direct responsibility of the Minister, but does she have any indication as to when we can expect to see details on the cost of that new supply?

Mrs Foster: Well, with a question from you, I would quite like to have a translation of your Gaelic before you start your actual question, but that is a matter for the Deputy Speaker and not for me.

It is a matter for the systems operator to put the contract into place. There will be some cost impacts on consumer bills. That has never been hidden. The costs have been minimised through the competitive tendering process that is in place and will be around £5 per annum on average to the domestic bill.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Could you give us an update on where you are bringing

pressures on the interstate connector and whether more can be done on that?

Mrs Foster: With the North/South interconnector, as I understand it, the Republic of Ireland planning process has not really begun in earnest as yet. The application has to go back into An Bord Pleanála, as I understand it. In Northern Ireland, our application is now with the Planning Appeals Commission. I hope that we can proceed as quickly as possible, but that is not a phrase that I use very often in relation to the North/South interconnector because it has been dreadfully slow, and, as a result of not making progress on the North/South interconnector, we are having to take steps in relation to additional generation. Let me say this to the House: I am not in the business of allowing us to get into a situation where lights will go out. I am making sure that we have enough capacity going forward, certainly from 2016.

Going for Growth

5. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the primary focus of Going for Growth is farmers or the agrifood sector. *(AQO 6988/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Going for Growth is a strategy for the entire agrifood sector, and farmers are an integral part of that sector. A sustainable primary production sector will be crucial to the success of Going for Growth and delivering on the Agri-Food Strategy Board's strategic vision to grow a sustainable, profitable and integrated agrifood supply chain that is focused on delivering the needs of the market.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. Does she have, in the DETI budget or separately in the Invest NI budget, any direct financial input to Going for Growth? Is anything built into those two budgets?

Mrs Foster: Invest NI plays a very important role in Going for Growth. We continue to provide significant local input to companies. In the first half of 2014-15, Invest NI made over 200 offers of assistance to the food sector, totalling £21 million, which is a record level of support. A £170 million expansion has been announced by Moy Park, with 628 new jobs across Dungannon, Craigavon and Ballymena. There has been a £20 million expansion in Dale Farm to allow it to expand its sales outside Northern Ireland and a £6 million investment by Ballyrashane Creamery to grow its European business. Significant investments have been made in relation to Invest Northern Ireland, and I hope that DARD will continue in its commitment to help to ensure that this vital sector continues to grow.

Mr Frew: I note the Executive's response to Going for Growth, Minister. Will the timescales for the objectives be met to the utmost advantage of the agrifood industry? Will the Minister give details and her thoughts on the single agrifood marketing organisation?

Mrs Foster: I hope to see the results of the marketing review, which is undergoing some focus, before Christmas, and I hope that officials will provide me with the way forward. As you know, engagements on marketing and how a single voice can be given to the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland are going on. That is not without its challenges, because different parts of the sector have different ideas on how they want their sector marketed. However, I want a decision made before Christmas so that we can move on and implement marketing for agrifood in Northern Ireland.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers and, in particular, her comments on the dairy processing industry. The Minister is aware that the Chinese market is potentially very lucrative, particularly for instant milk powder baby food products. Will she state what representations, if any, she has had from Northern Ireland companies that have not yet been able to go to China? The Republic had a big delegation there within the last two weeks, and very promising indications have been forthcoming about the potential for such products.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. I noted, in 'Farming Life' on Saturday, that there were some concerns in relation to that trade mission that some Northern Ireland firms had expressed a desire to go on the mission and had not been facilitated. I will look into that because, if we are to work collaboratively on issues in places as far away as China, it would be helpful if we could ensure that companies that want to avail themselves of those facilities are allowed to do so. I was speaking to Simon Coveney about the milk sector recently, so it is disappointing that those companies were not allowed to attend. I should make it clear that I am not sure whether it was dairy companies; I did not read which companies were not allowed to proceed with that.

I have been speaking to a number of dairy companies about the pressures that they face, not only in relation to China but because of price volatility and the Russian ban on agrifood from Europe. There are a lot of pressures on the dairy sector at the moment. We keep very close to dairy companies and see what we can do to help them. Sometimes it is not about finance or money; it is about how we can make representations on their behalf at Westminster or in Brussels. We will continue to make such representations and work alongside the sector.

Inniskillings

6. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board intends to commemorate the role of Irish soldiers, particularly the Inniskilling Fusiliers, in the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. *(AQO 6989/11-15)*

Mr Cree: "Inniskilling Fusiliers" should be "Inniskilling Dragoons".

Mrs Foster: In any event, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not been approached to commemorate the role of the Inniskillings at the battle of Waterloo. I think that you mentioned the dragoons, is that right? However, NITB is working alongside tourism partners in Fermanagh on the heritage gateway to Fermanagh project. That will see radical refurbishment of the Enniskillen Castle complex that houses the Inniskillings Museum.

Mr Cree: I know that the Minister is aware that Arthur Wellesley, arguably Britain's greatest soldier, was born in Dublin or thereabouts. He was a sponsor of Catholic emancipation and defeated Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815. Surely that bicentenary deserves to be commemorated and presents a unique opportunity to attract tourists.

Mrs Foster: The Member will be delighted to hear that our national Government have advanced plans in relation to

celebrating the battle of Waterloo. They have been to the site, and I think that they have actually donated £1 million to help with the upgrade of the site for 2015. Certainly, with the Inniskillings' connection, we will want to ensure that our voice is heard in relation to any benefit that we can achieve there. Given that we have stepped forward in relation to a number of these very significant commemorations, we should certainly ensure that our voice is heard in relation to the battle of Waterloo as well. We should claim it as our own.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will be aware that the nation remembers this week. We should also remember the contribution of HMS Caroline in the First World War, particularly in the battle of Jutland. Can I ask for an update on the role of that vessel, which is so important to the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland as we move forward?

Mrs Foster: Yes, indeed. In what is happening from a national perspective, HMS Caroline is a key priority not just for me, DETI and Northern Ireland but for the UK Government. The Prime Minister has announced a national event on the ship planned for May 2016. I welcome that event, which is part of the World War I centenary commemorations. Just a couple of weeks ago, the Heritage Lottery Fund confirmed an award of £11·5 million to National Museums and DETI. We are using that to conserve and display HMS Caroline, and we are contributing an additional £2·7 million in match funding to the project. I look forward to the commemorations and the fact that Caroline will be part of a national celebration in Northern Ireland.

Tourism Events Fund: Cuts

7. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that the cuts to the tourism event fund have had on the economy. *(AQO 6990/11-15)*

10. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how large-scale events will be supported following the removal of the tourism events fund for 2015-16. *(AQO 6993/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 7 and 10 together. Since the creation of the tourism events funding programme by NITB, the level of funding provided for events has varied from year to year. In spite of the pressures faced in the current financial year, I have allocated additional resources to NITB for events, and a total of 76 events are due to be supported in 2014-15 through the allocation of £2·8 million, which should provide significant benefits to the local economy.

Pending clarification of the Budget position in 2015-16, the Tourist Board announced the suspension of the application process for events for next year. That was a prudent step, given the present very difficult financial situation. In light of the draft Budget allocations that have now been announced, the Department is engaging with all its arm's-length bodies on the savings that will need to be made. The position regarding support for events going forward is being assessed as part of that work. Nevertheless, I can confirm that nine international events that received three-year funding letters of offer for 2014-15 through to 2016-17 will continue to be supported, as well as the Tall Ships and the Irish Open in 2015.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. What recent discussions has she had with the British Government and the Irish Government on the benefits to the local economy of joint funding tourism events on an all-Ireland basis?

Mrs Foster: That is not something new, because, as the Member probably knows, there is some joint funding for the Irish Open. When the Irish Open came to Royal Portrush, we were able to avail ourselves of some money from Fáilte Ireland and, indeed, when the Irish Open returned to the Republic of Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board gave some funding.

It depends on the events and on whether we believe that our getting involved in events in the Republic of Ireland benefits us in Northern Ireland, and I suppose it is vice versa from their perspective.

3.15 pm

Let me say, however, that I am not going to turn away funding from any source. If there is money in the Republic of Ireland to help us with events in Northern Ireland, please give it up to me.

Miss M McIlveen: I welcome the Minister's comments. Obviously, events such as the Milk Cup have been receiving funding from DETI, and there has been an absence of substantial funding from DCAL. What discussions has she had with that Minister about events that would naturally fall within her Department?

Mrs Foster: Certainly, a number of our large-scale events straddle sports and their capacity to bring tourists to Northern Ireland. There are a number of those, of which the Milk Cup is one. The Giro d'Italia is another very good example. In the past, officials have discussed what money DCAL could help to provide to some of those large-scale events. If the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister were here, she would say that it is primarily an event and therefore falls to DETI through the events fund. However, I think that there are other things that can be helped with. Whether that can be done through DRD for road safety for perhaps the North West 200 or DCAL through Sport NI, we perhaps need to look at other Departments to help to bolster the events fund in NITB.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move to topical questions. Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Judicial Review

T2. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the judicial review that her Department has taken to deal with the Environment Minister's breach of the ministerial code, given that she will be aware of the work that had been undertaken by an Executive subcommittee to deal with the draft Belfast metropolitan area plan, up until the point at which the Environment Minister acted unilaterally and published the report, with the inclusion of an element that would have economically disastrous consequences in, for example, Sprucefield in Mr Givan's constituency. *(AQT 1712/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: In so far as these matters have been publicly accounted for, it is matter of record that I feel that the Minister acted outside his powers. Therefore, I

instructed departmental solicitors to look at the matter. The pre-action letter on the judicial review has been sent. There has been a meeting between the Minister of the Environment and me, which I thought was quite helpful. However, the matter has not progressed beyond that, so it appears that we are moving inexorably towards the courts. That is regrettable, but I do not see any other way to deal with this, unless the Minister of the Environment changes his current stance.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Minister's answer and the attempts at mediation that she has sought to deal with this to avoid it going to the courts and to avoid public funds being used to deal with a matter that the Minister of the Environment should properly reflect on and come back to the Executive to seek consensus. Does the Minister agree with me that Sprucefield presents a regionally significant opportunity to develop the retail sector and that it is vital that Sprucefield is given the space that it needs to bring forward planning applications, such as that from John Lewis, that would provide tens of millions of pounds of investment and create hundreds of jobs at a time when our Northern Ireland economy needs that type of investment?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his points about Sprucefield. I do not think that there is any doubt that Sprucefield, given its connectivity with the motorways and the A1 towards the border and on to Dublin, is very much an area that should be open to development. I am loath to get into the details of the subject matter of the judicial review. Suffice it to say that a wider issue is at stake here, so as well as the significance of this to Lagan Valley — I understand why he raises that — there is the matter of the importance of the ministerial code and the proper way in which to take decisions at the Executive. Frankly, if a number of us decided to take the particular route that the Minister of the Environment took, a number of things would be put out that have not been agreed but that we may perhaps have wanted to bring forward. I can think immediately of the tourism strategy, which we may have been able to deal with more proactively. However, that is where we are, and I hope that, even at this late stage, we will not have to go to the courts.

Investment: West Belfast

T3. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's efforts to attract investment to west Belfast. *(AQT 1713/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As he knows, we recently had a significant announcement from Delta Print and Packaging. He will say, "Yes, but that is an indigenous company", but I hope that he recognises that it is a global company with operations across the world. We supported the company in a meaningful way to ensure that those jobs stayed in west Belfast and were not taken elsewhere. That presented a challenge, but we took it on, and I took the matter to the Executive. Thankfully, I had the backing of all my Executive colleagues, and we continue to provide finance and activity in west Belfast, as we do in all other regions across Northern Ireland.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she outline how her Department uses varying financial incentives to entice potential employers to deprived areas?

Mrs Foster: If the Member cares to look at the offer made to the firm that I mentioned, he will see that we stretched ourselves in what we were able to do there. The reason why the matter was taken to the Executive was so that we could secure those jobs in west Belfast.

However, the Member should not just consider the money aspect, because it is about support and about trying to help people in the area start their own business and have an entrepreneurial spirit. It is about working with those people to try to get them to see beyond relying on the grant culture that has grown up in some areas over the years. We need to get away from that to looking at innovation and entrepreneurial ways of doing things in future.

Economic Development Agencies

T4. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what changes she envisages in the role, remit, scope and number of local economic development agencies across Northern Ireland in view of the transition period in local government. *(AQT 1714/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: That is mostly a matter for Enterprise NI working with local councils. A number of enterprise units right across Northern Ireland fall under the umbrella of Enterprise NI, and they will have to find a new relationship with the councils. That is because the Regional Start programme will be one of the programmes devolved to the local councils. Therefore, they will have control of it. That programme has been delivered by Enterprise NI and the local enterprise agencies for a number of years now. They will need to engage in the community plan for their particular areas to make sure that they have a role to play in economic development.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her response. Until now, there has been a variation in Northern Ireland in the level and shape of local economic development agencies. Given that we are in a transition period, does she agree that we should be trying to learn lessons from the experience of local enterprise partnerships in England, which have been operating for several years?

Mrs Foster: I agree that there have been varying levels of success in enterprise agencies across Northern Ireland, but, thankfully, we have some very good examples of enterprise agencies here, too. If the Member is asking whether we need to learn from best practice, absolutely, we do. Whether that is in England or here in Northern Ireland, that is certainly the route that we should be going down.

Fuel Poverty: Crude Oil Prices

T5. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to comment on the potential impact that the fall in crude oil prices might have on fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. *(AQT 1715/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: In the work that has been ongoing between the regulator and the Department, we have often been frustrated about what we can intervene on in relation to price. We have talked about energy costs in the House on a number of occasions.

Part of the difficulty has been that the wholesale costs make up around two thirds of the energy cost to the consumer. I am hopeful that, given that the price of crude oil is falling back, we should see some reflection of that in wholesale costs, particularly for electricity. However,

I caution against price volatility. If we have a drop in the price of crude oil and that allows us to have lower energy costs in one month, we certainly do not want to see energy costs go back up when the crude oil price jumps back up again. We need to be careful not to have price volatility. I am hopeful that if the crude oil price stays low for a period, that can then be reflected in electricity prices to the consumer.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answer. She has kind of answered my supplementary question as well. I was going to ask her to expand on how that would be reflected in electricity costs.

Mrs Foster: Ultimately, that is a matter for the Utility Regulator in conjunction with the energy firms. She has indicated to me that she wants to move away from a period when there was a large cut in one half of the year and then a rise in the other half of the year. That does not help consumers to plan, if you like. They like certainty and to be able to plan into the future. I am sure that if the Utility Regulator were here, she would say that one thing that she does not want to see is price volatility.

Invest NI: Displacement

T6. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, albeit that he welcomes Invest NI's recent successes, whether a study has ever been carried out to assess the effects that its actions have on competing businesses, either smaller or less large, in the same areas. *(AQT 1716/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I think that the Member is referring to displacement. It is something that Invest Northern Ireland takes a lot of cognisance of. It is one of the reasons why we look at a firm and try to assess its capabilities to export into a different market. We try to provide it with support to do that. It is one of the reasons why we do not get involved with some firms and why sometimes people challenge me on that and say, "Why do you not support Mrs X who is a hairdresser in Ballymoney?" Well, if we started to support all the hairdressers around Northern Ireland, we would just displace people around Northern Ireland. Displacement is very much something that we look at. I know that, when Invest Northern Ireland is looking to support companies, it is very cognisant that it does not displace business from other companies.

Mr Kinahan: One of the Minister's colleagues on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment mentioned that we go for the big hit with a trickle-down effect. When looking either at the displacement or how it affects competitors, is she looking at a strategy lower down for smaller or less big businesses to make sure that they can all pick up from the trickle-down that comes?

Mrs Foster: Yes, absolutely. If we have companies that want to get into the supply chain of some of our larger companies like Almac or FG Wilson, we will try to support them to do that. That is done through the Boosting Business campaign, which the Member may recall that we launched at the time of the recession. It comprised, yes, the jobs fund, but also a number of advisory helps to give assistance to companies that perhaps would not normally seek assistance from Invest Northern Ireland. Boosting Business is very much looking at that whole area of trying to help businesses that — I do not like using the phrase — are lower down in the food chain from some of our bigger companies.

Corporation Tax

T7. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to comment on the ongoing campaign to devolve corporation tax to Northern Ireland. *(AQT 1717/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: It is a campaign that has been going on for quite some considerable time. It is supported by the five parties in the Executive and by the wider business community in Northern Ireland, which realises the benefits that will flow from a lower corporation tax rate here in Northern Ireland. I have listened to some people talking about the corporation tax issue, saying that it is all speculative and asking how we know what will happen. We have had numerous people examine the evidence base. They have told us that tens of thousands of jobs will come to Northern Ireland over a period if we are able to have the lower rate of corporation tax.

I very much support the campaign, and I hope that we will have an answer from the Prime Minister in early December.

3.30 pm

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she believe that Northern Ireland has the necessary skills and infrastructure to attract new companies to invest in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: From an Invest Northern Ireland perspective, it will certainly change the way in which it interacts with companies globally, particularly in America. We are ready for that change if and when it comes. Even though the decision on the devolution of corporation tax should be announced in December, we will have a period during which we can change the way in which we do business from an Invest Northern Ireland perspective. The Employment and Learning Minister has also been looking into what he needs to do in relation to skills if we are able to have a lower rate of corporation tax.

A8/A2 Road Projects

T8. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is keeping the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Invest NI fully up to date with the A8 and A2 road projects so that tourists and new businesses will be aware of the advantages that exist for Mr Beggs's constituents in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey, with businesses able to consider relocating to that area, given that the Regional Development Minister, Danny Kennedy, has indicated that the A8 and A2 projects are progressing well. *(AQT 1718/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I was just establishing from my colleagues where the A2 and A8 are. Forgive me: I am a humble Fermanagh representative. I understand that they are to Carrick and Larne — am I correct? Yes? Well, I know more about the A4 and the A29. When we have an upgrade of infrastructure, it certainly helps in relation to the offering to inward investors and tourism. We will, of course, take cognisance of any upgrades to infrastructure, no matter where it is in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time is up.

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I will take the point of order at the end of Question Time.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I seek your —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Sorry. Order, please. I will take it at the end of Question Time.

Mr Campbell: At the end — sorry. OK.

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Ebola: Systems in Place for the Testing for Suspected Cases in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their place. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the systems in place for testing for suspected cases of Ebola in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): In line with arrangements for the rest of the United Kingdom, viral haemorrhagic fever (VHF) testing of samples taken from patients in Northern Ireland is carried out in Porton Down laboratories, following discussions with the imported fever service. The Regional Virus Laboratory (RVL) has transport arrangements in place to ensure that clinicians in the Royal Victoria Hospital receive VHF test results in the shortest possible time.

Where it has been agreed that a sample will be processed immediately on receipt, results will normally be available within seven to eight hours of the arrival of the sample in the laboratory. In addition, in anticipation of transport delays — for example, because of bad weather — the RVL has arrangements in place to have samples tested in Dublin. That would be in tandem with sending samples to Porton Down, which, as the Member will know, is in Wiltshire. VHF testing will commence in Edinburgh on 1 December this year. The RVL is exploring the possible benefits for Northern Ireland in terms of contingency arrangements and reducing travel times.

Mrs Dobson: The Minister will know about the very real worry and concern amongst the public. People will be waiting to hear the results and hoping that the Ebola virus has not reached our shores. At this time, we are all holding our breath for the patient and their family, and we are thinking of the staff at the Royal.

Minister, we need to be aware that this may be only the first of many scares. Perhaps the Minister can outline for us how those will impact on front-line services at our regional hospitals. Can he also give a commitment that, at a time when our trusts are under such immense pressure, these pressures will not be a barrier to our health service adequately responding to future Ebola scares? Can he detail approximately how much a scare costs, what training is provided to staff and how costs will be met to protect patients and staff?

Mr Wells: I thank the honourable Member for her supplementary question. As she is aware, a patient was admitted to the Royal Victoria Hospital on Friday 7 November and tested positive for malaria. As the

patient had been in Sierra Leone, samples were sent to Porton Down in Wiltshire and, I understand, to Dublin as a precaution. The results of the tests are imminent, but we do not have them as yet. We may have them before the end of this session. The results are expected to be negative, but we have to be absolutely certain. As soon as the results are available, everybody will be advised of them.

We have been here before: in Londonderry, a similar scare at Altnagelvin proved to be negative, and, in Donegal in the Irish Republic, a similar situation arose. This is third time this has happened on the island of Ireland.

We have an arrangement with the Royal Free Hospital in London, where any patient who is assessed as having Ebola will be flown. Arrangements have been established for that to be done rapidly. Therefore, the overall treatment of anyone who has Ebola will be carried out on the mainland and not in Northern Ireland.

Even in the worst-case scenario, the numbers in the United Kingdom would be expected to be in single figures. Therefore, whilst it is a matter of great concern to the public, we do not envisage this placing an inordinate burden on our health services or those in the rest of the UK. In Northern Ireland, every health and social care trust has plans in place that were tested in a regional exercise on 23 October. We had all the bodies, including the trusts, the Public Health Agency and colleagues from England, Wales, Scotland and the Irish Republic involved to make certain that we were fully prepared in the event of a suspected case of Ebola or, in the worst-case scenario, a confirmed case.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. He referred to the incident in Derry, and I want to acknowledge the role that the staff in the Western Trust played on that one. Given the potential worst-case scenario, is there specific public health advice that the Minister would offer the wider public at this point?

Mr Wells: It is highly unlikely that anyone in Northern Ireland will contract Ebola unless they have been in one of three countries in West Africa — Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea — where Ebola is having a profound impact. Arrangements are in place at all the major entry points to the United Kingdom and Europe to screen for Ebola.

My only advice at this point is that, if anyone has returned from those countries and is showing any of the signs — one of which is sometimes an increased temperature — they should seek health advice immediately and self-refer. Prompt medical care is essential to improving the rate of survival. It is also important in controlling the spread of the disease, and infection control procedures need to be started immediately.

We know for certain that this person was in Sierra Leone, in the area affected by Ebola, so the correct procedures were invoked once self-referral took place. The public health agencies in the rest of the United Kingdom do not envisage spread within the United Kingdom from existing sufferers; it is far more likely to be brought to the shores of the British Isles from West Africa.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answers. Can he give us an assurance that all equipment at the Royal Victoria Hospital, including personal protective equipment, is fit for purpose and compatible with that in use in the rest of the UK?

Mr Wells: I have to be slightly careful when I am replying to the honourable Member for North Down because patient confidentiality is absolutely essential in this instance and, indeed, in all instances. The equipment being used in the Royal is absolutely in line with that being used in the rest of the United Kingdom and is of the highest international standard. Isolation has occurred for the patient and is being carried out under the strictest possible controls.

I am content that everything that can be done in the Royal is being done. Remember, the individual has tested positive for malaria, a disease that can be quite readily treated in Northern Ireland. There is no confirmation of anything beyond that, as yet. Therefore, I am content that all the correct precautions are being undertaken.

Mr McKinney: Will the Minister outline the state of preparedness, including transport, at all our hospital facilities?

Mr Wells: I have taken part in two COBRA conference calls with the Health Ministers for Wales, Scotland and England to try to make certain that the United Kingdom as a whole is completely prepared for any potential situation arising. We have arrangements in place to make a transfer from Northern Ireland to the Royal Free Hospital rapidly. An air ambulance service is available to make that transfer as soon as is required. Remember, the patient would remain in isolation if, per chance, Ebola were confirmed in the Royal. Therefore, there is no chance of the condition spreading. I am content that a very good system is in place to make certain that everybody is ready and prepared to take the patient to the expertise in the Royal Free, which has two beds immediately available and can expand that to 12, if need be. That hospital has huge international experience in dealing with these conditions.

The Chief Medical Officer has issued letters to all front-line staff who may be treating or admitting patients. All steps have been taken to ensure that we are ready. So far, what I am seeing indicates that those precautions are working and have been effective in this particular situation.

Mr Allister: What is the capacity of the isolation unit in the Royal? Does the Minister or his Department have access to any data, perhaps from the border agencies, to indicate the number of citizens connected to Northern Ireland who are travelling to, or have travelled to, the suspect countries?

Mr Wells: The isolation ward in the Royal has a capacity of one. However, we have a relationship with the Royal Free, so there is, in my opinion, sufficient capacity. We have had numerous discussions about checking the entry points for people from the three affected countries coming into Northern Ireland. There are no direct flights from West Africa to Northern Ireland. Therefore, the vast majority of people will come through London, Paris, Brussels or the Channel Tunnel. All those entry points now have scrutiny and testing arrangements in place. We believe that 97% of the people who could potentially come into Northern Ireland are covered by those arrangements.

On Wednesday, I will meet my counterpart in the Irish Republic, Leo Varadkar. One of the issues on my agenda is to make absolutely certain that the arrangements in the Irish Republic are as strong as they are in the United

Kingdom. We also have other step-up beds available, here and in the rest of the UK. The Minister for Health in England, Jeremy Hunt, has suggested that, if the worst comes to the worst, we would be talking about single figures for the whole country. Therefore, there is sufficient capacity in the United Kingdom to deal with a situation. We have had several months' warning and have taken all the necessary steps to make certain that, should things go wrong and people with Ebola come in, we are ready to act.

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice and guidance on the long-established procedure in the House regarding the Speaker's discretion, which obviously is ultimate and final, to call Members for supplementary questions. On question 1, during questions to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, a number of Members stood up on one side of the House and were called, and one Member stood up on this side and was not called. The previous Speaker, and other Deputy Speakers, indicated that Members should constantly rise to their feet to have the possibility of being called. I seek your guidance and reassurance that that is still the case, and that people will be called, in so far as is possible, from across the Chamber if they continue to stand.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. That sounded very like a challenge to the Deputy Speaker. I am glad that you clarified that it was not because that would be extremely serious. The Member is welcome to go to the Business Office and check the records. He will find that his party was exceptionally well catered for today, while three members of my party did not get to ask their supplementary. Let that be the final word.

Adjourned at 3.45 pm

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 November 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Good morning. I remind Members that the Business Committee has agreed to suspend the sitting for 10 minutes from 10.55 am to 11.05 am to facilitate Members who wish to mark Armistice Day.

Executive Committee Business

Food Hygiene Rating Bill: Second Stage

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

> *That the Second Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill [NIA 41/11-16] be agreed.*

The food hygiene rating scheme was launched in Northern Ireland on 6 June 2011 and rates the food hygiene standards of 14,000 local businesses where people can eat or buy food. It is operated in Northern Ireland by district councils in partnership with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on a voluntary basis. It also operates in England on a voluntary basis but became a statutory scheme in Wales in November of last year. The aim of the scheme is to help people make informed choices around the purchase of food by providing information about food hygiene standards, found at the time of inspection by district council food safety officers, in the places where food is eaten or sold from a shop. This in turn will provide a strong incentive for businesses to achieve and maintain compliance with existing food hygiene law.

The information is provided to consumers through a simple numerical scale operating from nought to five, where nought means that urgent improvement is necessary and five means a food business fully complies with legal requirements and has a very high standard. The rating is made available on the Food Standards Agency website — food.gov.uk/ratings — but businesses are also provided with a food hygiene rating sticker to place in the window or the door at their premises so that information is available to consumers before they enter the establishment. In Northern Ireland each year, there are approximately 48,300 cases of food-borne illness that result in 450 hospitalisations, 24 deaths and an equivalent total cost of £83 million to the Northern Ireland economy.

The overarching aim of the scheme is to reduce that burden.

Whilst the scheme has delivered positive outcomes to date, it operates on a voluntary basis in Northern Ireland, which means that food businesses are not obligated to display their rating sticker. Consumer research has shown that decisions about food are typically made quickly and without conscious thought, and the most effective way to influence consumers about whether or not to eat in a certain food outlet is for the information to be seen from outside so that a decision can be made before entering. Further research undertaken this year shows that only 40% of businesses in Northern Ireland are displaying stickers

that are visible from outside. It is not surprising to learn that display is much lower amongst establishments with a rating of 0 to 2. The Food Standards Agency and councils are working to encourage businesses to display ratings, but it is reasonable to conclude that such activity is likely to have little impact on those businesses with a low rating.

As Members will appreciate, the voluntary nature of the scheme can make it difficult for consumers to find out the food hygiene rating of a food business. I want to change that, and the main purpose of the Bill is to place the food hygiene rating scheme on a statutory footing to ensure that food hygiene rating stickers are visible at all food outlets for everyone to see. The Bill will therefore make it mandatory for food businesses to display their food hygiene rating sticker, and, in doing so, will ensure that consumers have access to the information at the point of choice.

People in Northern Ireland are becoming more aware of the voluntary scheme, with 83% of consumers recognising the stickers and certificates. They are also accustomed to seeing the rating stickers in the doorways of food establishments. However, once we introduce the mandatory scheme, the full range of food hygiene rating stickers will be more apparent, and people will be much more aware of them.

A 12-week formal consultation on the policy informing the Bill was carried out between February and April 2013. The consultation paper was widely circulated to interested parties, including the food industry, district councils, Departments, community and voluntary groups and consumer organisations. A series of stakeholder events and one-to-one meetings were also organised to address and discuss the proposals outlined in the consultation paper.

The consultation attracted 29 responses from a wide range of stakeholders, including individual food businesses, food industry trade associations, enforcement representatives from councils and their representative bodies, the voluntary sector and, of course, the general public. Views were also sought from small food businesses and consumers through the Food Standards Agency's independently conducted citizens forum research programme.

In general, responses to the consultation showed strong support for the mandatory display of food hygiene ratings at food premises to better inform consumer choice. A full consideration of all the consultation responses resulted in a review and modification of some aspects of the policy proposals that were put forward in the consultation paper. That has helped to shape the Bill, which was endorsed by the Executive on 19 June and introduced to the Assembly by me on 3 November.

The Bill comprises 20 clauses and one schedule, and makes provision for the production of food hygiene ratings, the display of food hygiene ratings and the enforcement of the requirement to display ratings. It will apply the scheme to all food businesses that supply food directly to consumers, including restaurants, takeaways, mobile caterers, schools, hospitals, residential care homes, delicatessens and supermarkets. It will require councils, following inspection of food business establishments within their areas, to assess the food hygiene standards and produce a food hygiene rating, which will be scored against criteria set out by the Food Standards Agency.

Within 14 days of an inspection, councils must provide written notification of the inspection outcome, and the appropriate food hygiene rating sticker, to the food business operator. The food business will be required to display that sticker at its establishment, and the Food Standards Agency will be required to publish the rating on its website. The Bill will also require councils to enforce the requirements to display food hygiene rating stickers, and will provide them with the means to do so through the use of fixed penalty notices and, where appropriate, prosecution.

Given the wide range of food business establishments in Northern Ireland to which the scheme applies, it is intended to prescribe in regulations where the sticker must be displayed at establishments. The format of the sticker will also be prescribed in regulations.

Importantly, the Bill will also require food business operators to inform a person verbally of their establishment's food hygiene rating, if requested to do so. That will not only provide access to the rating for blind or partially sighted people but enable consumers to find out a business's food hygiene rating when making a telephone order.

Whilst my main objective is to provide information on hygiene standards to consumers, I want the Bill to be fair to food businesses. Although they will be required to display their food hygiene rating, the Bill will provide a number of safeguards for businesses. There will be safeguards to provide food business operators with, for example, a right of appeal against their ratings where they believe the rating does not reflect the hygiene standards at the time of the inspection; a right to request to have their rating reassessed where they have made necessary improvements; and a right to reply to explain to consumers any mitigating circumstances, and that explanation will be published on the Food Standards Agency's website.

It is important to note that the Bill will not impose any significant burden on food businesses, as the main requirement for them arising from it will be to display a rating sticker that will be provided by the district council, free of charge, following a food hygiene inspection. Any improvements that businesses need to make to get the top rating are already required by law, so the scheme does not impose additional financial burdens on them.

In addition to the scheme incentivising food businesses to comply with food hygiene law, businesses that achieve a good rating will be subject to less-frequent inspections by district councils, thereby reducing the regulatory burden on compliant businesses.

The increased transparency provided by the statutory scheme will also provide an effective and more sustainable alternative to formal enforcement action by district councils for securing and maintaining compliance and so provide a non-intervention approach.

I believe that this is a timely and important Bill which makes good sense for the consumer and the food business operator alike. It will allow consumers to make informed choices, but local food businesses also understand that a good food hygiene rating is good for customers and good for business. I want to see food hygiene standards throughout Northern Ireland improved and maintained, and I am convinced that the introduction of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill will make a positive difference to the health of people across Northern Ireland.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public

Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I welcome the Bill.

The Committee supports the overarching aim of the Bill, which is to seek to reduce the incidence of food-borne illness by introducing legislation that will make it mandatory for food businesses to display information to consumers about hygiene standards, based on inspections by district council food safety officers. Not only will that provide an impetus for businesses to achieve and maintain compliance with food hygiene law, it will allow consumers to make an informed choice regarding where they choose to eat or shop for food.

The food hygiene rating scheme has been operating here on a voluntary basis for over two years. It provides a simple numerical rating, displayed by way of a sticker placed in a prominent position in the premises of the food business. The scheme also operates in England and Wales, although the Welsh scheme is mandatory.

The Committee took evidence from officials, prior to the introduction of the Bill, on 23 January 2013 and 5 February 2014, and, from the outset, was broadly supportive of the aim of the Bill. Statistics provided at the Committee briefing in January 2013 gave reasonable cause for concern, highlighting a surprisingly high number of incidents of food-borne illness. The Minister alluded to those. On average, there are around 48,500 cases of food-borne illnesses here each year, 450 of which result in hospitalisation, and, unfortunately, up to 20 deaths.

There is also an associated cost to the economy of £83 million. Therefore, we are mindful that this is a very serious public health issue.

10.45 am

The Committee noted that, although the voluntary scheme has been deemed generally successful, it was disappointing that only something in the region of 50% of businesses are choosing to display their ratings. Perhaps understandably, that figure drops considerably among businesses with lower ratings of around zero, one or two. At the time of the Committee briefing in January 2013, it was 22% for those businesses, and that had further dropped to 13% by the February 2014 briefing. Therefore, the Committee is supportive of the need to put the scheme on a statutory footing.

During the briefings we held with the Food Standards Agency on the proposed Bill, members raised a number of issues that I expect we will explore further during Committee Stage. The first issue was around the effectiveness of penalties for businesses that fail to display a sticker showing their rating. We were concerned that minimal fixed penalties would not act as much of a deterrent and that some businesses might be prepared to risk not displaying a poor rating. While the option of a court conviction will exist for repeat offenders, we want to ensure that the penalties are sufficiently robust and that consumers will be made aware of those businesses that have not complied with the law.

The second issue for the Committee was around ensuring that businesses were treated fairly under the new legislation. It is important that the appeals process is transparent, robust and timely, so that businesses that believe there has been a genuine mistake in their rating score can get it sorted out quickly without it negatively impacting on their trade.

We also welcomed clarification from officials who advised that the legislation is not designed to close establishments with low ratings but to help encourage businesses to improve their hygiene standards. To that end, rerating inspections will be available in addition to appeals, and the Committee commends that aspect of the Bill.

The third issue that the Committee discussed was the resource implications of the legislation. The rating process will be carried out by district council officers, as is currently the case with the voluntary scheme. However, we want to ensure that, by making the scheme mandatory, we do not impose any unnecessary bureaucracy on district councils in carrying out their duties.

We also noted that the proposed statutory scheme remains in most aspects very similar to the voluntary one. It also shares much in common with the Welsh model, in an effort to maintain a degree of consistency across all jurisdictions. However, if there are lessons that can be learned from the Welsh experience, I am sure that the Committee will take those on board so that we can have the best possible legislation in place here.

To conclude, the Committee welcomes the Bill's intention to make the food hygiene rating scheme mandatory and looks forward to carrying out detailed scrutiny of the Bill at Committee Stage.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I support the Second Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill. I was not a member of the Committee when the Bill was being discussed in Committee, but I have read Hansard and the supporting documents, and I commend the Committee for its scrutiny and the Food Standards Agency for its invaluable input.

Since the inception of the food hygiene rating scheme in Northern Ireland, I, like many other consumers, have actively used the Internet to check hygiene ratings of the many businesses that I use in my local community. Online, I can find the ratings for my local supermarkets, butchers, filling stations, bakeries, newsagents, schools, care homes, churches, playgroups, social clubs, garden centres, fruit and veg shops, hotels, restaurants and the many takeaway food outlets in the area that I represent and I live in, as you can tell. I realise that not everyone is quite as obsessive as me when it comes to checking food hygiene ratings. Some people have a life and do not think that looking up the Internet is the best use of their time, but I believe that it is essential that the food hygiene rating scheme is made mandatory in all places where we eat out or shop for food.

In the briefings provided to Committee from the Food Standards Agency, it states that the rating system is designed to improve public health and provide an important driver for businesses to achieve and maintain compliance with food hygiene laws. As the Minister and the Chair of the Committee stated, associated costs to the Northern Ireland economy in relation to food-borne illnesses are £83 million annually; therefore, as an Assembly, we need to take decisive action and endeavour to reduce that figure substantially.

The other issue that I want to touch on is consumer choice and the bearing that it will have on businesses to

improve food hygiene. We, as consumers, expect a certain standard when we pay for goods and services, and that should not be any different when it comes to the purchase of food. Customers should be made fully aware of the level of food hygiene and, in doing so, as the Chair already stated, we are then provided with an informed choice of where we want to eat. As an Assembly, we need to do everything in our power to ensure that the onus is put on service providers to provide and maintain the very highest food hygiene standards. I support the Bill at Second Stage and look forward to its swift passage through the House.

Mr McKinney: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the debate and to support the Food Hygiene Rating Bill and the rationale that underpins it: to give the customer the opportunity to make an informed decision when purchasing food in a particular establishment. My colleague Paula Bradley outlined that eloquently.

I will deal with some of the context. While we are here, principally, to deal with health, we are daily reminded of the pressure on our budgets. To hear that a bill in the region of £83 million annually is attached to cases of food poisoning, with 450 hospitalisations and, sadly, as Maeve McLaughlin pointed out, 20 deaths, that underpins the need for this legislation, particularly when we hear that only 10% of cases are reported. This is an under-reported issue and demands the actions that are being taken. It is something of a hidden undercurrent of public concern in our society, to the extent that we could argue that it is endemic and, as I said, that underpins the need for action. Without doubt, the existing voluntary food scheme has been very successful, and I underscore, like colleagues, that it operates on a voluntary basis. When we hear that only 56% of establishments adhere to it, that also calls for greater action.

The proposals in the Bill will enable customers to make informed decisions. The fact that a number of safeguards have been built into the scheme to encourage compliance and self-regulation must be welcomed. I also welcome the fact that there are provisions in the Bill to promote an equal playing field among businesses.

I have one or two concerns reflected by the FSB, which voiced its concern over the definition of "food business establishment", and I would welcome the Minister's remarks on those concerns, particularly in the context of business-to-business implications. There have been concerns over the economic impact of re-inspection fees, particularly for small as opposed to larger businesses. Therefore, a balance has to be struck. Clearly, we have to have a robust piece of legislation that ensures that consumers can shop and eat in the most high-quality businesses that they can. However, we do not want to overburden businesses with administration or extra costs.

Mrs Dobson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of what I expect to be an uncontroversial piece of legislation. The overall aim of the Bill, which is to make the display of stickers mandatory, makes sense. I suspect that many members of the public will be surprised to learn that it was not already compulsory. The current voluntary scheme has, to its credit, worked quite well. The biggest disappointment, however, was the fact that those businesses with a lower rating were — not at all surprisingly — the least keen to publicise it. Some business will rightly consider the current scheme a benefit, especially if it is a chance to advertise their impeccable hygiene standards, but many others with lower ratings may avoid the scheme for fear of deflecting possible business. I believe that it is even more important that consumers be informed about establishments with lower ratings. It is all about giving consumers enough information —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I pray your indulgence, but I must interrupt the Member.

In accordance with the Business Committee's decision to facilitate Members who wish to mark Armistice Day, the sitting is suspended until 11.05 am. The Member will be called immediately to continue her contribution to the Second Stage debate.

The sitting was suspended at 10.55 am and resumed at 11.05 am.

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

Mrs Dobson: Some businesses will rightly consider the current scheme a benefit, especially if it is a chance to advertise their impeccable hygiene standards, but many others with lower ratings may avoid the scheme for fear of deflecting possible business. I believe that it is even more important that consumers are informed about establishments with lower ratings. It is all about giving consumers enough information to make those informed decisions. As has been said, if people knew about the poor hygiene standards of some establishments or if a mandatory scheme were in place, I have no doubt that it would help reduce incidences of food-borne illnesses in Northern Ireland. The Bill will remove the luxury of opting out of the scheme. That may be bad news for the 83% of businesses with a mark of 0, 1 or 2 that currently do not take part in the voluntary scheme, but it is great news for consumers. I am conscious, however, that the scheme will have a regulatory impact on businesses, especially those not already complying with the voluntary scheme. It makes no distinction between large and small and so some will inevitably be better prepared to deal with it than others.

I am aware that the Department has made some changes following responses received during the consultation exercise and I commend it for that. For instance, I especially welcome the decision to increase the time for a food business to appeal a rating from 14 days to 21 days, and I note the call from the Federation of Small Businesses for clarity on what types of establishment may be exempted from the scheme. That is an important point and one that I urge the Minister and his officials to think carefully about. I trust that if they do decide to make such a regulation under clause 1, they will only do so in consultation with councils and bodies such as the FSB. I would appreciate it if the Minister could make such a commitment in his remarks later.

Whilst the Bill may have the greatest impact on businesses, I appreciate that the scheme will not enforce itself. Councils will also invest significant staff resources in properly applying the current system, and that will only increase with the passage of the Bill. At a time of fundamental reform of our local government, I believe that it is a rather apt opportunity to bring in these responsibilities. I ask the Minister, however, looking at the commencement clause with the Bill, when approximately he envisages his Department making the order to bring in the bulk of the Bill? Will he be linking it, for instance, to the establishment of the new 11 councils in April?

One last issue that I would like to raise with the Minister is the future budget for the Food Standards Agency. It is directly related to the Bill and many other areas of work relevant to the Department of Health. It is proposed that, next year, the FSA's budget will be cut from £8·5 million to £7·4 million. That is a cut of 12·8%, which is the largest of any Department or body in the draft Budget. As we have heard today already, food safety and food hygiene are hugely important, and so I am concerned that the body tasked with protecting the public is having such a large cut to its budget. What impact does the Minister think the budget reduction will have on the FSA's ability to deliver its body of work and introduce new policies such as the one that we are discussing today?

Mr McCarthy: I rise to speak in favour of the Bill. I am a member of the Health Committee, and, as our Chair said, we fully support the efforts being made to make our food safe, particularly to ensure that food prepared and consumed in many eateries throughout Northern Ireland is safe for human consumption and, more importantly, that clients and customers have the knowledge that the premises have been examined and given a rating number indicating how the authorities regard the eating establishment. The Bill will make it mandatory for food businesses to display their food hygiene rating in a public place where clients can see it before they enter any of the premises.

There are, of course, safeguards built into the scheme, including the right of owners to appeal against a rating that they have been given. After the consultation period and discussion with the Health Committee, the preferred way forward was a new scheme with the mandatory display of ratings at food premises, plus recovery costs where businesses choose to request a rerating.

The Bill contains some 20 clauses. The implementation of the Bill will fall on local councils and their food inspectors. I support the comments of the small business group, the FSB, about ensuring that all inspectors are given the best training to enable them to fulfil their duties. The FSB also noted clauses 10 and 11, where offences are created and the fixed penalties kick in. Its concern is that all eateries and food supplies are subject to the same rules and regulations. There may be an assumption that, once again, the small cafes or restaurants will be the soft touches, in comparison to the bigger establishments, and be disproportionately affected by prosecution, fines etc.

To date, the voluntary scheme has operated and has been relatively successful. However, it has its limitations. As I understand it, just over half of businesses display their rating, and, naturally, the rate of display tends to follow the higher scores awarded. I think the Minister made some reference to that in his introductory remarks, and we know that it is correct. I do not think that businesses have anything to fear from that voluntary process becoming mandatory. First, most businesses are run well and responsibly, with a high standard of hygiene. Secondly, there is an advantage to the food sector as a whole from a process that will assist in driving standards up even higher.

In conclusion, I suspect that most of the detailed debate will now revolve around the capacity of the district councils to implement the scheme. I have no doubt, as a former councillor of 28 years in the best council in Northern Ireland — namely, Ards Borough Council — that the council officers will rise to the challenge. Also, the rules and regulations around the right of appeal and the capacity to ask for a reassessment of the business are slightly different concepts.

On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the Bill and look forward to giving it more detailed consideration later on.

Mrs Cameron: As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I support the Second Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill. The Bill has relevance to everyone who eats food from outside of their own home from the various establishments, as my colleague Paula Bradley outlined at length. It is a matter of huge public significance but, until now, it has gone largely unnoticed, due, in part, to the fact that the current scheme is operated on a voluntary basis.

We heard that we have in the region of 48,500 food-borne illnesses each year in Northern Ireland, accounting for some 450 hospitalisations and 20 deaths. What is perhaps even more troubling is the vast number of illnesses that go unreported, are simply written off as an upset stomach and are treated at home without even being reported to a doctor, therefore not making it into the statistics. I am sure you will agree that the potential figure for those who actually suffer from food-borne illnesses could be astronomical. With that in mind, the reduction of food-borne illnesses is paramount.

A mandatory rating scheme will not only provide consumers with the tools to make an informed choice but will serve to increase food hygiene standards across the industry. The current scheme in its voluntary form has been extremely well received by the general public. It has been administered through our local councils by environmental health teams through routine inspections, with the rating provided as a sticker that can be displayed within the food outlet.

I think there is a common misconception amongst the public that it is compulsory for food outlets to display their ratings. I have often noticed when a food hygiene score of an establishment is displayed but have not always noticed when the score is absent.

I recently experienced an example of this. After a conversation with a friend who worked in a restaurant that I ate in regularly, I learned that the establishment had a 2 rating and was, therefore, not displaying the sign. Needless to say, I have chosen not to eat there since.

11.15 am

Therein is the crux of the problem with the voluntary scheme. Fifty-six per cent of businesses display their rating; however, that falls to only 13% of business ratings between 0 and 2. It is therefore safe to assume that people could, unwittingly, be eating in an establishment that has a far from perfect standard of food hygiene.

Whilst there has been some opposition from the food industry, it has been, unsurprisingly, from those at the lower end of the rating scheme. The aim of the Bill is not to increase administration or workload for businesses but to provide consumers with knowledge of how their selected food outlet performs with regard to hygiene. A mandatory scheme will provide a consistent approach to food-hygiene rating; will undoubtedly increase customer confidence; and ensure that best practice is carried out across the industry.

As I mentioned, the voluntary scheme is managed by local district councils and, as such, it is anticipated that there

will be no additional cost to councils in moving from a voluntary to a mandatory scheme. It is anticipated that any additional cost for rerating a business at its request will be met by the individual business. It is proposed that failure to display a rating or to display an incorrect rating will result in a fixed penalty notice. That will allow for offences to be dealt with quickly and means that only the most severe breaches of food hygiene standards will be dealt with through the courts.

However, I feel that a loophole exists around the displaying of hygiene ratings for businesses that operate online. In a world of ever-increasing reliance on technology, many of us order food through websites or apps and pay and arrange delivery without ever visiting the premises. Whilst it is proposed that should a member of the public wish to, they can check the hygiene regulations through the Food Standards Agency website, I feel that that defeats the point of having a system that should be instantly recognisable and identifiable. I hope that this point is considered and that a mechanism for online business is put in place as the Bill progresses so that customers can instantly see food hygiene ratings displayed on the website or app as prominently as if they were visiting the establishment in the flesh and observing the rating in the window or on the door.

In closing, the Food Hygiene Rating Bill will provide consumers with a clear and user-friendly way to identify the hygiene standards of any food outlet and enable them to make informed choices. It will undoubtedly increase standards across the hospitality industry and ultimately, most importantly, reduce the incidence of food-borne illnesses. I support the Bill.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt ar son an Bhille inniu. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill today. Members have already spoken, but, as a member of the Health Committee, I add my own words about the Bill and what it seeks to do. It introduces legislation that makes it a legal requirement for the food industry to display its food hygiene ratings.

As we have heard, the aims include the following: to allow members of the public to have an informed choice about the establishment in which they are provided with food, whether they are in a restaurant, hotel, café or any of the other outlets mentioned. It also seeks to improve the standard food provision by incentivising businesses to improve and reduce the incidence of food-related illness.

Baineann an pointe deireannach le tinneas bia a laghdú, agus mothaím gurb í sin an ceann is tábhachtaí. I feel that the final point about the reduction of illness brought on by food is the most important. When we go into a restaurant, or any food outlet for that matter, we want to feel reassured that the food for which we are paying is safe and properly cooked and that the standards of kitchen hygiene and food storage are the highest possible. These measures are absolutely necessary to minimise the likelihood of disease or illness being contracted in the process of food provision.

As we have heard, the scheme exists on a voluntary basis and is administered by district council environmental health officers. They visit and examine premises and then issue a rating. The owners or property holders are then at liberty to display the rating or not. That rating has been useful for people seeking to eat in restaurants. Tá an meastachán seo an-úsáideach do thomhaltóirí, go háirithe nuair a bhíonn siad ag tabhairt cuairte ar áit nua gan fios ná gan eolas áitiúil.

It is particularly important if people are visiting new places where they have not been before and they do not have any local knowledge or information to go on. This will give them something to base their judgement on. As we heard, the information is on a scale from 0 to 5, so it is easy enough to make a decision based on that rating.

We heard that mixed results came from the consultation that was carried out. Tháinig torthaí measchta amach as an chomhairliúchán sin. As would have been anticipated, there was much support from consumers and council stakeholders for the mandatory display of ratings. Those businesses with high ratings concurred with that, and, not surprisingly, those with lower ratings were not supportive. While some businesses might not like the idea of the scheme and might view it as intrusive, safeguards are nevertheless built in for protection. Agus creidim go bhfuil gá leis seo. I believe that that is necessary. Any business that is unhappy with the rating can appeal the decision and have a reassessment carried out after making changes. They can also respond to explain any mitigating circumstances to consumers.

I look forward to the Committee Stage, when we can subject the Bill to proper scrutiny. Molaim an Bille. I commend the Bill.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank those Members who contributed to the debate. I believe that all of them are members of the Committee, and they will therefore have a large degree of input at Committee Stage.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, I served on the Health Committee for five years, and I noted the way in which it interacted with the Department to improve all the legislation that was brought before it. I can think particularly of the legislation on sunbeds and on the Safeguarding Board. I think that everyone agrees that both those Bills went into Committee Stage quite strong and detailed but came out considerably improved as a result of the Committee's scrutiny. Therefore, I would like to think that the Committee would carry out its normal role when I refer this Bill to it.

Individual Members teased out various issues, and I am very open to hearing their views on them. One issue that the Chair raised was penalties. She was concerned that there may be those who would simply disobey the law, fail to display the sign and then accept the small penalty as the cost that they would pay for not displaying. I suppose that they would argue that they would make more money by not displaying their sticker than if they displayed it. Of course, as the Chair pointed out, there is the option of the district council taking the offender to court, but I would be interested to hear from Members about whether they feel the penalty scale is appropriate. I know that on the Sunbeds Bill Committee members voted to increase the penalties, and the Department quite readily accepted that. That is one issue that I think that the Committee can look at very seriously.

The Chair raised the point that everything had to be "transparent, robust and timely", and I think that that is a very good line to use about this Bill. It has to measure the consumer's interests and balance them against the needs of the industry. I think that the Bill, as it stands,

has achieved a very fair balance, but, again, I am very interested to hear Members' views.

I will deal with some specific points that were raised. Mr Fearghal McKinney asked what the definition of a food business is. That definition relates to an establishment selling food directly to consumers. It does not, at the moment, include business-to-business trade. However, the Bill provides the flexibility to extend the definition to bring other businesses within its ambit. I was fascinated by Mrs Bradley's comment about sales of food over the Internet. I have to say that that has not occurred to me before. I can see all sorts of difficulties with including that in the definition of a food establishment, but I think that it is worth the Committee looking at that to see whether it can come up with something that can deal with it. I do not know the extent of food sales over the Internet; I presume it is quite unusual, but you never know. Perhaps that is something that we need to tighten up in the modern era.

Mrs Dobson raised a series of interesting points. I will seek to deal with those first of all. She, too, asked about the definition of what constitutes a body or business selling food. The Bill provides power to make regulations to set out what type of business would be exempt from the scheme. For example, at the moment, craft shops selling small quantities of low-risk food, such as tins of biscuits, may or may not come under the definition. Again, I would be very interested in the views of the Committee and the various bodies that represent those types of retail outlets. We are very open to positive suggestions one way or the other on whether that imposes too much of a burden on those shops or is required. I will very much be directed by the Committee's views on that.

Mrs Dobson also raised the issue of the impact on local government. Mr McCarthy raised it as well. Several Members behind me were also concerned about the burden that would be placed upon district councils. Remember, of course, that district councils already carry out this function. They regularly inspect premises' food-hygiene standards, sometimes on the back of a complaint and sometimes, sadly, as a result of an outbreak of something like salmonella or other food poisoning. This is simply an extension of something that councils' environmental health officers are extremely experienced in doing. Indeed, the voluntary scheme already encompasses a large number of food retail establishments, takeaways etc. Therefore, I do not see this imposing a considerable extra burden on councils; but, again, I will be very interested to hear the wise views of the Committee on that issue.

Mrs Dobson raised the issue of when the Bill will be implemented if it is passed by the House. We are very conscious of the fact that local government in Northern Ireland is undergoing a huge overhaul at the moment. We are aware of that. The Food Standards Agency is very aware of it. It is anticipated that the Food Hygiene Rating Bill, if passed, would not be mandatory until at least early 2016. Therefore, those MLAs who are concerned about the new district councils can rest assured that they will be up and running well before that and will have the necessary experience and knowledge. We do of course realise that these councils will have larger budgets and larger numbers of environmental health officers. They should be in a better position to carry out this work.

I thank Members for their positive contributions. I think that there is very clear cross-party support for the basic ethos of this legislation. We are actually dealing with a very serious situation here; literally with life and death. In the average year, more than 20 people in Northern Ireland die as a result of consuming food in the Province. Therefore, we have to do all that we can to ensure that food establishments, takeaways, restaurants etc comply with the very highest possible standards of food hygiene and cleanliness. For me, that is a no-brainer. It is so obvious that we need to do that.

Clearly, many establishments out there have taken the voluntary approach and have already invited inspectors in. Most of them have achieved a high rating and have displayed that. I take the point that, at the moment, you see an awful lot of 4 and 5 ratings around the Province; you see very few 0, 1 and 2 ratings. I think that it is very obvious why that is. Indeed, I am told that some people who display a 0, 1 or 2 rating do not actually understand what the certificate is saying.

I would also add that, to be positive to the food industry, there is clearly an enormous benefit for an establishment to achieve a 5 rating. Mrs Cameron has quite rightly pointed out that she has withdrawn her considerable trade from an establishment based on the fact that she found out that it has only a 2 rating. Clearly, it is a severe blow to that outlet's future that it has lost the Cameron income. The industry need not fear the change of moving from voluntary to compulsory.

11.30 am

The other thing that encourages me is that, quite clearly, all the evidence from surveys shows that the public recognise and understand the process and have a large degree of confidence in it. Therefore, we are pushing an open door in educating our public as to the importance of the new scheme. I have not heard anyone today who has not been supportive of it.

I am confident that the rating Bill will provide a simple but effective public health measure that will make it easy for everyone to identify the businesses that are committed to complying with food hygiene requirements. I also believe that the Bill will provide a strong incentive for businesses to achieve and maintain compliance with existing food hygiene law. Members should recall that there is no change in the law in what is expected of businesses here. There is no upgrading or strengthening of the law; we are simply expecting businesses to comply with the existing law and to tell their clients whether they are doing that. No great onerous burden is being placed in that sense.

The scheme presents a real opportunity for local businesses to demonstrate how seriously they take food hygiene by displaying their ratings for all to see. The consistency and transparency of the scheme makes it easy for consumers to use, and it should bring increased business to the food outlets that clearly take pride in their work. I believe that the Bill will have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the health of the people of Northern Ireland. I am delighted that we are seeking to move, as Wales has, to a mandatory scheme. I ask Members to support the Bill. I look forward to working with the Committee and others with an interest in the food hygiene rating scheme as they scrutinise the Bill.

Several Members raised concerns expressed by the FSB. It has an obvious platform as the Committee goes through its scrutiny to come forward and express those concerns. It has a legitimate right to do that on behalf of thousands of its members. I will watch with great interest to see what happens at Committee Stage. I will welcome the Bill coming back strengthened, improved and thoroughly scrutinised. I commend it to the Members and wish it a speedy passage.

Mr Easton: On a point of order. Last Tuesday, in the debate on the BBC 'Spotlight' programme, the deputy First Minister made comments about unrepentant bigots in the DUP. I am certainly no bigot, and I take great offence at those comments. Will you, Deputy Speaker, take those comments away, have a look at them and come back to the House?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I reiterate the previous advice that has been given: there should be good temper and moderation during debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Second Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill [NIA 41/11-16] be agreed.*

Work and Families Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, to move the Consideration Stage of the Work and Families Bill.

Moved. — [Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): 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 is a single group of amendments — amendment Nos 1 to 6 — which remove language associated with welfare reform and make two other technical changes.

I remind Members who intend to speak that, during the debate on the amendments, they should address all the amendments in the group on which they wish to comment. Once the debate on the group is 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. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

No amendments have been tabled to clauses 1 to 4. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 (Statutory shared parental pay)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 to 6. Those amendments remove language associated with welfare reform and make two other technical changes. I call on the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, to move amendment No 1 and address the other amendments in the group.

Dr Farry: I beg to move amendment No 1:

In page 16, leave out lines 6 and 7.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 17, leave out lines 22 and 23.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

No 3: In page 20, leave out lines 43 and 44.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

No 4: In page 22, leave out lines 13 and 14.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

No 5: In clause 21, page 61, line 31, leave out "a statutory provision" and insert

> *"Northern Ireland legislation or an Act of Parliament".— [Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

No 6: In schedule 1, page 73, line 26, leave out head (b) and insert"(b) in paragraph (4), for 'paragraph (5)' substitute 'paragraphs (5) and (5A)',

> *(c) in paragraph (5), after sub-paragraph (b) insert—*
>
> *"(c) an order under Article 85ZS(6) or 107AB(4);",*

(d) after paragraph (5), insert —

"(5A) An order under Article 85ZS(6) or 107AB(4) shall not be made unless a draft has been laid

before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly."'".— [Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]

I thank the members of the Employment and Learning Committee for their detailed consideration of the Bill. As always, the Bill has got to this stage due to partnership between the Department and the Committee.

While the amendments are relatively minor and somewhat technical in nature, they are, nonetheless, necessary and reflect the detailed work carried out by the Committee, the Office of the Legislative Counsel and officials in my Department. I thank everyone involved for their efforts.

Amendment No 1 will remove paragraph (d) of section 167ZU(2), which is part of an insertion into the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 under subsection (2) of clause 5. That paragraph makes reference to the requirement of a claimant mother to have met prescribed conditions regarding her entitlement to be in the relevant employment. However, as that relates to welfare reform proposals, it is appropriate, given the present circumstances, for that paragraph to not be inserted by the Bill. It will only become relevant if welfare reform is taken forward, and, in that event, it would need to be considered as part of that package.

Amendment No 2 will remove paragraph (e) of section 167ZU(4) from the provisions to be inserted into the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 under subsection 2 of clause 5. Paragraph (e) makes reference to the requirement of the other claimant — that is, the person who is not the claimant mother — to have met prescribed conditions regarding his or her entitlement to be in the relevant employment. As with amendment No 1, the paragraph being removed relates to welfare reform proposals, and it is, therefore, appropriate that that is considered as part of any welfare reform legislation and not as part of this Bill.

Amendment Nos 3 and 4 address similar issues to amendments Nos 1 and 2 but in relation to adopters. Amendment No 3 will remove paragraph (d) of section 167ZW(2) from the proposed insertion into the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 under subsection (2) of clause 5. That paragraph makes reference to the requirement of a primary adopter to have met prescribed conditions regarding his or her entitlement to be in the relevant employment.

Amendment No. 4 will remove paragraph (e) from section 167ZW(4). That is part of the same insertion into the 1992 Act under subsection (2) of clause 5. The text that the amendment seeks to omit makes reference to the requirement of an adopter who is not the primary adopter to have met prescribed conditions regarding his or her entitlement to be in the relevant employment.

As with amendment Nos 1 and 2, the text to be omitted by amendment Nos 3 and 4 relates to welfare reform proposals and, once again, may need to be considered as part of any welfare reform package that is agreed by the Assembly.

Amendment No 5 is a technical amendment. It modifies the draft to make clear that the draft affirmative procedure should be followed for subordinate legislation provided for under the Bill that amends Northern Ireland legislation or any Act of Parliament. The amendment replaces the term, "a statutory provision", with:

"Northern Ireland legislation or an Act of Parliament"

in subsection (5) of clause 21 of the Bill. It reflects a change to drafting practice that legislative counsel has advised will be adopted in other Bills.

Amendment No 6 makes an adjustment to the Assembly procedure applicable to an order made under newly inserted article 85ZS(6) or article 107AB(4) of the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. The amendment to paragraph 4(19) of schedule 1 to the Bill ensures that any such order amending the definition of "approved foster parent" or "approved prospective adopter" as a consequence of changes to relevant DHSSPS legislation will be subject to the draft affirmative resolution procedure. As a result, no order of that kind can be made unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): To begin, I will set out the work that the Committee for Employment and Learning has done to date on the Work and Families Bill. The Committee recognises the Minister's aim in bringing forward the Bill, which is to allow parents the ability to manage their parental and work priorities with flexibility, and supports him in that endeavour. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister and his officials for his open engagement throughout on the Bill and for responding promptly to Committee concerns.

The Bill was referred to the Committee on 12 May 2014. On referral, it wrote to key stakeholders and inserted public notices in the regional newspapers seeking written evidence by 23 June. Seven organisations responded to the request for written evidence, of which three provided substantive comment. Those three organisations were invited to give oral evidence to the Committee. One took up the invitation, while the other two agreed to provide in writing any further clarification that the Committee might wish to seek.

The three organisations that made substantive submissions were the Engineering Employers' Federation Northern Ireland (EEFNI), the Confederation of British Industry Northern Ireland (CBINI) and the Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NICICTU). However, their submissions drew heavily on their responses to the Department's consultation on the general proposals rather than on the detail contained in the clauses. As a result, a number of the comments related to issues not contained in the Bill but that will be outlined in secondary legislation to be established if the Bill is passed.

The Bill refers throughout to the fact that "The Department may make regulations" and that "Regulations ... are to provide for". Consequently, it is clear that the regulations and not the Bill will provide the detail of how the rights will operate in practice.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules reported on the Bill and the subsequent regulations and noted that he was content. He pointed out that, although there are powers to make subordinate legislation throughout the Bill, the Department has explained that the more significant

regulations are subject to the confirmatory resolution procedure while more minor regulations are subject to the negative resolution procedure. He said that that seems to be appropriate.

On the issues that the submissions did make, the EEFNI, although broadly supportive of the main provisions, voiced concern about how the rights will operate in practice and how the Department will balance those rights against the needs of employers who need to be able to continue to operate their business effectively.

The CBINI also gave qualified support for the Bill. It supports the reform of the existing system but warns that, for reform to have the confidence and backing of the business community, it is imperative that, in a time of continuing economic challenge in which the burden of red tape must continue to be reduced, the system be simple so as to be truly effective.

NICICTU points out that, although it supported the Department's proposals outlined in its consultation, it is disappointed that the new Bill does not address many of its original concerns. It argues that international evidence shows that fathers are more likely to take leave that is clearly available solely to them — on the basis that, if they do not use it, they will lose it — and that shared entitlements are used mostly by mothers. NICICTU feels that the absence of reserved leave for fathers means that they are less likely to apply.

On considering the evidence, it was clear to the Committee that the actual concerns being voiced were not specifically set out in the legislation but will be developed in the subsequent subordinate legislation and guidance, which, if the Bill is passed, the Committee will be keeping a close watch over.

With that in mind and in support of the Bill's aim, the Committee formally considered the Work and Families Bill on 1 October 2014 and was content with the Bill as drafted. However, the Committee noted a number of issues during its scrutiny that it will return to and be cognisant of in coming months.

Many issues and concerns were raised by the organisations that responded to the Committee's evidence-gathering. They aired their misgivings and concerns but have not had any meaningful assurances because their issues will be dealt with through subordinate legislation and/or guidance that will be issued by the Department later.

I refer Members to pages 13 to 26 of the Committee's report on the Bill. When it put organisations' issues and concerns to the Department, the Committee was pleased with its response and will be looking to see how each one is resolved.

I will now highlight the issues on which the Committee made further comment. The CBI view on the proposed two-week negotiation period is that there are practical concerns about instances in which that period might be impossible for certain employers to implement. For example, in cases in which an employee's line manager is on annual leave or of employees who work shift patterns that do not coincide with their manager's, the negotiation period might need to be significantly longer.

The CBI warns that the period of notice could prove difficult, as ensuring temporary staff cover for short periods of leave with only eight weeks' notice could prove challenging and costly. It recommends that the two-week negotiation period therefore be a minimum guideline rather than a requirement.

With regard to the process for requesting leave, the EEFNI made the points that an employee's initial notification of leave should be binding and that employers should be able to veto an unsuitable period of leave.

11.45 am

On the issue of allowing parents to take leave in one-week blocks, there is a difference of opinion between the ICTU and the CBI. The ICTU pointed out that allowing parents to take leave only in one-week blocks is highly inflexible and will discourage shared parenting. The CBI, however, feels that allowing parents to take leave in a minimum of one-week blocks would be very difficult for employers, especially small businesses, to manage. In addition, both the EEFNI and the CBI ask that the legislation is backed up by user-friendly processes and point out that the high proportion of SMEs in Northern Ireland and the fact that the rights outlined in the Bill disproportionately impact on the small employer, mean that the secondary legislation coming from the Bill reflects the difficulty faced by these employers. The CBI argued that minimising the administrative burden on businesses must be at the heart of the Government's aims and argues that this will allow parties to focus discussions on issues of substance and minimise the opportunity for disputes based on process.

The CBI agrees with the EEFNI that the success of the legislation depends on good guidance. For the changes in the Bill to succeed, the CBI believes that it is imperative that detailed, practical and understandable guidance for employers and employees is published well in advance of April 2015 so that all involved can familiarise themselves with the new processes. That will require the legislation to be kept as clear and practicable as is feasible so that effective, user-friendly and timely guidance can be published. The EEFNI advocates the use of an at-a-glance guide setting out the main rights, with supplemental guidance providing further detail on particular aspects of those rights. The EEFNI also suggests that standard documentation, such as the notification document of the intended leave pattern, would be helpful. On this range of issues, the Committee was content with the Department's assurance that the associated guidance would be reviewed by key stakeholders.

The ICTU also has concern that the new rights for shared parental leave, as they stand in the Bill, will not have any impact on the number of fathers applying for parental leave and notes that the Department has given a commitment to:

> *"keep the uptake of shared parental leave and pay by fathers and partners under review".*

The Committee also noted this undertaking and has asked to receive further information on how and when the Department will review uptake of shared parental leave, including the terms of reference for the review. The Committee notes that the Department has tabled a number of amendments. While the Committee accepts that these are technical amendments relating to welfare reform, I am disappointed that they were not brought to the Committee during its deliberation rather than afterwards. The Committee supports the Bill and will watch closely how it is implemented.

I will now make a number of comments as the Ulster Unionist member of the Committee and seek clarification from the Minister in relation to the tabled amendments. The Minister stated that the amendments as listed on pages 16, 17, 20 and 22 are welfare reform-related. The Minister's officials were questioned a number of times during evidence sessions with the Committee about whether any part of this Bill was in relation to welfare reform. On each occasion, it was said that the Bill stood separate from welfare reform. I seek assurance from the Minister on how, if these sections are removed at this stage and should welfare reform be presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly and be accepted, he intends to reintroduce these sections and provide the protections that they entail within the Bill. I also welcome the Minister's amendments to introduce the draft affirmative process in the Bill.

Mr Buchanan: I welcome the opportunity to speak briefly on this today. The Minister has quite rightly pointed out that the amendments are minor and technical in nature and that they were brought forward as a result of the stalemate in welfare reform here in Northern Ireland. However, one of the issues of concern when the Bill was going through the Committee was shared parental leave.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. I ask the Member to ensure that he is speaking into the microphone in order that Hansard will be able to report everything that is said. Thank you.

Mr Buchanan: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. One of the issues of concern in the Committee was shared parental leave and the difficulty that that could create for small businesses. The Chair of the Committee pointed out in his deliberations that the CBI has concerns in that regard. Hopefully, that will be fully addressed by the officials and proper legislation will be in place to ensure that small businesses are not affected by this shared parental leave. Should a husband and wife work in the same business, that could have a detrimental effect on the business. I ask the Minister to ensure that proper legislation is in place to ensure that small businesses are not adversely affected by this type of scenario, should it arise in the small business sector.

We are also disappointed that the amendments that have been brought forward did not come before the Committee. As the Chair pointed out, welfare reform was not mentioned. This was said to be a stand-alone Bill, despite all the times that the officials were questioned on it.

There are some issues that we are concerned about, and perhaps the Minister will address those in his closing remarks.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I recommend the Bill as a progressive, if fairly minor, piece of legislation that gives new parents greater flexibility in organising their parental leave, if their employer agrees, and gives equal rights to adoptive parents.

As not all workers are aware of their rights to maternity and paternity support, I commend all the trades unions that are organised in involving their members in the process of implementing better working conditions in the workplace, as well as the many NGOs spearheading progressive campaigns on the issue.

The argument for providing more generous maternity and paternity rights in the workplace is being won, with more and more employers realising the importance of assisting and retaining staff through the challenges of pregnancy and raising young children. However, we need to work harder to defend the rights of working parents, especially in the context of ageing societies and low birth rates.

I point to the recent situation in the European Parliament, where my party colleague Martina Anderson MEP and other MEPs who sit as part of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left group had to strongly defend women's rights to maternity leave after the European Commission moved to withdraw the maternity leave draft directive in July. The aim of that draft directive, which has been stalled in the EU Council of Ministers for almost four years, is to strengthen women's rights by ensuring 20 weeks of fully paid maternity leave across the European Union and to ensure that women are protected on their return to work. The impasse has been caused by a blocking minority of states, made up of Ireland, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary, Sweden, Malta and Latvia. The directive also includes provision for paternity leave and special arrangements for working parents with disabled children.

Sinn Féin will continue to defend the rights of women and men to combine work and parenthood without discrimination in the labour market and in the social security systems.

Much has been said over this past number of months about welfare reform, which has been injected into every discussion, mostly by the DUP. When people start talking about welfare reform, they should at least get the facts right and tell it as it is.

Mr Ramsey: I welcome the Bill. Any Bill that comes to the House having gone through the Committee in a non-contentious way is most welcome. For that, we owe a debt to the Department for Employment and Learning staff who have been constantly briefing the Committee, our own Committee staff for their concentrated efforts over recent months and, clearly, to the Minister as well. It is a most welcome Bill

As regards families, the SDLP is committed to continuing to ensure that standards of development in early years are raised. We believe that good parental leave policies must be complemented by good family policies, including childcare, early years and nursery provision. The SDLP believes that support for the family structure is central to positive childcare policies. It is important that support be given to hard-working families, and government support for families should focus on easing external pressures on them. It is vital that the legislation be sufficiently flexible to benefit parents and children in the different social situations that they so often find themselves.

The legislation permits qualifying birth parents, adopters and intended parents in surrogacy arrangements to qualify for shared parental leave, which is crucial. The Bill is an excellent opportunity to address inequality in society by creating a culture of shared parenting. I welcome legislation that will help to reduce women's disproportionate caring responsibilities and go some way to tackling the discrimination too often felt by women in the workplace.

I take on board the comments on the legislation from, for example, Citizens Advice. It mentioned that the Bill will allow working families greater flexibility, control and choice over caring arrangements.

On the part of the Bill that deals with adopters and appointments, I believe that more must be done to help different family situations. I am glad to say that those who are planning or are in the process of adopting are considered in the parameters of the Bill. The change in adoption leave rights and the enhancement of statutory adoption pay will give adoptive parents the ability to spend 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 begin to establish a bond with their child.

A number of representations were made to us from business. On the effects that the legislation will have on business, I reiterate the importance of creating a one-stop shop. One of the key elements that came out of the consultation that we had, certainly from the business community, was, Minister, that there has to be a website to ensure that, at an early stage, businesses are aware of the changes that are coming and, more importantly, of how those changes will affect them.

We heard from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which stated that it was unaware of the need for guidance and online tools for businesses. DETI officials informed the Committee that they would aim to put those mechanisms in place as quickly as possible. I know that the departmental officials who came to us were very keen to progress that area as well. I agree with the Department's response, and I suggest that those tools are introduced before the legislation comes into effect so that stakeholders are educated and aware of all the issues. I believe that that is vital for the uptake of the scheme and, more importantly, for the success of the legislation. For example, I welcome the news that small businesses will be able to recoup 100% of statutory payments that they make, plus 3% compensation.

In conclusion, this legislation will be not only beneficial to parents, adopters and those using surrogates but will be as important to small businesses and business in our community. In fact, as it aims to mirror the content arrangements already in place, it is beneficial to users. From the SDLP's perspective, we are fully in support of this Bill.

Dr Farry: I thank all the Members who spoke for their comments. It is probably fair to say that most of the comments were of a general nature on the Bill as a whole rather than on the specific amendments. They were also about the important points on delivery and implementation and ensuring that we provide regulations that are balanced and appropriate for the situation and that proper guidance is provided through all the different media that are available to us.

I will start with the Chair's comments. I reiterate our appreciation to the Committee for its deliberations on the Bill and for the prompt delivery of the Committee report, which I and my officials have read. There are a number of aspects to that, including areas where the Committee raised concerns or caution about the delivery of certain aspects of the Bill while supporting them going into legislation. We will certainly take note of that, and the Committee will signpost us towards areas where particular work needs to be done on delivery and implementation.

The Chair also made the point, quite rightly, about the situation where fathers will perhaps be less likely to take advantage of what are shared provisions as opposed to dedicated rights that are available to them. It is worth making the point that this is an enabling Bill and is not about enforcing any particular type of situation on the parents or those who are in any relationship with the child or newborn child for how they must take forward their leave. It is about providing them with options on that. It is our expectation that the current situation where the mother takes the balance of the leave entitlement will probably remain the case, but, on the margins, if we can facilitate a change in patterns of behaviour, that is all to the good. While the Bill removes the current entitlement for additional paternal leave, the basic paternal leave is still there and the expectation is that it will be taken.

12.00 noon

Concerns have been raised by different stakeholders about the approach that will be taken to leave through consultation periods and how the leave will be allocated. On the periods in which decisions have to be made, a threshold has to be drawn that balances the needs of employers and employees. I think that the thresholds that we have set in the Bill are a fair balance in that regard. There will always be particular difficulties with any type of scheme that is put in place, but there is enough space to accommodate very particular situations that may arise and create difficulties in businesses.

It is worth emphasising that, if an agreed pattern of access to shared parental leave cannot be agreed, there will a default to the leave being taken in a single block. Ultimately, there is that protection for businesses. We also recognise the importance of making sure that the administrative burden is as simple as possible, and we will give full guidance on the implementation of the measures.

Speaking in his party-political capacity, the Chair asked for an assurance that the Bill is not related to welfare reform. Let me be very clear: the Bill is a free-standing piece of legislation that is not inspired by welfare reform nor dependent on it taking place in the rest of the UK or, indeed, in Northern Ireland. This is something that we should be doing on a free-standing basis, because it is the progressive thing to do. Also, as I will come to in a moment, it is the right thing for businesses and the wider economy. But, quite simply, no piece of legislation exists in a vacuum. All sorts of cross-references have to be made to other pieces of legislation and anticipation made of other legislative changes that are being made elsewhere.

An assumption was made that welfare reform would progress through the Chamber, but, to date, that has not transpired. I wish that it was otherwise, although I appreciate that other Members do not share that point of view. All we are doing is taking out technical references to welfare reform or its implications in the surrounding knock-on effects of the Bill, and the issue will be left to the welfare reform legislation that will be going through the Assembly. If we get to that stage, I imagine that amendments will be tabled to the Welfare Reform Bill, the current draft of which is about 18 months old and which will need to be updated in a whole host of areas. I imagine that we will be able to provide the technical amendments at that stage and that it will be taken forward in that format if we come to that situation.

Tom Buchanan and Pat Ramsey touched on the wider rationale of why we are providing shared parental leave.

At times, there was maybe a slight degree of reservation from some quarters, but, equally, there was very strong endorsement from others. Let me reiterate the rationale of why we want to do this. Shared parental leave is important for individuals and families. It is about facilitating choice and recognising that households today come in all shapes and sizes and that there are different pressures on work and the need to bring in income. In so far as the Assembly can give flexibility in that area, we should seize that opportunity and enshrine it in the policies that pertain in Northern Ireland.

There is also a very strong business rationale for the reform. I appreciate that we often get trapped by looking at the technicalities and the administrative burdens that it is perceived will be imposed, without having a full recognition of the opportunities for business and the wider economy. The Bill will make changes, albeit on the margins, and will have the effect of creating a more inclusive workforce. We want to aspire to that for a whole host of reasons. At its heart, we will be moving towards a greater maximisation of the talent pool out there.

We know that talent is spread across genders. At times, very strong segmentation in certain businesses or sectors of the economy means that we do not fully draw on the talent that is there and do not operate purely on the basis of merit, but that is what we should be aspiring and trying to do. So, if, subject to choice and decisions being made, we see greater potential for women to return to the workplace more quickly and can create another leg that allows us better to retain women in the workplace, we will move towards a greater maximisation of the existing talent pool.

I move now to the situation that may pertain in individual businesses. Businesses are aware of the clearly defined right to a paternity break. A female employee may be off work for a number of months or, on some occasions, for a period approaching a year. A business could see a situation in which an important employee could, if her partner took advantage of their shared parental leave entitlement, return sooner. So, rather than companies having employees away for a longer period, this may facilitate key personnel returning to work earlier. That situation may become more apparent at higher skill levels, so this legislation may, in its own way, add to the productivity gain occurring in our economy.

Tom Buchanan raised the issue of what would happen if a husband and wife, or two partners, worked in the same business. The same point applies. At present, parental leave entitlement lies with the mother. If the couple takes a decision to share that entitlement, the company will not see any greater level of absence. We are talking about the same level of access to maternity leave as pertains at present. The Bill creates options for that leave to be shared between partners to a greater extent than is the case at present. So, companies should not expect any greater absence in relation to the birth of a child.

Fra McCann made points about welfare reform. The position of his party has been clearly articulated. Again, I stress that this legislation has nothing to do with welfare reform; it is simply the case that it is sometimes cross-referenced in the wider context of other policy developments. This is free-standing legislation that stands entirely on its own merits. I am more than happy to return to welfare reform on another occasion, but I will not get into that debate today because it is not pertinent to our discussion. However, I echo the comments that Mr McCann made about the importance of proper maternal rights, and I stress that there is a very strong rationale for individual choice and respecting family life. There is also a very strong business rationale for why it is important that we invest in that. He referred to what is happening, sometimes negatively, elsewhere in the European Union. However, there is also a lot of good practice elsewhere in the European Union that we should seek to draw on.

Pat Ramsey referred to the wider benefits of and rationale for the Bill. I welcome his strong endorsement of the legislation. Like others, he stressed the potential additional administrative costs and difficulties that businesses may experience. I have pointed out the wider business and economic rationale for doing this, but let me focus on the flip side of the coin for a moment: how we will deal with the situation by way of regulation and guidance.

I am keen that the legislation will be in place by 1 April 2015 and that we will have a common approach to shared parental leave across the UK. There is a very strong rationale for meeting that target, particularly given the changes that HMRC will conduct in relation to the changes happening in Great Britain. If we are able to buy into that at the same time, it will make life a lot easier for all of us, including businesses. A large piece of work will be accelerated on how we work through the regulations and the development of the guidance. I have made the point already that we will look to make that as user-friendly as we can and to make full use of the different media available.

In conclusion, I will reiterate that the concept of entitlement to be in the relevant employment in this particular context is associated with a package of welfare reform proposals, which has not been agreed by the Assembly. Therefore, there is no rationale for including those paragraphs in the Bill, which is the rationale for amendment Nos 1 to 4. We are, therefore, removing references in the text of the Bill. So, for anyone with any lingering concerns, we are removing references to welfare reform from the Bill, even though I have explained it, there is no entrenchment even with the language in the Bill; it is the opposite.

Amendment Nos 5 and 6 are purely technical amendments, which adjust and improve drafting. Nonetheless, it is important that we make those changes. So, I leave those amendments before the House.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Amendment No 2 made: In page 17, leave out lines 22 and 23.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

Amendment No 3 made: In page 20, leave out lines 43 and 44.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

Amendment No 4 made: In page 22, leave out lines 13 and 14.— *[Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): No amendments have been tabled to clauses 6 to 20. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 6 to 20 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21 (Supplementary, incidental and consequential etc. provision)

Amendment No 5 made: In page 61, line 31, leave out "a statutory provision" and insert

> *"Northern Ireland legislation or an Act of Parliament".— [Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

Clause 21, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): No amendments have been tabled to clauses 22 to 24. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 22 to 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1 (Minor and consequential amendments)

Amendment No 6 made:

In schedule 1, page 73, line 26, leave out head (b) and insert "(b) in paragraph (4), for 'paragraph (5)' substitute 'paragraphs (5) and (5A)',

> *(c) in paragraph (5), after sub-paragraph (b) insert—*
>
> *"(c) an order under Article 85ZS(6) or 107AB(4);",*
>
> *(d) after paragraph (5), insert —*
>
> *"(5A) An order under Article 85ZS(6) or 107AB(4) shall not be made unless a draft has been laid*
>
> *before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.""".— [Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]*

Schedule 1, as amended, agreed to.

12.15 pm

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Work and Families Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Education Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, to move the Bill.

Moved. — [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis an díospóireacht seo a oscailt. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on this group of amendments. I should first like to address amendment Nos 1, 4, 7, 8, 12 and 15. These amendments concern the provisions agreed by the Assembly —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. I simply asked that you would formally move the Bill.

Mr O'Dowd: Sorry.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I wish to clarify to Members the subsequent procedures, the Bill having been moved. 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 two groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 4, 7 and 8, and 12 through to 17, which deal with amending existing duties of the authority, the commencement of certain provisions and committees of the authority. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 5 and 6, 9 to 11 and 18. These amendments deal with membership of the authority and technical matters.

I remind Members intending to speak that, during the debates on the two groups of amendments, they should address all of the amendments in each group on which they wish to comment. Once the debate on each group is 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 debate at Further Consideration Stage is restricted to debating further amendments to the Bill. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Mr O'Dowd: Apologies —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. I have not quite finished.

We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 to 4, 7 and 8, and 12 to 17. These amendments deal with amending existing duties of the authority, the commencement of certain provisions and the committees of the authority. Members should note that amendment No 2 is an amendment to amendment No 1; amendment Nos 1 and 2 are mutually exclusive with amendment No 3; amendment Nos 13 and 14 are mutually exclusive; and amendment Nos 16 and 17 are mutually exclusive.

I now call the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, to move amendment No 1 and to address the other amendments in the group.

Clause 2 (Functions of the Authority)

Mr O'Dowd: I beg to move amendment No 1:

In page 1, line 12, leave out subsection (3) and insert

> *"(3) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education."*.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: As an amendment to the amendment to clause 2, page 1, line 12, tabled by the Minister of Education on 03/11/14, after "promote" insert "integrated and".— *[Mr Lunn.]*

No 3: In page 1, line 13, after "promote" insert "integrated and".— *[Mr Lunn.]*

No 4: In page 1, line 14, leave out subsection (4) and insert

> *"(4) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools."*.— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 7: In clause 7, page 2, line 39, at end insert"(za) section 2(3);".— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 8: In clause 7, page 3, line 2, at end insert"(c) paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 1.".— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 12: In schedule 1, page 6, line 37, leave out from "will" to end of line 38 and insert

> *"shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(3)."*.— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 13: In schedule 1, page 6, line 38, at end insert

> *"(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the different school sectors of the Education system."*.— *[Mr McCallister.]*

No 14: In schedule 1, page 6, line 38, at end insert

> *"(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority."*.— *[Mr McCallister.]*

No 15: In schedule 1, page 6, line 39, leave out from "will" to end of line 40 and insert

> *"shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(4)."*.— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 16: In schedule 1, page 6, line 40, at end insert

> *"(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the different school sectors of the Education system."*.— *[Mr McCallister.]*

No 17: In schedule 1, page 6, line 40, at end insert

> *"(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority."*.— *[Mr McCallister.]*

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle, and apologies for jumping the gun. I am sure that you will appreciate that, after seven years of waiting to move even some form of review of public administration in education, my eagerness is well founded.

I should like to address amendment Nos 1, 4, 7, 8, 12 and 15. These amendments concern the provisions agreed by the Assembly at Consideration Stage for the Education Authority to have duties in relation to shared education and the community use of school premises, and to establish standing committees to fulfil those duties. Fortunately, in regard to shared education, there is currently no legal definition of that concept. Without one, we risk a situation where the Education Authority, when established, is placed in an untenable position. It will have a statutory obligation to promote shared education without there being a definition acceptable to the Assembly of that form of education.

As I stated during the debate at Consideration Stage, I will shortly be bringing forward a stand-alone Bill on shared education, which will provide a legislative definition and define the role of the Department and its arm's-length bodies in relation to shared education. I firmly believe that it is essential that the Assembly and the Education Committee are given the opportunity provided by the stand-alone Bill to debate and scrutinise the proposed legal definition of shared education. Therefore, rather than introduce an amendment that will define shared education, I have tabled an amendment to the effect that the duty placed upon the authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education will commence on a future date determined by the Department. That is amendment No 7.

If the authority's duty is to commence on a future date, it follows that the provision establishing a standing committee to fulfil the duty should also commence on a future date. That is the effect of amendment No 8, which is consequential to amendment No 7.

As for the duty itself, it would clearly be inappropriate to require the Education Authority to implement any high-level general duty to any extent beyond the specific powers available to it to do so. I have therefore tabled an amendment to the effect that it is the duty of the authority, so far as its powers extend, to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. That is amendment No 1.

For Members' information, I hope to publish a policy document on shared education within the next number of weeks to move that matter on.

If the duty on the authority is to be qualified in that way, then the remit of the standing committee would need to be similarly qualified to ensure that it is not established to do things that the authority itself has no power to do. I have therefore tabled an amendment to the effect that the standing committee will exercise the functions of the authority as set out in the relevant clauses of the Bill. That is amendment No 12, which is consequential to amendment No 1.

I hope that Members will support those amendments, which will allow legislative recognition of the duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education whilst providing opportunity for mature consideration of a legal definition.

Secondly, in regard to community use of schools' premises, Members will appreciate that there are practical limits as to what the Education Authority may do as regards school premises that it does not own, such as in maintained schools, most Irish-medium schools, voluntary

grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools. Notwithstanding the requirements on schools that are already in place under the education orders, I appreciate the importance of opening schools up for community use. However, as with the duty in relation to shared education, it would be inappropriate to require the Education Authority to implement a duty to any extent beyond the specific powers available to it to do so. I have therefore tabled an amendment to the effect that it is the duty of the authority, so far as its powers extend, to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools. That is set out in amendment No 4.

Again, if the duty of the authority is to be qualified in that way, the remit of the relevant standing committee would need to be similarly qualified. I have therefore tabled an amendment to the effect that the standing committee will exercise the functions of the authority as set out in the relevant clauses of the Bill. That is amendment No 15, which is consequential to amendment No 4. I hope that Members will support those amendments, which I have tabled simply to make the relevant provisions more practicable and to avoid any uncertainty surrounding their future operation. I believe that they are sensible and necessary.

I will turn to amendment Nos 2 and 3. The Assembly debated an amendment at Consideration Stage that would have placed a statutory duty on the authority to encourage, facilitate and promote integrated education. As that amendment was voted against on a cross-community basis, I am surprised to see these new amendments at Further Consideration Stage.

As I explained during the Consideration Stage debate, there already exists a duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education under article 64 of the Education Reform Order 1989. My Department continues to have a rigorous approach to that statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. The Education Authority will be accountable to and operate within the strategic framework set by my Department.

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will not, no, because I am conscious of the time restraints before the lunch break.

That will include assisting the Department as appropriate in discharging its statutory duty in respect of integrated education. In addition, the Department will hold the authority to account through the management statement and financial memorandum as it currently does with the five education and library boards.

Members will also be aware that the Department has a similar duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education under article 89 of the Education Order 1998. So, I think it is both unnecessary and not in the spirit of further amendments to the Bill, which include all sectors on the authority, to single out one sector that already has legal protection under a statutory duty from another sector that has legal protection under a statutory duty and name it in the Bill. I think it is not in the spirit of the discussions that we have had in the Chamber and outside the Chamber in relation to trying to move the Bill forward. Therefore, I will not support those amendments.

Amendment Nos 13, 14, 16 and 17 deal with the membership of the standing committees to be established to fulfil the authority's duty in relation to shared education and the community use of school premises. Amendment Nos 14 and 17 seek to ensure that the respective committees are representative of the membership of the authority. While I do not see the need for such provisions, the Bill specifies that, except for a teaching appointments committee, any committee that performs functions on behalf of the authority must be composed exclusively of members of the authority. How, therefore, could the relevant standing committees not be representative of the membership of the authority?

Amendment Nos 13 and 16 seek to ensure that the respective committees are representative of the different school sectors of the Education Authority. Again, I believe that such provisions are not necessary. As the standing committees will be performing functions on behalf of the authority, they must be composed exclusively of members of the authority. They will therefore be representative, by definition, of the membership of the authority. They could only be representative of the different school sectors within the education system to the extent that those sectors are represented in the membership of the authority. While there is nothing in those amendments that does harm to the Bill or the outworkings of the Bill, I believe that they are unnecessary. However, I await the decision of the House as to whether they will form part of the Bill. That brings an end to my deliberations on this grouping of amendments.

Ms Fearon: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for being absent during questions to OFMDFM yesterday.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Thank you.

The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension today. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business that we return to will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 pm.

2.00 pm

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair) —

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Drivers: Provisional Licence

1. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's rationale for requiring learner drivers to hold a provisional licence for 12 months before taking the driving test. *(AQO 6999/11-15)*

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): The mandatory minimum learning period, to which the Member refers, is part of a package of measures in the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill. The combination of those measures, often referred to as graduated driver licensing (GDL) has been designed to provide new drivers with experience and skills, over time, in lower-risk environments.

Integral to any such scheme is a mandatory learning period, within which learner drivers follow a prescribed programme of training. The Bill, as introduced in the Assembly, makes provision for a 12-month mandatory learning period. The rationale of this period is to encourage provisional licence holders to focus on learning to drive and not simply passing the practical driving test.

The mandatory learning period provides learners with time to take additional training, to practise and to gain experience on a variety of roads, traffic environments and weather and light conditions. By gaining this experience throughout the year, and during the different seasons and associated weather and light conditions, drivers become better prepared for solo driving after passing the test. The minimum period also accounts for differences in learning ability, which a specific number of lessons cannot address.

New drivers are over-represented in fatal and serious collisions. Over the period 2008 to 2012, R drivers, who account for fewer than 1% of licence holders, were responsible for 7% of fatalities and serious injuries. I want to encourage drivers to gain experience before they drive unaccompanied. It is this experience of real-life driving, with the benefit of a supervising driver, that the mandatory learning period seeks to encourage. The Bill is at Committee Stage, and I look forward to hearing the Committee's views on the full range of its provisions.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer and take on board the last point that he made about road safety being paramount. Will the Minister outline his Department's thinking on evidence from the Ulster Farmers' Union and driving instructors that suggests that the driving test should not be about age but driver ability? The oft-made point is that young people from a farming background may be ready for the test sooner than 12 months after they secure their provisional licence.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr McElduff for the question and his supplementary. The purpose of Committee Stage is to consult. I value input from any organisation and individual that will improve the Bill and road safety.

The organisations to which Mr McElduff referred — the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and, of course, approved driving instructors — are most valued by me and will certainly inform us, going forward. However, the contention that rural drivers or those from a farming background are better equipped for driving on the road, merely because they have driven a tractor since they were young, does not, unfortunately, stand up to scrutiny. The sad reality is that the majority of serious injuries on our roads or collisions that result in fatalities occur on rural roads — 80%, in fact.

I believe that the points made by Mr McElduff, which echo those of approved driving instructors and the UFU, are good; I will not ignore them. The Bill, as presented, is not, in my opinion, that which will finally be passed in the House. I am prepared to accept amendments to it and will possibly bring amendments to it myself, all with a view to making a Bill that is workable and which works to reduce fatalities and injuries on our roads.

Lord Morrow: Does the Minister feel that one driving test in a lifetime is adequate, bearing in mind how the volume of traffic is changing? It is changing certainly annually, but it seems that there is more and more traffic on our roads nearly daily.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Lord Morrow for his question. The point that Lord Morrow makes is one that has been made before and one that would warrant further exploration, in my opinion.

When we talk about road safety, it is not just about drivers and the fitness of people to drive. Look at how we assess fitness of vehicles on the road and their roadworthiness. Vehicles have to be tested after four years and every year thereafter, so people might quite sensibly ask, if someone passes their driving test aged 17 or 18, whether they should not be examined for 70 years thereafter, or however long they may be lucky enough to be able to remain behind a wheel. Then there are our professional drivers, as you might call them, such as HGV or taxi drivers. The taxi legislation, with which Lord Morrow is very familiar, requires new training for drivers on an annual basis to ensure that their standards of driving remain extremely high. Again, people might ask whether ordinary drivers should also have to have continued development in that respect.

Ms Lo: The Minister said that the rationale for this legislation is to improve road safety and that it particularly targets young people. Some organisations, when giving evidence, question the Minister's logic for lowering the age of learner drivers to 16 and a half. I would like to hear his comment on that. Also, there is a question about our being out of sync with the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland for a younger learner driver when they drive across the border or to other parts of the UK. Also, there is the fact that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Ms Lo: Yes, it is on the same question about lowering the age of learner drivers. What will the impact be on insurance premiums?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Ms Lo for her questions. She is probably quite right in that people giving evidence to the

Committee are questioning my logic. It is not just people who appear before Committees in this place who question my logic or the logic of many others here.

The issue of reducing the age at which someone can start learning, however, is something of a red herring. The impact of a minimum learning period on increasing the full licensing age to 17 and a half, which this legislation also does, limits the fact that provision is made in the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill to reduce the provisional age to 16 and a half, as Ms Lo has pointed out.

Recent figures demonstrate that the number of people currently achieving a full licence prior to 17 and a half years of age is limited. It is estimated that around 540 persons aged under 17 and a half currently hold a restricted or R-plate driving licence or have passed a test and not yet applied for their licence. This represents some 4·4% of the population in that category.

The fact is that, if we allow people to start learning at 16 and a half and introduce the mandatory minimum learning period of one year, people will not be on the roads until they are 17 and a half. As I have highlighted through those statistics, currently, there are people driving before they reach 17 and a half. There is an old adage that, if you are good enough, you are old enough. However, evidence from the other jurisdictions to which Ms Lo refers shows that with age comes responsibility and a reduction in the likelihood of involvement in collisions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Planning: Conservation Areas

2. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the status of a conservation officer's report in relation to a planning application within a conservation area. *(AQO 7000/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the "desirability of preserving or enhancing" the character or appearance of conservation areas under article 50(5) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. The Department has planning officers with particular expertise in conservation matters, and their advice is sought on development proposals that may impact on a conservation area. This advice is one of a number of considerations taken into account when reaching a planning decision.

The Department must give full regard to all material considerations, including the policy guidance set down in chapter 7 of Planning Policy Statement 6, 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage'; the advice and guidance in the relevant conservation area document to which the proposal relates; the relevant development plan; consultee responses; council views; objections; and any other representations made.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that the question that I put to him was not new. He quoted article 50(5) and said that full regard had to be taken by the Department. Out there, the view is that planning just ignores these reports, which obviously cost a lot of money. Does he have any notion of how he could strengthen conservation officers' power through legislation or in some other way so that their reports would actually have an impact? The experience in councils, and it has been raised many times here, too, is that they are ignored.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. I thank Mr Kelly for that supplementary question.

First, let me assure Mr Kelly and the House that these reports are not ignored, however it may seem. Believe me, I have heard concerns that they are ignored or that, shall we say, sufficient weight is not always — even not often — attached to them. As I said, the report of a conservation officer is a material consideration that must be balanced with other material considerations for each application. Each application is unique and assessed on its own merits or otherwise.

As for strengthening this policy, or perhaps giving more weight than is currently given to conservation officer reports, the Member will be aware, as will other Members, particularly those on the Committee for the Environment, that work on the strategic planning policy statement (SPPS) is well under way. We have had over 700 responses to the consultation on the draft SPPS. A summary of those responses went to the Committee just last week or the week before, and my officials and I are working through them. This SPPS is not and, in my opinion, should not be merely a consolidation of existing planning policy statements but a great opportunity to improve them.

Conservation issues will be in the mix. I will also look to see how and whether this particular element can be improved.

Mr A Maginness: In the context of what the Minister referred to, in north Belfast, we have a very old part of the city. There is Clifton Street, including Clifton House, which is a very historic building. We also have the Grand Orange Lodge building as well, which was the former headquarters of the Orange Lodge in Belfast. In addition, we have other historic buildings, such as St Patrick's Church and also maybe 'The Irish News' building — I do not know whether it is historic or not.

In that context, how would the Minister prevent an adverse impact on the development of student accommodation in that area that might feed the student population of the new University of Ulster buildings in that area?

2.15 pm

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Maginness for not just the supplementary question but the virtual tour of the north of Belfast.

I am committed to ensuring that my Department plays its full role in ensuring that the provision of student accommodation has no detrimental impact on the built heritage or the amenity of local communities. In order to achieve that and to maximise the benefits associated with investment in the area of north Belfast — there has been quite a lot of publicity around proposals and potential proposals in your constituency — I have asked my Department to explore options to develop a comprehensive approach to that form of development. However, I must also recognise that we take full account of the statutory planning process, which will include the Belfast metropolitan area plan (BMAP) and policies contained in the HMO subject plan.

I recently met the Mayor of Belfast, Nicola Mallon, about concerns that the council had with regard to some of the proposals and potential proposals and their impact on not just the built heritage but the amenity of local communities, as I said. A holistic approach to assessing and dealing with those applications is necessary to ensure that the right and appropriate balance is struck between built heritage and the economic benefits that can and should come to the local communities with investment in that area.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn. A written response will issue.

Councils: Call-in Procedure

4. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the role of the call-in procedure while councils are operating in shadow form. *(AQO 7002/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: I am committed to ensuring that the protections for the interests of minority communities in council decision-making, which are enshrined in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, apply to all decisions by the new councils, including those taken during the shadow period. Many of the decisions will establish the framework and ethos within which a council will operate once it takes on its full responsibilities from 1 April 2015.

Taking that commitment into account, section 41 of the Act, which makes provision for members to request the reconsideration, or call-in, of a council decision in specified circumstances, was brought into operation by commencement order from 2 June 2014 and is therefore available to members of a new council during the shadow period. Section 41 also requires a council to make provision in its standing orders to require the clerk to the council to obtain the opinion of a practising barrister or solicitor where the call-in has been requested on the grounds that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district.

Section 37 of the Act, which also came into operation on 2 June, places a duty on a council to make standing orders for the regulation of the proceedings and business of the council. Therefore, during the shadow period, a council is under a statutory duty to make provision for the call-in procedure. In addition, the local government regulations specify that a council's standing orders must include provision that a qualified majority is required in relation to a council's decision on a call-in made on the ground of disproportionate adverse impact. Section 38 provides the Department with an enabling power to specify in regulations the provisions that a council must incorporate in its standing orders.

As I indicated during the passage of the Bill in the Assembly, my Department intends that the call-in procedure will be specified in regulations made under section 38 as a mandatory aspect of the council's standing orders, which will ensure a consistent procedure across all councils.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that very complex answer. I am sure that everybody took in every detail of the points. Will he advise whether any shadow council so far has used the call-in procedure? Have there been any queries through his Department on any legal advice sought yet on the procedure?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Elliott for his question and supplementary. The supplementary was not as complex, nor will my answer be, you will be relieved to hear.

No council has officially gone down that route. However, there have been representations and questions from a couple of councils regarding particular decisions. There have even been questions as to whether decisions that have been made were decisions or not, let alone whether they could be called in. One that springs to mind is the representation made by Limavady council on the decision to defer making a decision on leisure facilities in Dungiven. There have been a couple of queries, but there has been no concrete action from any council on this matter, much to my relief.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that there was a major decision taken by the Londonderry and Strabane council surrounding the name of the council that had ramifications going back 30 years and all the consequences in community division that flowed therefrom. Is he aware that there will inevitably be a call-in on those grounds? What will the outcome be once that call-in procedure has been activated?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle agus go raibh maith agat don Uasal Campbell as an cheist sin. I thank Mr Campbell for that question. The major decision to which he refers is one that he may deem controversial; however, I am not sure how many others do. As the legislation and the regulations are about protecting the rights of minorities, he may feel that that warrants a call-in. He says that it is inevitable, but I have yet to hear of any approach by the council or any of its members. Perhaps, they are seeking the legal advice that is required before anyone goes down that route.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. He made reference to Limavady, which of course is only one of two councils that have switched from nationalist control to unionist control. Could the call-in procedure be used on the decision by the Causeway Coast and Glens Council to defer a decision to develop leisure facilities in Dungiven? That caused huge controversy.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Dallat for his supplementary. As he pointed out, I referred to that decision in a previous answer. It is my understanding that Limavady council or members thereof are seeking legal advice, as is required, to establish whether the decision to defer making a decision qualifies as a decision. He rightly said that the decision to defer making the decision was controversial and could be very detrimental not only to leisure provision in the Dungiven area but to community relations in the new council area.

Mr Campbell: And the Londonderry one did not?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

HGV Levy

5. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to reverse his Department's decision to enforce the heavy goods vehicle levy. *(AQO 7003/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: The HGV road user levy is a UK Government tax, which was brought in by Westminster on 1 April 2014.

Whilst I remain concerned and continue to monitor the impact of the levy on hauliers on this island, I believe that my pragmatic decision that the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) will enforce payment of the levy alongside its normal activities will have the least detrimental impact on hauliers. Therefore, I have no plans to reverse the decision. On 4 November, the Assembly affirmed my decision by voting down the prayers of annulment against the five statutory rules that provided for domestic enforcement of the levy by fixed penalties.

The levy has been developed in compliance with EU rules on road user charging. To avoid infraction, the UK Government must ensure that payment of the levy is enforced. If DVA were not to enforce the levy, the Department for Transport would have no option but to introduce its own enforcement regime in the North. I do not consider that Irish hauliers would benefit from another enforcement agency operating here, as that would significantly increase the chance that they would be delayed en route as a result of encountering multiple roadside checks. In addition to the greater efficiencies that having the DVA enforce the levy would bring, there are financial benefits in staff and equipment resources that will give the DVA greater flexibility in ensuring that road transport in Northern Ireland is as safe as possible.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will know that the HGV levy will have a very negative impact on the North/South economy, not least in my constituency of Newry and Armagh. Has the Minister sought to re-engage the British and Irish Governments to try to achieve an arrangement that reflects the situation on the island of Ireland? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Brady for that supplementary question. This was the subject of a long enough debate last week. Coming from a border constituency myself, I fully recognise the impact that the levy could have on cross-border trade and cross-border traders. Prior to making the decision, I engaged in exhaustive correspondence and negotiation with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland and the Department for Transport in London with a view to initially avoiding the introduction of the levy here and then seeking exemptions around particular routes, the A5 being one of particular relevance to my constituency and that of others. I secured from Minister Robert Goodwill in the Department for Transport a commitment that this would be monitored. If we, Mr Brady or the hauliers themselves are able to provide evidence of any detrimental impact being caused to business by this levy, the enforcement and implementation of the levy here in the North could be reviewed.

Mrs Cameron: Following on from the suspiciously long debate on the issue last week, could the Minister outline what action the Department for Transport at Westminster would have taken if the Assembly had not approved the regulations to enforce the road user levy?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mrs Cameron for that question. As outlined in my initial answer to Mr Brady, had I not decided to proceed with enforcement of the levy here through the DVA, the Department for Transport, due to EU regulation and rather than face EU infractions, would have had no option other than to come here to enforce the levy itself. I indicated during the debate and again today that having one local agency doing that could, should and will work to the advantage of these hauliers, rather than having multiple agencies carrying out roadside checks that would lead to delays that would inevitably and definitely have a detrimental impact on the business of hauliers. We were able to secure from DfT funding that will enable us to provide three additional jobs in DVA to enforce the levy and £0·75 million that can be spent on automatic number plate recognition cameras that can be used not just around levy enforcement but to help DVA with the other checks that it has to do to ensure the roadworthiness and safety of the vehicles using our roads here in the North.

2.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to topical questions.

Built Heritage

T1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his commitment to the protection and development of the built heritage. *(AQT 1721/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Eastwood for that question. The built heritage of Derry, as Mr Eastwood well knows, is a key selling point for the city, in the attraction of visitors and the encouragement of inward investment.

Mr Wilson: Are you going to guard auld Derry's walls?

Mr Eastwood: No. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Durkan: It is also a key focus of pride for residents, and that is why I am committed to ensuring that important work to realise its full potential continues into the future. Over the past 10 years — I heard Mr Wilson calling out there; he will remember — my Department has worked in partnership with Derry City Council and other key stakeholders on a range of built heritage projects in the city. That has included delivery of the Walled City signature project, focusing on the conservation of the walls and six key buildings, including the Guildhall. We have also worked with the Foyle Civic Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver the Townscape Heritage project. We also provided assistance to an Gaeláras and the Inner City Trust to purchase and conserve two very important listed buildings.

My Department also works with partners to build on the efforts of 2013 to offer events focused on the city's heritage and increase awareness. It delivered an Archaeology Day event in June and a strong celebration of the city's built heritage, focused on European Heritage Open Days in the summer.

Of course, a key area of action is in the processing of applications for planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent. I am committed to ensuring that my Department continuously seeks high standards of design and protects the special architectural and historic character of the city's buildings and areas throughout this process.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the work done on the built heritage, the protection and support of it, has been of great economic benefit to our city? Will he further give a commitment — if he is able, in these economically straitened times — to continuing that work and ensuring that we have protection

for the built heritage and the economic spin-off as a result of that?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Eastwood for his supplementary question. He touches on the economic benefit that can be generated through investment in the built heritage, and that is something that cannot be denied. It has been evidenced that for every £1 spent by the Department on built heritage — be it on restoration or renovation of listed buildings — a further £7 from other sectors is attracted. That is of major benefit to any area, but particularly to an area like Derry where, I suppose, other economic opportunities are so unfortunately sparse.

I remain committed to the built heritage in Derry. However, given the swingeing cuts in the Budget, I cannot say that the commitment that has been given by the Department over recent years can be maintained. That is something that causes me great concern and will cause great concern to people not just in Derry but right across the North, those with an interest in built heritage and those who see the economic driver that our built heritage has become.

Driver and Vehicle Agency Staff

T2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he agrees that the coming of Christmas is topical and, if so, what cooperation he has had from other Departments and from London to make Christmas a little bit more hopeful and to extend some goodwill and prosperity to the former Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) workers in Coleraine who are now about to run out of the temporary work they were given by DSD. *(AQT 1722/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Dallat. It is a sign of the times, I suppose, that Christmas becomes topical as soon as we reach Halloween.

I understand and sympathise fully with the DVA workers who are in limbo and who face great uncertainty. As a result of the DFT decision, 272 DVA licensing staff became surplus. To date, 118 of those staff have been redeployed to other duties or cleared by other means; for example promotion or retirement and transfer to DOE posts, relocated by me from Belfast to Coleraine. In total, that was about 50 administration jobs.

The agreement of the previous Minister for Social Development to temporarily provide work for staff in Coleraine was very much appreciated, and it helped to ensure that more than 60 surplus DVA staff had been utilised in meaningful work on behalf of the Child Maintenance Service since the licensing services ceased at the end of July. However, that work is temporary and will continue only until the end of this year; the complement of staff required for that work has already begun to reduce. I wrote to Minister Storey on this just last week, and he informed me that there is no scope for DSD to transfer any further work to Coleraine on a permanent or temporary basis.

One glimmer of hope for staff there is a guarantee or an assurance that I have received from the DVLA in Swansea that it will contribute significantly to an early-exit scheme for workers. It is geographically limited, but it is not limited to these DVA staff and could and should free up positions in the Civil Service in and around the north-west to which they can transfer.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I commend him for the strenuous efforts that he has made to alleviate the plight of those wonderful people in Coleraine. I have to say, though, in my supplementary question that I am extremely disappointed that he has not been able to report greater cooperation from other Departments. Can the Minister update us on the situation not only with the jobs but with the services? My indication is that there are horrendous problems.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Dallat for that supplementary and his recognition of the battle, I suppose, fought by me and my predecessor, Minister Attwood, to retain these jobs. That was not just about protecting public servants but was about protecting a high-quality public service that people in the North had come to expect. Sadly, since the transfer to Swansea, there has been, without doubt, a diminution of that service. I am sure that that has manifested itself in many representations and calls to me from other Members of the House and councillors across the North representing constituents who are encountering difficulties in Swansea.

I have followed this up continuously with Minister Goodwill, and I have to say that, in response to a letter to him, I got a letter from Claire Perry MP. She replied to me recently, confirming that she is aware that there were issues with what they deem a small number of records, reassuring me that they would be rectified as a matter of priority. DVLA has since stated at official level that the initial teething problems have largely been rectified and that any issues identified with individual records are being dealt with through a normal line of business. I also provided a special hotline for elected Members to Swansea, should they have any particular constituent complaints. They contend that most of these issues have been rectified, and I think that that is reflected in the reduction in the amount of correspondence that I am getting on these issues.

NIEA-owned Property: Accessibility

T3. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what measures he is taking to ensure that Northern Ireland Environment Agency-owned property is as accessible as possible to the public. *(AQT 1723/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Miss McIlveen for her question. As I outlined in my answer to Colum Eastwood, I fully appreciate and recognise the value of our built heritage, not just as part of our rich tourism product but as something to be cherished and enjoyed by residents here. It is my intention to ensure that our built heritage assets remain as accessible as they have become over recent years to tourists and locals alike.

Due to unforeseen budgetary cuts in the summer, I had to make a decision that resulted in a reduction of staffing at some of the assets. A lot of the staff at those locations are employed on a temporary or seasonal basis, and some had to be let go a couple of weeks earlier than normal. However, by shifting around the workforce in the NIEA, I have managed to address those problems, and, hopefully, they will be back at full throttle next summer.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. As a Strangford MLA, I find it disappointing to see built heritage closed, such as Scrabo Tower, which closed quite recently, Newtownards Priory and Kirkistown Castle, which

I wrote to the Minister about recently. Along with other striking historical structures that have been closed to the public for many years, they could draw additional tourists to those areas. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that sites are opened and are tied into a tourism strategy that will benefit the people who live and work near them, particularly in my constituency?

Mr Durkan: I thank Miss McIlveen for that supplementary question. In particular, I have gone to some effort to ensure that Scrabo Tower is reopened. I have not yet got round to replying to the correspondence she referred to, but I will do so in the near future. I am sure that it will reflect what I am saying here, which is that I am committed to exploring any option that is available to us, as a Department, or the NIEA, as an agency, to ensure that those facilities can be opened, so that we can maximise the benefits of these assets to the local community.

Flooding: South Belfast Compensation Payments

T4. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the number of compensation payments made in south Belfast not only for the floods on 16 October but following the much worse floods in 2012 and during the last 10 years, if the scheme existed then, and thanked the Minister for his intervention to provide emergency compensation payments to those families in south Belfast that were devastated by the floods on 16 October. *(AQT 1724/11-15)*

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Ó Muilleoir for his question and welcome him to the Assembly.

In October, heavy rainfall resulted in flooding in properties in south Belfast. The Member, of course, is well aware of that. I am sure that he was up to his eyes in it, or at least to his knees. I activated the scheme of emergency financial assistance, which allowed residents affected by flooding to apply through their local council for a £1,000 emergency grant. That practical assistance is available only to those who have suffered severe inconvenience, to help make their home habitable as quickly as possible.

I do not have figures for the floods a few years ago. They predated my time in office. However, I understand that some 35 homes in south Belfast were affected by the more recent flooding in October and were entitled to the £1,000 payment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but I do not have time for a supplementary question.

Finance and Personnel

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that questions 7 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Banking Charges

1. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any engagement he has had with the banking sector to address the differences in banking charges across the island of Ireland. *(AQO 7013/11-15)*

2.45 pm

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Whilst I meet the local banks regularly, the focus of the discussions is on current levels of lending to small and medium-sized enterprises and restructuring to ensure that local areas continue to have adequate access to financial services. I would be happy to raise with the banks any concerns or evidence in respect of customers in Northern Ireland being unfairly subject to higher bank charges, but I am not aware that it is a major issue. In addition, differences in banking charges are a consumer issue, which, perhaps, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment would be in a better position to take forward. It is, of course, a matter for the Irish Government to represent the interests of banking customers resident in the Republic of Ireland, although that should not be to the detriment of Northern Ireland customers.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. I heard what you said, Minister, but local banks have higher standard and non-standard bank charges than the same banks operating in the South and, indeed, some of the British banks. Does the Minister agree that that is not appropriate and that the issue should be addressed promptly?

Mr Hamilton: As I said in my response, I am not aware of it being a major issue. If the Member is in receipt of different evidence, I am happy to look at it. In fact, if the Member wishes to furnish me with any information that she has on differences or perceived discrepancies between banking charges on this side of the Irish border versus the other, particularly within the same bank — bearing in mind, of course, that whilst they may be part of the same group, they are different companies and operate in different currencies — I would be very content to do so. There are, perhaps, a range of explanations for why it may be the case, but, as of yet, I have not received a wealth of correspondence from anyone suggesting that it is a problem. However, if the Member has been informed differently, I would be happy to take receipt of that information and take it up with the banks in the regular meetings that I have with them.

Lord Morrow: What progress has the access-to-finance implementation panel made to date?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The House will recall that the access-to-finance implementation panel was established by my counterpart the Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster and me to take forward the recommendations in Minister Foster's economic advisory group's report on access to finance. We have been very well served by the members on the panel, namely, Russel Griggs, who heads up the appeals mechanism for the British Bankers' Association; John Trethowan, head of the Irish Credit Review Office: and Ann McGregor, who will be familiar to many in the House as the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce. Their direct experience with banks and local businesses has been invaluable to Minister Foster and me in improving access to finance. We took receipt of their report and its recommendations, which covered four broad areas: looking at the structure of our banking sector in Northern Ireland, which is recognised as being different and unique to this part of the United Kingdom; property overhang, which the Member and the House will be familiar with as being a particular problem in

Northern Ireland; the education needed across the board on the changed circumstances in banking in Northern Ireland; and, importantly, and something that we can take forward quite quickly, the need for banks, business and government to work much better together and to improve communication between them.

Members will be aware of the difficulties that we have had as a House, and which the Committees have had, in engaging with banks in the past. If there is an attempt, and I believe there to be a genuine willingness on the part of banks, to engage better with government, we will all be the beneficiaries. The recommendations were put to the joint ministerial task force on banking. The Secretary of State, Treasury and business Ministers from Whitehall were also present. There are many parts of the recommendations that they can take on board as well. I put on record my thanks to the members of the panel for their work to date.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister said that there is an overlap with DETI, but are there any recommendations that could be followed up in relation to your discussions with banks and small businesses on procurement in the public sector or have any been actioned? Further to that, have the banks made any threat of closure to some small businesses?

Mr Hamilton: That is a fairly wide-ranging question. The Member has successfully inserted the issues of procurement and small and medium-sized enterprises into a question about banking. It is an area that I receive a lot of correspondence about from time to time, not least from the Member and others. I appreciate that it is impossible to satisfy everybody with regard to procurement. There are always winners and losers, given the nature of the contest that goes on for public sector tenders, which are sizeable. We are a large customer in Northern Ireland. Government spends about £2·6 billion each year on public procurement. I am content that we have managed, in so far as we can, to strike a balance between value for money and ensuring that local small to medium-sized enterprises get a fair chunk of the business.

There is always scope for improvement, and I am always willing to listen to people who will suggest that improvements can be made. Some 81% of contracts between April and August have been awarded to SMEs, with 74% of contracts awarded to Northern Ireland firms. So, Northern Ireland firms do pretty well in respect of government procurement in Northern Ireland.

With regard to issues with banks and small to medium-sized enterprises, we are seeing from the published lending data that, as a result of the work put in over the last number of years, there is a loosening up in the availability of cash to small to medium-sized enterprises. It is not quite right yet, and it is not quite where we need it to be, but there is an improvement, with a sizeable increase between quarter 1 and quarter 2 of this year and a year-on-year increase. So there are signs that there is an improvement in the availability of finance for small to medium-sized enterprises, which is so essential for wanting to grow our economy.

Civil Service: Flexible Working

2. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what savings could be made by the implementation of further flexible working options across the Civil Service. *(AQO 7014/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Civil Service is generally regarded as an exemplar employer in its flexible working human resource policies. The Civil Service offers a range of flexible working patterns such as flexitime, term-time and part-time working and job sharing to support staff in the balance between their work commitments and life responsibilities. Whilst there is a guiding and overriding principle that the flexibility should be achieved without adverse effect on the overall efficiency of Departments or on service to the public, the aim of the flexible working policies is not primarily to reduce costs.

My Department provides the technology to support a range of flexible working options. However, decisions to deploy technology to support a more flexible or agile work style are a matter for individual business areas in Departments.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. This morning, the former Finance Minister was involved in a very interesting discussion on Radio Ulster. Despite the different political perspectives, productivity featured, which would be no bad thing for all aspects of the economy. Are there any other steps that the Civil Service could take through flexitime to increase productivity, which would be a bonus for all concerned?

Mr Hamilton: I heard the Member's contribution on the radio this morning. We might come on to that, as question 4 is probably more relevant to that. So I do not want to say anything about that just yet.

In the circumstances in which we find ourselves, with less money available to government in Northern Ireland to spend, we want to see increases in productivity. That can be a challenge in the circumstances, but, irrespective of the circumstances, we should always seek to increase productivity across the board. I appreciate that being a more flexible employer and making new practices, new policies and new technologies available to our staff is important.

We had a short but, nonetheless, useful debate on the subject yesterday in the Assembly, and we were able to highlight some things. Whilst there was understandable criticism of some elements of our policy development by the Committee in its report, it was an opportunity for me to highlight where we have been doing a good job in becoming an exemplar, particularly in the use of teleconferencing. The Member will be interested to know that, in his constituency, on a daily basis, NI Direct staff in Belfast have teleconferencing meetings with their counterparts in Londonderry, which allows staff to work closer to home.

We have also developed a range of business zones, or hubs, across Northern Ireland. That is something that I am keen to take forward with the Department where opportunities might arise. So we have some in Belfast and Castle Buildings on the Stormont estate. There is also one in Marlborough House in Craigavon and one in Academy House in Ballymena, and they allow staff to plug into the system securely, even though they are not based in those buildings. There is a range of other measures that we have been able to bring forward. My job is to ensure that the policy is there and the technology is there. It is very much up to the Departments, where and when appropriate, to take that forward. I will not be found wanting in making sure that the policies and the technology are there to allow increased productivity in the way that the Member suggests.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin agus tá ceist agam don Aire faoin chóras oibre solúbtha san earnáil phoiblí. I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister heard the debate yesterday on flexible working. One of the points made during that debate related to the considerable savings made through flexible working arrangements in Whitehall Departments. Does the Minister agree that it is preferable to make savings through the promotion of flexible working arrangements rather than a reduction in the headcount in the public service?

Mr Hamilton: I do not actually agree with the premise that the Member is putting forward. When we are facing — as we are in the next financial year — over £200 million worth of reductions in public spending, and when we are looking at a public spending landscape to the end of this decade where 13% in real terms reduction is what we could face in cuts to our spending, which would be equivalent to over a further £1 billion coming out of public spending in Northern Ireland, with the best will in the world, the adoption of all of the flexible working practices that you could think of will not bridge that gap. For example, if you take Marlborough House as the business zone that allows staff to work there even if they are not actually based in Marlborough House in Craigavon, the indicative monthly saving on travel costs to those staff is £5,300. We would need a lot of savings like that across different places to bridge a £200 million spending gap, never mind a £1 billion spending gap.

We can certainly use that to help make savings, although it is not the principal objective. The principal objective for me is to ensure that you get better work/life balance, that people are working closer to home, and that it fits in around their care and the other needs that they might have as ordinary citizens. Of course, you will not get significant savings through flexible working if you do not have a commensurate reduction in the footprint of the Civil Service estate across Northern Ireland, and that is something that we have been aggressively pursuing. The asset management strategy is seeking to realise, and has been realising, over £15 million of savings a year as we consolidate the Civil Service office estate. However, with the best will in the world, and with respect to the Member, I do not think that adopting flexible working policies is going to see us through a £200 million spending shortfall in Northern Ireland, never mind a £1 billion spending shortfall between now and the end of the decade.

Mrs Cochrane: Has the Minister assessed whether there are any gender differences in the uptake of the current flexible working practices and, if so, are those a barrier to women progressing in the Civil Service?

Mr Hamilton: No, I have not assessed whether there are any gender differences. As we talked about yesterday during the debate, sometimes there is a focus on flexible working being around flexitime, which is available to a wide range of civil servants, or it is about homeworking and things like that. However, it can be about job sharing and other aspects that may be, I am guessing, more prevalent among female members of staff. I have no evidence to back that up, but I will certainly dig that out for the Member and provide her with it. It may be helpful in revealing whether there are issues around the take-up, particularly by female members of staff and whether that is a barrier to progression to the Senior Civil Service, where, of course, we have an issue about attracting more women into Senior Civil Service grade posts.

Revenue v Expenditure

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his proposals for increasing local revenue whilst decreasing local expenditure. *(AQO 7015/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: The Executive are facing a 1·6% real terms reduction in their resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) in 2015-16. Combined with a number of central and departmental pressures, that means that all Departments will be required to deliver significant savings in 2015-16 and beyond. The draft Budget, which I announced on 3 November, sets out the Executive's plan for a balanced budget in 2015-16.

The only strategic lever open to the Executive to raise significant amounts of additional funding is the regional rate, which contributes approximately £650 million to public services. The Executive have agreed that, in 2015-16, regional rates will increase by the rate of inflation only. I consider it unfair to ask our citizens to pay more at a time when our economy is still recovering. For the most part, the power to generate additional income lies with individual Departments rather the Executive as a whole. Although no specific proposals have been included as part of the draft Budget, Ministers are encouraged to consider options for increasing revenue where appropriate.

3.00 pm

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Has the Minister considered any new progressive levies that might broaden the revenue base?

Mr Hamilton: I am tempted to put it to the back to the Member to suggest where he thinks that could take place. We have to be careful. I know that the Member and his party are prone to thinking that money grows on trees sometimes. Even just inserting the word "progressive" in front of something almost seems to suggest that it takes away the pain of having to pay any tax, but people and businesses have to pay in some way.

A study has been undertaken by my Department, which will conclude very soon, into additional tax-varying powers that we might want to take on as an Assembly. Some of those that might be in a more favourable position are things like landfill tax or stamp duty. It is interesting to observe what they are doing in Scotland at the minute, where they are attempting to have a more progressive stamp duty land tax system put in place or a transactional tax as I think they call it. I am open to looking at all of those. I do not think that they would have the same transformative effect on our economy as, for example, the likes of corporation tax would, but they are interesting to look at nonetheless, and if they provide some benefit for Northern Ireland and are affordable, I would be supportive of devolving them, particularly if they have a defined social and/or economic benefit.

We have to bear in mind that our ability to raise revenue off a very small tax base is limited and, even if it was progressive, somebody still has to pay for it. Whilst the economy, in my view, is recovering, doing a lot better and

improving all the time, we have to be mindful and very careful about increasing the tax take from our citizens at a time when many of them are still feeling under significant pressure.

Mr Campbell: It is refreshing to hear the Minister directly answering questions. It is refreshing when compared to his DCAL colleague last Monday, who refused to. Could I ask the Minister — *[Interruption.]* I obviously hit the bullseye again.

When the discussions and debates are going on — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Campbell: — in response to the draft Budget, has he outlined or identified any areas of additional revenue that he may begin potentially to explore beyond that stage?

Mr Hamilton: Some have tried to characterise the Budget as not raising revenue at all. It does include an increase in our rates, and the regional rate will go up by the rate of inflation, which I think is the right level for it to go up by. I think that people understand that our costs are rising, just as their costs are rising, and I think that an inflationary increase is acceptable. Anything beyond that, and you are into the sort of difficulties that I was outlining to Mr Ó hOisín in terms of the pressures that households are under. Our rates take will go up because of increasing the regional rate by the rate of inflation.

I think that there is limited scope for other charges or costs to be implemented. I am happy — "content" is probably a better word — to look at a range of other measures that might have broader political support, and it is important that, if we start to entertain other ideas, they have a measure of broad political support and cannot just be one party or another party introducing it itself through a Department.

I am thinking of things like rates. Rates is what is called an unhypothecated tax, where the money comes in and goes to a range of services. It does not go to particular services. I would be content and prepared to look at hypothecating revenue from some sources going to particular areas. I am thinking primarily of things like prescription charges and a reintroduction of some level of prescription charges so long as the revenue is targeted towards some of those pressures that our colleague the Health Minister is facing over drugs for cancer and other serious illnesses.

I listened with interest to the contribution by the two vice chancellors last week. A similar argument could be made for a small increase in student fees that would go to support the higher education sector through some of the difficulties it is going to have in the next financial year. I am happy to explore and look at those things, but I think it needs a measure of reality in all parts and broad support around the Chamber —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up, Minister.

Mr Hamilton: — for doing those sorts of things.

Mr Kinahan: Following on in the same way, has the Minister looked at and discussed with Westminster ways of gearing more money out of the income that we get, either from the Treasury or from others, so that we could make more use of the money that we get to lever more money from other sources?

Mr Hamilton: I think one of the ways in which the draft Budget does that is through the proposal to create an investment fund. Mr Cree is just over the Member's right shoulder; he is a frequent questioner in the House about the use of financial transactions capital. That is an innovative and imaginative way in which we can use that financial transactions capital. We actually run the risk of not being able to spend all of our allocation this year.

The investment fund that I speak about ticks the box that the Member is talking about because it is going to put in about £100 million of financial transactions capital over the next number of years and will leverage in around £1 billion additional investment from, we hope, the European Investment Bank. So that is extracting better value out of the money that we receive from Treasury. I am thinking about imaginative and creative ways of exploiting that and getting, in that case, a 10:1 benefit out of it.

Living Wage

4. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the net local savings and increases in receipts that would be generated through the introduction of a living wage. *(AQO 7016/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: I do not see how the introduction of a living wage would impact on savings or receipts in Northern Ireland. Whilst an analysis of the economic impact of replacing the minimum wage with the living wage has not been conducted by my Department, the key issue is that any increased tax receipts would accrue to the Treasury, as would any social security benefits savings.

Whilst the Northern Ireland Executive might in theory benefit from increased revenue through the regional rate, any impact is likely to be marginal at best. It is also important to recognise that the living wage for Northern Ireland may be lower than in the rest of the UK, reflecting the lower house prices and the support that the Executive are providing by holding rates low and not introducing water charges.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer so far. I hear what he has said but does he not agree with me that an increase in wages would actually boost the economy and lift a lot of our people out of poverty? Will he commit to carrying out a full and detailed analysis of the potential impact of the living wage on the local economy?

Mr Hamilton: The Member and I will not disagree about whether increased wages are a good thing. In fact, the essence of the previous Minister's contribution on the radio this morning was that what we want to see in our economy is increasing wages. That is precisely what the economic strategy that has been agreed by the Executive is all about. As Mr Wilson pointed out today, the majority of the jobs that Invest Northern Ireland has attracted have been for well in excess of the median wage in Northern Ireland. That in itself is a way in which we can combat low pay in our economy — by attracting new jobs that pay in excess of the average wage. That is something that we should continue to pursue. It is a worthy goal of our economic strategy. It is not even a worthy goal; it is something that we have actually been achieving.

I do want to see wages increase. I think that there is an obligation on employers, as the economy improves and they see their own positions as companies improve, to pass on the benefits of those improvements to their staff. Whilst I and other colleagues in the House could ream off a whole selection of statistics that show that our economy is growing — economic growth is happening, unemployment is going down, employment is going up, property prices are rising; there is a whole range of indicators — the one place in which I do not think economic recovery is being felt is in people's pockets. That is why I think it is right that we keep household taxes low in Northern Ireland, but we have to be mindful that that is caused by the fact that perhaps their wages have not been increasing, or, particularly in the private sector, their wages have gone down over the last number of years. So I do want to see, as the economy grows — I think that all of us would want to see, as the economy grows — employers uplifting the pay of their employees. I think that we would all agree with that.

As for conducting a study, I have nothing against it. I am not entirely sure, given the nature of the subject, whether it is my Department's responsibility or the Department of Enterprise's responsibility to do something like that. Certainly, it is something that I will consult colleagues on.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I wonder, Minister, whether you would be willing to introduce a living-wage condition as part of public procurement contracts.

Mr Hamilton: This was the subject of a debate some time ago in the House, and, as far as I am concerned, the issues have not radically changed. Again, we want the people who are winning procurement contracts to pay those who work for them an appropriate wage. The difficulty, I think, is that there is a range of issues that we would have to be mindful of if we were to seek to enforce it in all Government contracts.

The first is that it is likely that the successful contractor would push the price onto us as the customer, and that we would see the price that we are paying for contracts go up as a result of increased costs. That would ultimately mean, as it happened across the board, that there would be less money in the public purse to spend on projects that benefit Northern Ireland.

There would also be an issue of policing it: how would we police it and ensure that they were doing it? There would also be a situation where somebody in a firm was generally getting paid a normal wage that was below the living wage, but for Government contracts they would be on a living wage. You could have a situation where for three days of the week they were getting paid a living wage, and for two days of the week they were back down to, say, the national minimum wage. There are issues and practical difficulties. It is not something that I am pursuing as a policy. I imagine that, for most of the contracts that we are letting, people are being paid around or above the minimum wage anyway, but I think that there are practical concerns that we would have to bear in mind if we were to head down that route.

Mr Lyttle: Does the Minister agree that one of the most important ways to increase people's wages is for the Executive to prioritise investment in the skills of our community? I ask him whether he thinks that the 10% reduction included in his most recent Budget reflects that priority.

Mr Hamilton: I hope that the whole House, including the Member and his party colleagues, recognise the very difficult financial circumstances that the Executive find ourselves in. It would be incredibly difficult; every area of public spending, at Budget time, becomes a priority. I am already starting to hear representations from a wide range of groups saying that their area of funding should not merely be protected but increased. Whenever those representations come forward, I very rarely get any suggestions from those people as to where the money might be found, what other budget it might be taken from, or what source of revenue might be increased to bridge the gap.

I have said — I think that I said it last Monday — that the area of the Budget settlement that I am least satisfied with is probably the Department for Employment and Learning's settlement. There are reasons to do with how the Minister put forward his bids. They were not inescapable bids, which would have allowed me to meet them much more easily than I might otherwise have been able to. However, I am prepared to work with him, and I will be meeting him in the next number of weeks. I am prepared to meet those in the broad university/college sector, and others as well, to see what we can do in these difficult circumstances.

Let us bear in mind that money is not just going to drop from the sky to the Executive between draft and final stage to allow us to give it all to universities or colleges, much as we might like that. However, I am prepared to commit myself to working towards doing that. It is an area of the Budget that I would like to see increased, or certainly the impact of the cuts on it reduced, between draft and final Budget. However, that will take considerable effort, and it will not be an easy task, given the financial circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners: £20 million

T1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain why, although the Executive were to receive, as part of this Budget, £20 million from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, they actually did not. *(AQT 1731/11-15)*

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Seo í mo cheist ar an Aire. De réir an Bhuiséid atá i réim faoi láthair, bhí £20 milliún le teacht ó Choimisinéirí Chalafort Bhéal Feirste, ach níor tháinig an t-airgead sin chuig an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire cad chuige nár tháinig an t-airgead sin.

In case you think that that was a Gregorian chant, it was not. *[Laughter.]* A Gregorian chant is a form of liturgy that came into vogue during the reign of Pope Gregory. *[Laughter.]*

3.15 pm

Mr Hamilton: I am glad that the Member clarified that that was not a Gregorian chant. If that was anything to go by, I certainly do not think that a recording career awaits him.

The Member is right that the current Budget that we are in, which is the 2011-15 Budget, was predicated on "releasing

value" — I think that was the term that was used — from the Port of Belfast. The Port of Belfast is one of our biggest and most profitable companies in Northern Ireland, and there was a widespread view in the Executive that there was value to be extracted from it. That is because the port has done incredibly well not just in growing its core business of being a port but principally in the development of land in its ownership. Whilst I supported seeking to get that £20 million from the port, unfortunately that has not been possible due to legal difficulties. I am incredibly disappointed that the Department for Regional Development has not pursued that £20 million with the gusto that I would have expected it to. I would not be alone in taking the view that there was never really seriousness in that Department about pursuing that £20 million. That is why we are in the situation now where we do not have it.

I have had to restore that £20 million to the baseline in next year's Budget, the 2015-16 Budget, because I do not think that it would be feasible to continue without doing that or dealing with the issue conclusively. In monitoring rounds in the last number of financial years we had been allocating £20 million to the port, although we have not agreed to do that this year because of the difficult circumstances that we are in in-year.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat arís, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra chuimsitheach sin. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for that comprehensive answer. Does the Minister agree with me that the Executive have been hoodwinked by the Harbour Commissioners? Will he now give us an assurance that he will make efforts to ensure that we receive the £20 million that is due to us?

Mr Hamilton: I am not sure that I would agree with the characterisation of being "hoodwinked". Whilst next year's Budget will not be predicated on releasing £20 million from the port, I do not think that we as an Executive should give up on the pursuit of releasing value from the port. It is, after all, a public asset, and, whilst I am not pleased with the endeavours made by the Department for Regional Development, I am equally not pleased with the way that the Harbour Commissioners have behaved in this respect. In my view, they have not been willing to meet with the Executive to meet halfway or even to compromise in some way. This is a publicly owned asset that is operated on our behalf by the Port of Belfast and the Harbour Commissioners. It is doing pretty well, and I commend the Harbour Commissioners for their stewardship of the Port of Belfast and for the development of land around it. However, I think that it is only right and proper that, occasionally, although not all the time, government here at Stormont should seek to release value from it that can be deployed elsewhere on behalf of our citizens. I think that is perfectly reasonable, and I do not think that it should be met by the threat of legal challenge by the port. They should seek to work with us to release value from it as a one-off or on a short-term basis.

The fact that it is not in the draft Budget does not mean that I have given up on it. I am not sure whether the same could be said for the Minister for Regional Development. I feel that he gave up on it some time ago, and, as a result, we are in a position where his Department is £20 million worse off this year.

Commercial Rates: Review

T2. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the review of commercial rates. *(AQT 1732/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: Most of the fieldwork for the review of non-domestic revaluation has concluded. Some final bits and bobs of work are going on. I hope that we will be able to publish a draft list of the new valuation of our 70-odd thousand non-domestic properties across Northern Ireland within weeks.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for that update. Given that we have seen some high-profile closures in my city, including Austins, which has, thankfully, been bought this week from the receivers, can the Minister tell us whether the review will do anything to prevent major established businesses in my city and other towns and cities across the North going out of business as a direct result of rates issues?

Mr Hamilton: I cannot commit to no major businesses anywhere in Northern Ireland, including Londonderry, going out of business as a result of anything. I cannot make such a commitment. The Member is chancing his arm in asking me to do that.

With the revaluation, we are trying to re-establish fairness in the non-domestic rating system. I had what, I hope, was a useful meeting with his party colleague Mr Ramsey and traders from the city of Londonderry, at which I explained the history of non-domestic rates and what I anticipate will be the results for Londonderry city centre of the non-domestic revaluation.

I cannot, conclusively, say now — I do not want to pre-empt publication of the draft list by saying what I expect from it — but I expect a rebalancing of non-domestic rating values across Northern Ireland. In towns and cities, such as the Member's, where there has been a proliferation in the last number of years of large out-of-town and edge-of-town shopping centres and retailers, one would expect — I put it no more strongly — to see that reflected in changes in non-domestic valuations for businesses within a city centre, town centre or on streets or roads that have not, perhaps, done as well. Some places will do well out of the revaluation; some will do not so well because they have held up; and others will remain more or less unchanged.

The attempt is to re-establish fairness that, I accept, has not been there over the last number of years. We were not able to proceed with a non-domestic revaluation because the market was in such a state of flux. I hope that businesses in the Member's constituency and others will welcome the results of the non-domestic revaluation when they are published.

Budget: Sectoral Engagement/Equality-proofing

T3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his strategy for sectoral engagement and equality-proofing of the draft Budget. *(AQT 1733/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: The same people are drawn to ask topical and oral questions here.

The Member will be aware that the draft Budget is out to an eight-week consultation. The key part of the eight weeks will be used by Departments to establish spending

plans for the budget allocations that they now have. They will outline where they want to spend money and where the savings that they are required to make will impact. There will be work for the House and its Committees to do scrutinising that. I hope that Committees will engage with interest groups in each Department's area of responsibility.

My Department will engage in sector-by-sector stakeholder meetings with the likes of trade unions, the business community and others, including those in the third sector and community sector who have a particular interest in the outcome of the Budget. That will continue over the coming weeks. Obviously, equality screening of the Budget will also be done in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Can the Minister confirm that he will also be in contact with the likes of the community and voluntary sector, women's groups, disability groups and the LGBT community?

Mr Hamilton: It is important, given that it is an eight-week consultation, that we try to structure that engagement as best we can to ensure that we get the best out of it in the run-up to its conclusion on 29 December. Many of the groups that the Member talked about will be directly or indirectly represented at those stakeholder engagements.

The draft Budget is out for general public consultation. We know from past experience that it will get some responses but not in a structured and focused way. That is where, I think, stakeholder meetings are important and valuable. I will not be able to engage personally with everybody over that period, but I will conduct bilateral meetings with each Minister and expect them to reflect the views expressed to them by various interested groups in their Department. We will try to make it as thorough and comprehensive a consultation over the eight-week period as we can.

Infrastructure Action Plan: Progress

T4. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the infrastructure action plan is progressing. *(AQT 1734/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: The House may be familiar with my plan some time ago to speed up planning — I am sorry, speeding up planning is someone else's responsibility. We could do with speeding up planning as well, of course. My plan was to speed up the delivery of major infrastructure projects in Northern Ireland. That flowed from analysis that showed that we were significantly slower than other parts of the UK or Ireland in delivering big infrastructure projects. Perhaps planning was, in many cases, the reason why they were slowed up.

I developed an infrastructure action plan that focused on the greater centralisation of infrastructure delivery. The proposal was that the delivery arm for a range of infrastructure projects would be centralised in my Department. That was not a power grab by me; it was a way of ensuring that there was uniformity of delivery and efficiencies through cost savings in delivering through one service rather than several. There were some areas of infrastructure development that would remain outside my Department's responsibility for delivery, but we were going to try to amalgamate as much as we could. We have already seen Health Estates move into my Department from 1 October. It was also an attempt to prioritise big infrastructure projects. We have had a problem in the past, particularly with the likes of the A5 not moving forward, in trying to then fast-track major infrastructure projects to fill the breach.

The plan has been circulated and has received support from several Ministers: Enterprise, Social Development, Justice, and Employment and Learning. I intend to take up the issue with the Ministers who are yet to respond. I am optimistic and take the fact that they have not yet responded to mean that they are not being negative about it. In the bilateral meetings I will have on the draft Budget over the next month, I want to engage with them on the infrastructure action plan so that it can be endorsed by the whole Executive as quickly as possible.

Mr Dunne: Is the Minister satisfied that the cuts will not hit his plan dramatically?

Mr Hamilton: The Member asks a good question about the impact of reductions in public spending on the delivery of infrastructure. The capital budget is the one brighter spot in the Budget. The Member will be familiar, as will the whole House, with the reduction in our resource expenditure, which is down 1·6% in real terms. With the decisions we have taken as an Executive, that equates to a £213 million reduction in our public spending for the next financial year. The capital budget has been rising and is slightly above this year's figure, so I do not anticipate that funding per se will be a particular issue in delivering infrastructure moving forward. The investment fund I mentioned in response to Mr Kinahan gives us another vehicle through which we can continue to invest in infrastructure in Northern Ireland. I do not imagine that a lack of funding will be the problem; it is probably more, at this stage, that the lack of broad political support for the action plan will see it not move forward. However, I hope to iron out those problems, which I think are minor, with Ministers over the next month or so.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is the end of Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

Mr Swann: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Much is made in the Chamber when Members fail to attend for Question Time. Can I seek your guidance on what happens when a Member submits a Question and then withdraws it but remains in the Chamber during that Question Time?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is an interesting question, and I will take a look at it. I do not want to give you an off-the-cuff response. It would seem to indicate a certain abuse of the process, but let me check it, if you do not mind. I will come back to you.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Education Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Clause 2 (Functions of the Authority)

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 1, 2 ,3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14,15, 16, 17, which amendments were:

No 1: In page 1, line 12, leave out subsection (3) and insert

> *"(3) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education.".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 2: As an amendment to the amendment to page 1, line 12, tabled by the Minister of Education on 03/11/14, after "promote" insert "integrated and".— *[Mr Lunn.]*

No 3: In page 1, line 13, after "promote" insert "integrated and".— *[Mr Lunn.]*

No 4: In page 1, line 14, leave out subsection (4) and insert

> *"(4) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools.".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 7: In clause 7, page 2, line 39, at end insert"(za) section 2(3);".— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 8: In clause 7, page 3, line 2, at end insert"(c) paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 1.".— *[Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 12: In schedule 1, page 6, line 37, leave out from "will" to end of line 38 and insert

> *"shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(3).".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 13: In schedule 1, page 6, line 38, at end insert

> *"(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the different school sectors of the Education system.".— [Mr McCallister.]*

No 14: In schedule 1, page 6, line 38, at end insert

> *"(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority.".— [Mr McCallister.]*

No 15: In schedule 1, page 6, line 39, leave out from "will" to end of line 40 and insert

> *"shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(4).".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 16: In schedule 1, page 6, line 40, at end insert

> *"(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the different school sectors of the Education system.".— [Mr McCallister.]*

No 17: In schedule 1, page 6, line 40, at end insert

> *"(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority.".— [Mr McCallister.]*

Mr McCausland: With regard to group one, I intend to deal with the amendments that are proposed by the Minister of Education first of all.

I am glad that we are at Further Consideration Stage today because it is imperative that we get the Education Bill through the entire process and move forward to the creation of the new education authority because, at the moment, there is a level of uncertainty. The current education and library boards are in a difficult position. Many of them have depleted staff and resources. The sooner we have this completed, there is some certainty and work can get really under way, so much the better.

As regards the issues raised by the Minister of Education in his amendments, we certainly agree with his proposal in amendment No 1 to clause 2. The insertion of the words:

> *"so far as its powers extend",*

is perfectly reasonable. The other amendments that he has tabled are, again, ones with which we have no issue. The key thing with all of these is that the focus should be very much on shared education.

That brings me to the point concerning amendment Nos 2 and 3, which have been tabled by the Alliance Party. My concern is that, when we say that we promote shared education, it is something that is available to all sectors. No matter whether a school is in the controlled sector, maintained sector, voluntary grammar sector, controlled grammar sector or Irish-medium sector, it can be part of a process of shared education. Therefore, that commitment and determination by the Education Authority to promote shared education is one that is inclusive. No one is excluded or left out. The difficulty that I see with amendment Nos 2 and 3 is that, as was stated earlier, these things were raised previously and voted against in the Assembly. They would put one sector — the integrated sector — in a special, privileged position where it alone of all the sectors would be promoted. I believe strongly in the principles of equality and fairness. I believe that the different sectors should all be treated fairly and equitably. Having that additional special treatment for a sector is inappropriate.

It is right that all sectors should be supported. It is right that we should promote shared education. It is right that there should be support for the integrated sector along with others, but that additional term is one that we think is unacceptable in so far as it has a particular legal connotation. We are opposed to amendment Nos 2 and 3.

The other area dealt with in group one is in amendment Nos 13, 14, 16 and 17, which were tabled by Mr McCallister, regarding representativeness. I will wait to hear what he says in due course, because amendment Nos 13 and 14 appear to be contradictory to Nos 16 and 17. We will see exactly which amendments he moves in due course. We certainly strongly subscribe to the concepts of representativeness and equality. I am sure that the Member to whom I have just referred, who has tabled amendment Nos 13, 14, 16 and 17, will explain to us in due course which ones he intends to move. We will look

at that in due course. We certainly hold to the concept of representativeness.

On the group 1 amendments, our position is that those tabled by the Minister are acceptable, amendment Nos 2 and 3 are not, and we will see how the other four amendments are moved or which of them is moved in due course.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Like Members who spoke previously, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Further Consideration Stage of what is very important legislation.

I will outline where we are coming from in regard to some of the amendments. We will not support amendment Nos 2 and 3 — the Alliance ones — which I will touch on. We are happy enough to go along with the rest in group 1. My colleagues and I raised legitimate concerns around the notion of trying to define shared education before it was done by the Department. We referred to statements from the Minister —

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: Sorry. I want to get through this.

We referred to statements from the Minister that outlined his intention to bring forward a policy paper and a stand-alone Bill. That brings a certain amount of clarity to the situation again today. As the Minister has already outlined, I welcome the fact that the Assembly and the Committee will have the time to consider a definition of shared education and what it means going forward in light of the authority and will work with the authority.

It is important to support the amendments around allowing the legislative reorganisation of the duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education in light of this. It is something that the community wants to see. Likewise, on the community use of schools, I do not think that anybody in here would deny the fact that we need to see the greater use of schools. However, to my mind, what was proposed last time did not sit comfortably with the legislation. I am glad that, hopefully, it will be tidied up today. The amendments in that regard will undoubtedly make the relevant provisions more practical and sustainable.

Finally, I will touch on the Alliance amendments, Nos 2 and 3. As we outlined rigorously the previous day, the duty already exists on the Department and all associated bodies to encourage and facilitate integrated education under article 64 of the 1989 Education Reform Order, as with article 89 of the 1998 Order for Irish-medium education, and so it will be with the Education Authority. We should be under no illusions: those duties will still apply to the body. No matter what we discuss or decide today, that will be the case.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want to make the obvious point that Sinn Féin has done a complete about-turn on this. At Consideration Stage, you voted for exactly the same wording as we are now putting forward. *[Interruption.]* Yes, you did. Your party voted for amendment No 1 at Consideration Stage.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for the intervention. I am trying to make it clear that these amendments exclude the Irish-medium sector. If passed, they would be open to legal challenge. If we had an authority here that excluded one sector in particular while promoting another, it would be open to legal challenge. That is why we will not support the amendments.

Frankly, John McCallister's amendments are probably unnecessary. I will wait to see how the Member describes what they will do or the real need to have them. I do not see the real need for them, but that is not to suggest that I am opposed to them in any particular way. As I said, I will wait to hear what the Member says, so I will leave it there.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the Bill back to the Chamber. I am glad that we are going to get somewhere today quite quickly. I still find it sad that we have had accelerated passage, as numerous conversations still needed to be had to get things right and improve the Bill, but so be it. I hope that this will be an interim Bill and not one that is here for a long, long time.

As you will have seen, we dropped my wish to have two practising teachers on the board; that does not mean that my wish has gone away. It is important that we include practising teachers, particularly those who are young and are in the system, if it is possible. However, I realised after the last debate that it would be difficult to find a way to do that. I am also sad that a review clause has not been put in because one will be necessary if we are going to look at a vision for the future of education. If the Bill is in place for a long time, it should have a mechanism in it to fit with how things change. We have not got there with that.

I am pleased that we have got to a day when we have no petitions of concern, we have all had a chance to talk to each other and we have got somewhere. We could have done things better if there had been a little less speed.

We are happy to support amendment Nos 1 and 4, which just tidy things up. I ask the Minister to please keep pushing on shared education. I look forward to seeing the Bill and seeing the way forward because shared education is the way forward for our education system.

I, too, struggle with amendment Nos 2 and 3 on promoting integrated education within the shared and the community-use-of-buildings concepts. I would love to support integrated all the way through, but I see it still, as I said last time, as a subset of shared education. We have shared education in the Bill, we have a shared Bill coming and, as others have said, integrated already has a preferential position. Many schools have contacted me since the Treacy judgement on Drumragh and others to voice their concern that the integrated sector could be in too strong a position. There are certain controlled schools that are concerned about the future. They are as good as integrated — with a small "i" — they have a great mix and yet they stand or look as if they stand second fiddle to integrated schools. We need to find a balance. We will not support amendment Nos 2 and 3.

On amendment No 7, I was waiting for the Minister to provide clarification. However, having spoken to him, I understand that the next two amendments are linked to getting the shared Bill in place. I did not want the education and library boards struggling for longer than necessary on their current resources, so I asked the Minister to ensure that they will be properly resourced until the Bill is in place. I hope that what we do today does not delay anything on the definition of shared education or hold the Bill back, so I wait for the Minister's guidance.

On John McCallister's amendments — amendment Nos 13, 14, 15 and 16 — I will wait to hear a little bit more about them. The second two in each pairing are likely to be the ones that he proposes. I like the fact that we are looking at sharing more. Sitting at the back of my mind is a concern about whether we are tightening up standing boards in the authority to having exactly the same members as those who are on the main board. If things continue the way they are going today, we will have left out the community, youth and the unions, so there are a whole lot of people who are not involved; I want to make sure that everyone is involved when the board wants them to be and that we are not limiting it.

In summary, we support amendment Nos 1, 7 and 8. We are waiting to hear about amendment Nos 13, 14, 15 and 16 and we oppose amendment Nos 2 and 3.

Mr Lunn: I am glad that we have got to this stage. I am also glad that we are having a petition of concern-free day, which is very refreshing after the 10-spot the last time. The only reason I can think of for the DUP not lodging a petition of concern against amendment Nos 2 and 3 is that they know perfectly well that Sinn Féin will not support them so they will fall anyway.

3.45 pm

I will go through the amendments in reverse order so that I will be well warmed up before I get to amendment Nos 2 and 3. Amendment Nos 16, 17, 13 and 14 are John McCallister's amendments about representation of the membership and the different school sectors on the standing committee on sharing and the community use of schools. Like others, I am slightly puzzled by these, but Mr McCallister will no doubt enlighten us in due course. I do not see any harm in them — on the face of it, there is nothing to vote against — but we will listen with interest to his learned explanation.

The only thing that I would say about amendment No 12 is that it just refers to section 2(3) rather than repeating the words "promote, facilitate and encourage". I notice that the Minister, in his amendments, has introduced a change of words from "will" to "shall". I thought that that was interesting, so I did a wee bit of research this morning. "Shall" actually has more legal effect than "will". Legally, under the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954, "shall" means "must". That is the correct use of terminology, so I have no problem with amendment No 12. Amendment No 15 is the same as amendment No 12 only in relation to the community use of schools.

In amendment Nos 7 and 8, the Minister wants to defer commencement of the clauses on shared education until there is a proper definition of sharing in education. Originally, we thought that we were not very much in favour of that, mainly because we had hopes, perhaps unreasonable, that our amendment Nos 2 and 3 would be passed, in which case it would have affected integrated education as well. However, they are clearly not going to be passed. We see no reason to disagree with the Minister on amendment Nos 7 and 8, so we will support those.

Amendment Nos 1 and 4 seem to be just a change from the exercising its functions wording to:

> *"so far as its powers extend".*

I am sure that the Minister has taken the correct advice on that, and that is fair enough with us.

That leads me inevitably to amendment Nos 2 and 3. The reason that amendment Nos 2 and 3 have come back is that the Bill Office and the Speaker's Office have allowed us to do that. It was a slight surprise, but they perhaps accepted the argument that, although the motion was defeated in cross-community terms the last time, as the Minister said earlier, it was not actually defeated by a majority of the House. The majority voted for it. It was only by one vote, but a majority voted for it, including, as I said earlier in an intervention to Mr Hazzard, the Sinn Féin Members, who have now decided to vote against the very same thing.

The Bill Office told us, and evidently the Speaker's Office agreed, that, because the Minister had produced his own amendment, amendment No 1, it was in order for us to re-amend that and bring in the word "promote", which is what we have tried to do. There is no fancy parliamentary manoeuvring, sleight of hand or smart tactics here. The Minister may have said before lunchtime that it was slightly improper, but it is nothing of the sort. It is allowed under the rules. It does not look as if we will be successful, but that does not mean that we should not try.

I cannot help thinking that it is a bit too easy for Sinn Féin on this occasion. The last time, Sinn Féin voted with us on this matter knowing that there was a petition of concern and it was not going to pass anyway. Today, there is no petition of concern, but it is still not going to pass because you have changed your minds. I really do wonder what is going on. I am perfectly happy for somebody to tell me at some stage before I sit down.

Mr Kinahan actually talked about there now being a preferential position for the integrated sector. That is not the case. The integrated sector is going to be the one that does not have the word "promote" attached to the departmental obligation. There will be a departmental obligation even to promote the community use of schools and shared education, but not, it appears, integrated education, even though, as I said at a previous stage, the Assembly voted, in 2011 on a private Member's motion, to include the word "promote". I know that it was non-binding, but the Assembly voted to include that word in relation to integrated education by 39 votes to nil. Nobody voted against.

There will be a clear difference now, because today's vote will mean that there will be a greater obligation on the Department and the authority to promote sharing, and it will be a more onerous obligation than that which they have "to encourage and facilitate" integrated education. I know that the Minister has frequently said that he intends to honour his obligations in respect of integration. I have no reason to doubt that he means what he says, but I think that the proof will be in the performance over the next few years. As it stands, there is a different approach to and a different obligation on the two sectors, if I can call "sharing" a sector.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for giving way, especially as I shall have the opportunity to respond at the end of the debate. However, I think that it is important to clarify this. Article 64 of the Education Reform Order 1989, which refers to integrated education facilitation and promotion, is not in any way neutered, amended or lessened by the Bill that is before us; and it is in no way amended, neutered or

lessened by the provision that refers to shared education. So, I do not think that the Member should present that case in public, because I think that that argument is deeply flawed and undermines his argument that integrated education has legal protection. That legal protection is there and will continue to be there, regardless of the views of this Minister or any other. The legal obligation remains.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his clarification; however, it is something that we are not going to agree about. I accept that integration has had that protection and that there has been such an obligation on his Department for 25 years; but what has it meant? Suddenly, this whole concept of shared education has come over the horizon. Millions of pounds have been thrown at it and more millions are to come. It suddenly has the status of promotion, facilitation and encouragement. I cannot give you a dictionary definition of the word "promotion", though I did in 2011, if you want to look at Hansard. "Promote" means more than "facilitate" and "encourage". One of the things that it means is "actively encourage". That is what "promote" means.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. What we have seen is that, whilst there is a legal obligation for integrated education, there is a Programme for Government commitment for shared education; so I think that the difference we are seeing is political will, and the lack thereof, when it comes to integrated education.

Mr Lunn: Yes. I thank Mr Agnew for making that point for me.

I am nearly done, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I just cannot help thinking that it is a pity. The big buzz around this place at the moment is for a shared future, for Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC). We have strategies galore for trying to bring people together, at adult level and, particularly, at childhood and school level.

If this place is going to make progress, one of the things that we have to do is let our children get to know each other, at an early age, and remove so many of the taboos and barriers that we all know about, and that we all profess that we are trying to break down. Yet the most obvious measure, bringing children together into the same school to be educated together, seems to cause this kind of disagreement. I think that that is a shame.

I will stop there, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I am disappointed today but hardly surprised.

Mr Newton: I welcome the opportunity to move this Bill forward again. It is key that we remind ourselves where the Bill is coming from. It is intended to establish the Education Authority and was prompted by the local government reform that will take place next year. Just for clarity, it is not the Education and Skills Authority by the back door, side door or any other door; it is a different Bill altogether. I say that in the sense that I recognise that good progress is being made on it. When there was the potential for accelerated passage, there was some concern from other sections of the House. However, look at where we are now. When the objective is to provide for the education of our children, it is amazing what we can do in such a short time. The objective relates to the pupils, parents and schools of Northern Ireland, and, in that context, I think that we are making good progress.

The first group of amendments relates to the duties of the authority and the committees. I support amendment No 1, I am against amendment Nos 2 and 3, and I am supportive in general of the others. Like my colleague Mr McCausland, I seek clarity on amendment Nos 13, 14, 16 and 17, which are Mr McCallister's.

It is important that we establish the authority and establish it on an absolutely sound footing that every section of our community can buy into. It is important that equality runs through the authority. It must run from top to bottom, from the board right through to the establishment of the committees. Its structure needs to give confidence to every section of the community and every education provider that what we are doing is on a fair and equal basis, and that is how they will be treated.

There cannot be any preference given to any section. Nobody can be gold-plated; nobody can be disadvantaged. There has to be a level playing field across all sectors. Other sectors need to be brought up to the same standard of achievement as those that, in the past, sought, and perhaps got, preference. All sectors need to have the same level of responsibility and be on the same platform — a platform enjoyed across the whole of the Education Authority.

It would be remiss of us if we were to put through legislation that gave preference to any one sector or part of the education estate. Certainly, the two largest education providers, the controlled sector and the maintained sector, cannot be disadvantaged, or even perceived to be disadvantaged, against any other sector.

I agree with the closing remarks of Mr Lunn, who said that our children need to get to know each other from an early stage. I presume that he means that children need to be educated together, and I agree wholeheartedly with that. In the previous debate, I made the point that I sought out a school for my children where they would come together with children from all sorts of backgrounds, religious and ethnic, and gain from that experience in education. It really is a question of how we do that, and I favour the approach of what we now refer to as shared education.

A number of years ago, shared education was an idea. It has now become a concept in the minds of many. It needs to move to a position in which it can be defined. We need to see what it will mean, what its outworkings will be and what support it will eventually need. It needs to be put into practice and we need to see it working.

4.00 pm

The Committee heard about a number of examples of where shared education is working. It is maybe not working in an ideal or totally holistic way, but we have heard about moves towards it. It needs to be continual and it cannot stop at a certain point. We also need an evaluation of shared education at some stage.

The Minister has indicated his desire to bring forward a definition of shared education. He has also indicated that there will be a stand-alone Bill on shared education, and the House should welcome that. Certainly, from where we are coming from, I see that as a very definite move. It needs to be done with a degree of energy and urgency, with an emphasis on it so that we do not reach the conclusion of the Bill and miss the definition of shared education.

We have not yet reached the end of the debate, but, generally speaking, the Bill has been a very positive move for education in Northern Ireland. I feel certain that the general feeling in the education community will be that progress is being made, particularly from our previous position on education, where it was reflected in the Chamber that we could not get agreement and where the pupils, the schools and the parents of Northern Ireland suffered. We are taking a step forward, and that is to be welcomed.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Agreement seems to be breaking out everywhere. I do not have much to add to what my colleague Chris Hazzard said. I do have some sympathy for Trevor Lunn and understand how aggrieved he may feel. I want to make a number of points about the amendments that he and his party tabled.

It has been mentioned that, if the amendment on integrated education were to become part of the Bill, it would give integrated education a privileged position. Had the Alliance Party also mentioned Irish-medium education, we may perhaps have taken a different view. I know that the Member is a realist and knows that, whatever decision Sinn Féin took on the issue, the amendment would never have got into this piece of legislation.

The other issue is the statutory obligation that the new authority will have to encourage and facilitate integrated education and Irish-medium education. The Department already has that obligation, and the new authority, through the Minister and the Department, will also have it. I note that the Member said that the obligation has been in place for a long time; however, it was only relatively recently that both sectors tested the legislation that contains the obligation in the courts, when both received favourable outcomes. If there was any ignorance of the legislation in the Department or a tendency to forget about it — certainly not from the Minister, but maybe from his officials — they have been reminded that the statutory obligation exists.

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: Certainly.

Mr Lunn: I want to return to the point he made about Irish-medium education. He knows perfectly well that we support the Irish-medium sector. If something is missing from the Bill that could be addressed by an amendment in relation to Irish-medium schools, I am at a loss as to why Sinn Féin did not bring it forward. The reason we did not bring it forward was that we knew it would arouse the ire of your colleagues opposite. There is no point in us trying to put through an amendment on the Irish-medium and integrated sectors knowing that the inclusion of the Irish-medium sector is going to drag it down. So, it was maybe a forlorn hope in our case that perhaps your colleagues opposite would see a bit of sense and run with the integrated. I feel sorry for the Irish-medium sector, but that is the way it is. There is, however, nothing to prevent you bringing something forward.

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I know that he, in particular, is supportive of the Irish-medium sector; I have no argument with that whatsoever. I suppose that, in the real world, we have to face up to the fact that no one is going to get everything they want in this legislation. I understand your fears about raising the ire of the Members opposite when it comes to the Irish language. We have seen the behaviour of some of them in recent times with regard to the Irish language. That is unfortunate, because I know that not all Members opposite share those views.

However, it is my understanding that, if we were to allow this to go through, the integrated sector would, effectively, have a privileged position over and above the Irish-medium sector. I think that both of those sectors, like all the other sectors, should be on a level playing field. Unfortunately, the integrated sector and the Irish-medium sector are far behind the rest and need assistance from the Department to get up to the starting line with the rest. That is why the statutory obligation to encourage and facilitate is there.

While I sympathise with the Member on this issue, I am afraid the realpolitik of the situation is that it was never going to get through. He knows that better than I do. On that point, I finish.

Mr Eastwood: I am not a member of the Education Committee; I am playing a sub's role today, as Seán Rogers is ill. I thank him for the work that he has done on the Bill thus far. It is a very good thing that we are, finally, at this stage and that we have no petitions of concern. We might have a couple of Divisions but nothing that is going to halt the progress of the Bill. Quite a bit of good work has been done behind the scenes to ensure that we can move the Bill forward. It is not going to be a perfect Bill, but we will have a Bill, and this delay will have, finally, ended.

We are largely happy not to oppose the amendments in this group. We have some concerns around the need for standing committees and everything else, and we understand Sinn Féin's concerns on the topic that has been most discussed so far. We share the concerns about the fact that the Irish-medium sector has not been particularly mentioned in the amendments. However, our view is that we have an opportunity here with the Alliance amendment. Amendment No 1, one of the Minister's amendments, proposes that we insert, "facilitate and promote shared education.". I think there is an opportunity there to add integrated education. Again, it is not perfect, but we are happy to support that.

We need to guard against the debate falling into an argument about whether it is shared education, integrated education or whatever. We have to understand that we come from a very difficult place in education. We can go back as far as you want in the North of Ireland.

We have a unique set of circumstances. We need to move as much as possible to a shared community, whether that is in housing or education. We need to begin that process. The people who are involved in integrated education are doing a fantastic job, and people involved in the new process of shared education are beginning to do a lot of good work around that.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes.

Mr Agnew: The Member made the comparison between shared housing and shared education. If you take that analogy to its conclusion, you could paint on each door whether the person walking through it is a Protestant or a Catholic, and you could stick them next to each other. In the case of schools, you put them in different uniforms to let people know what side they are from.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for his intervention. I understand and sympathise with that point of view, but I will go back to the point that we are coming from a very difficult place. We have parental choice. We also have a very difficult history. We have places in the North of Ireland where, 40 or 50 years ago, people could not get educated in a secondary school because some of them just did not exist and were not open to people. We have a lot of other difficulties in terms of our history.

We have to understand that the different sectors are imperfect and that we have not quite cracked it yet when it comes to building a shared and truly integrated society, but I think that whether it is shared education or integrated education, people are moving to the right place. We need to support that with its imperfections and support the amendments' imperfections with regard to the Irish-medium sector. We are happy to support them. I think that we need to move in that direction.

Mr Allister: Can I crave the indulgence of the House at the beginning of my remarks to make some reference to the tragedy in my constituency this morning because it has a very direct educational link? This morning, a young boy walking to meet the school bus was tragically killed, his brother is fighting for his life and his mother is very seriously injured.

The relevance is this: three weeks ago, that mother came to see me in my constituency office in Ballymoney. She explained that the education and library board had refused school transport to her family and, in consequence, every morning, she had to walk six children — five school attenders and a child in a buggy — down a narrow country road with no footpaths so that they could rendezvous with the school bus in the village of Cloughmills because the education and library board refused to allow the bus to drive the half mile up to her gate and pick up the children.

Her very foreboding words to me were, "Mr Allister, one morning we are going to be wiped out", and, this morning, it happened. Whatever driver was involved has a lot to answer for, but the education and library board has very serious questions to answer.

Three weeks ago, I immediately wrote to the education and library board asking it why it was taking that attitude. The answer has not come, but now it is going to come too late. Will the Minister require the North Eastern Education and Library Board to report to him on how it has treated the request from the family and its public representative for school transport because this was an accident waiting to happen? It did not need to happen if the education and library board had acted as it should have. I am grateful to the House for permitting me to make those remarks.

Turning to the Bill, I think that the Minister is right when he says that amendment No 7 is essential in a Bill that seeks to promote something called "shared education" because there is no definition of shared education — it seems to mean whatever you want it to mean. To Mr Agnew, it is that cynical matter that he described. To others, it is some sort of panacea. It is whatever you want it to be. You cannot draft legislation espousing a cause without defining what shared education is.

It is absolutely right that, before those aspects can be implemented, there must be a statutory definition of shared education. So I think it is right that those amendments were tabled in the regard.

4.15 pm

The whole issue of shared education is a profound muddle. It means whatever, as I said, you want it to mean. That, for me, underscores the folly of two things in the Bill. The first is the fact that there was not even a consultation about the Bill so that issues such as this could be fleshed out. The reason why we were not given a consultation, according to the accompanying explanatory document, was because there was a consultation for the ESA Bill, which confirms to me, if ever there were any doubt, that this Bill is simply ESA lite. If the justification for not holding a consultation is that there was a consultation on the ESA Bill, no matter how much some people like to deny it from the very top of the Administration, patently, this is ESA lite.

The second thing that the muddle, the lack of clarify and the procrastination of dealing with the issue of shared education speaks to me about is the sheer folly of having rushed the Bill through the House with accelerated passage, so that there has not been the opportunity to tease out and to get to answers. It has been so rushed through the House that this is the first occasion that I have been permitted to even speak on the Education Bill. That speaks to one of two things: either the inordinate period for which I was gagged or the indecent haste with which the Bill was rushed through the House. Maybe it is a bit of both. Either way, I think it is regrettable that important issues such as these are not capable of being addressed and that the means of addressing them through proper consultation and through a proper Committee exercise were shunned.

I welcome the fact that the Bill has been amended somewhat to this point. I welcome the amendments that were made to clause 6 and the limitation on the powers of the Minister to appoint, almost into perpetuity, the chief executive officer. I think that we have had enough manufactured niches for Mr Gavin Boyd and his prime ministerial salary without creating any more. So, I welcome the fact that the Bill has been amended to date in that regard.

Speaking of some other amendments, I simply do not understand the need for the Alliance Party's amendments. As has been pointed out, there is already statutory special status for integrated education; it already has it. What more does it want? According to Mr Agnew, it wants an endless supply of money to promote its own particular perception and agenda of education and to be given even more preferential treatment in capital spend. That, it seems, is what it wants. I have to say that these amendments seem to me to be irrelevant. The duty already exists.

I also welcome the fact that the Bill has been amended to right a long existing wrong: the provision of a sectoral body for the controlled sector. I look forward to that happening and to that sector being given the status, the voice and the authority that it has too long been denied.

Those are my remarks at this stage. I may return at the second batch of amendments to speak on other matters.

Mr Agnew: I wish to refute Mr Allister's scurrilous remarks that completely misrepresented what I said. I said that the integrated sector would like some new schools or new buildings and would like to grow rather than simply being maintained at 62 schools. That is neither here nor there. I just wanted to put the record straight on that because I spoke from a sedentary position, which, of course, I should not have done.

The integrated sector clearly has widespread public support. Unfortunately, it does not have sufficient support in the House to pass amendment Nos 2 and 3, and it does not have the support of those in positions of power in the sectors that have, over time, been losing pupils to the integrated sector. There is a challenge for Members, particularly in the DUP and Sinn Féin, as to whether they wish to lead on education or follow vested interest. The public are clearly saying one thing, and, as I say, the sectors with vested interests are saying another. Unfortunately, it is not the parents or the public who are being listened to; it is those in the different strands of the education sector.

I will not labour points that I have made in the past, but, for me, there is no doubt that shared education is nothing but an attempt to maintain the status quo in times of decreasing enrolments in schools and in times of financial hardship by providing a solution that works for the finances and allows us to maintain a segregated education system. It is essentially a rebrand.

We call the education system that we have "segregated", and so we rebrand it as "shared" but actually maintain the same problems and the same divisions that we have had for generations and, in effect, decide that yet another generation of children will be separated at the age of 4 into essentially Protestant and Catholic schools, taught from day one that they are different and should be taught in different schools and wear different uniforms. The emphasis remains on difference.

We have had enough division in our society. We had the opportunity, through the Bill, to tackle the division that we institutionalise in our education system, and, unfortunately, we have failed to do it. In my view, it is not good enough.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for giving way. Could he provide some clarity? He bemoans what he refers to as the public interest being overruled by sectoral interest, yet his name is to a DUP amendment that promotes sectoral interest while getting rid of community representation on the board. Can he square the circle, please?

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention. With the Deputy Speaker's indulgence, I will answer briefly and speak to it more in the debate on the next group of amendments. The amendment that we will discuss in the next group was a compromise amendment. It is not an amendment that I would draft, and I suspect that it is not an amendment that the DUP would have drafted were it not for the attempts to get cross-party support. So, there are elements that I think are positive.

I would like to see the integrated and Irish-medium sectors in particular have representation on the board and that to be facilitated by an increase in the numbers on the board. If I were drafting the amendment and had the party support to get such an amendment through, that is what I would have brought forward. Alas, given that it is myself alone, I did not have that power. So, I have gone with a compromise.

I was leading up to amendment Nos 2 and 3. I support the amendment brought forward by the Alliance Party and will answer those, including Mr Allister, who said that the legal duty already exists. As Mr Lunn pointed out, the addition of the word "promote" for shared education goes beyond "encourage and facilitate". It is not just an extra word but an extra word of force and importance. If we are to be told that shared education and integrated education are all moving in the one direction of educating our children together, surely we should not in any way seek to disadvantage integrated education. As I said in my intervention to Trevor Lunn, there is clearly a legal duty for integrated education. Unfortunately, what it does not have, as recognised in its lack of mention —

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: When I finish this point. It is not mentioned in relation to the promotion of shared education in the Programme for Government or the T:BUC strategy. What we have is a political will supporting shared education, which, as I said, is a rebrand, from my point of view, maintaining division. What we do not have is the political will to encourage, facilitate and promote integrated education. I will give way to Mr McCausland.

Mr McCausland: If it is possible for a school in any sector to participate in sharing, how does that disadvantage one particular sector?

Mr Agnew: A lot is going to be played out in the definition of shared education. Since I am addressing that, I will say that I support amendment Nos 7 and 8. I think that we do need a definition of shared education. I have sought that definition previously from the Minister in questions and will scrutinise any definition that comes forward, because, for me, it is at the crux of the debate. As Mr Allister said, currently shared education is, to some extent, whatever you want it to be. My fear is, as I have laid out, that it is about propping up a failing segregated system, so we will see what the definition of sharing is.

Yes, the integrated sector can be involved in sharing, but, to me, the conflict comes because, had we not come up with the solution of shared education, a natural outworking of area-based planning would have been that more schools within the controlled sector and the Catholic-maintained sector would have either had to become integrated or close. Now we are saying that we will maintain the two separate schools, but we will just do so in the same building, because that saves money, but what it does not do is change the nature of our segregated education system.

Those are my concerns over shared education. As I said, I will support amendment Nos 2 and 3, and I regret that others will not do the same. I will support amendment Nos 7 and 8, because, as I said, the definition of shared education is the crux here. If, as much as possible, shared education is made to look like integrated education, I will welcome that. If my cynicism — as Mr Allister calls it — forces the hand of those who want to rebrand our segregated education system as a shared one to actually make it look like it is shared, so be it. I will take that as a victory. To me, that has not been the intention to date, but the Minister now being forced to define it is a good thing. We can see what the agenda is and shape it through the House holding it to account. We can get the best possible outcome from what, to me, is a shoddy Education Bill.

I think that I have addressed the more controversial amendments. As many have said, I will wait to hear from Mr McCallister on his amendments, but I am inclined to support them. I look forward to speaking to the next group of amendments.

Mr McCallister: At the outset, I associate myself with the remarks that Mr Allister made and assure him that my thoughts and prayers are with his constituent.

Turning to the Bill, scarcely have I had such a build-up from every Member as to what the motivation and intent of some of my amendments are. I will hopefully address some of the concerns that I have around the Minister's amendments and why I feel that we should not go down that road in some of those instances. Under normal circumstances, if we were faced with a functioning Executive, amendment Nos 1, 7 and 12 might be deemed fairly reasonable to Members.

However, as the Minister stated, there is no current legal definition, and, as said by others, we risk the Education Authority, when established, being placed in an untenable position. It will have a statutory obligation to promote shared education, without there being a definition of that form of education that is acceptable to the Assembly.

4.30 pm

Amendment Nos 1, 7 and 12 attempt to deal with this legal anomaly. My concern is that they allow the Minister and the Executive to kick shared education into the long grass. The House unanimously supported the amendments at Consideration Stage, and I fear that these new amendments diminish the previous ones and enable the Minister to put his plans on the long finger. We have a shared education document from an advisory group, and we have the Minister's statement of over a year ago on it. That is why I am reluctant about this.

Amendment No 6, in my opinion, certainly waters down the original amendment, basically affirming that the authority has no power in this area. Amendment No 7 allows the Minister to enact the reduced amendment at a time of his choosing, as does amendment No 12. It brings the proposed standing committee into line, making the work that it would carry out questionable.

The Minister tells us that the reason why he intends to do this is that he is bringing a stand-alone shared education Bill. I believe the Minister's intent; I just warn that an old adage is that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I have limited confidence in the Executive and in the Minister getting his Bill through the Executive and into the Chamber, and we need that to happen within in a very short time frame. He has already said that he will bring a paper, hopefully this side of Christmas, on his proposed Bill.

The Education and Skills Authority process began a number of years ago, and here we are today with a diminished Bill, which still has quite controversial elements. I am of the opinion that, if we leave the Bill as amended by me and with the support of the House at Consideration Stage, much greater urgency will be placed on the Minister, the Department and the Executive to deliver a stand-alone shared education Bill in good time. That is why it is important not to make these amendments, and it is why I oppose them.

Amendment Nos 4, 8 and 15 deal with similar issues. However, I believe that, in all aspects, they are actually worse than the previous set. My reading of amendment No 4 is that it basically tells the new authority, "You have no business encouraging, facilitating or promoting the community use of schools in maintained, Irish-medium, voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools." That is a terrible message to send out, and it almost thwarts the will of the House. As stated at Consideration Stage, all these schools are funded by taxpayers. Regardless of who owns the land that they are built on or who runs the school, they should at least recognise the duty to encourage, promote and facilitate community use of those facilities, which are paid for by all our citizens. What, in that example — or indeed who — is the Minister afraid of?

At least, with shared education, the Minister is promoting a plan to meet the will of the House through a set of amendments. He is saying that he will overrule. Amendment No 8 is another kicking-into-the-long-grass amendment, allowing the Minister to introduce the duty on only half of schools when he sees fit. I firmly believe that amendment Nos 4, 8 and 15 contradict the Minister's stated commitment to shared education. Rather, they say that all schools are equal, but some schools are more equal than others. I therefore strongly oppose those amendments and urge the House to do likewise. I know that Mr Sheehan was getting complete agreement and that harmony was breaking out, so I will almost apologise for interrupting that. I hope that Members give serious consideration to those amendments. I believe that they ensure that virtually no difference will be made to the provision of the community use of schools.

The Minister questioned the merits of my amendments, and I think that, by his actions, he has proved their necessity. On a cross-party basis, I and colleagues tabled amendment No 11, which is in the next group of amendments for debate. If that amendment is made, I will not move amendment Nos 13 and 16. The reason for that, which I hope has been clarified, is that we will have that cross-sectoral representation to promote the community use of schools and, to a lesser extent, shared education.

If amendment Nos 4, 8 and 15 are made, my concern will have been proved warranted. I want to make sure that the standing committees to promote the community use of schools include all sectors in our education system. If amendment No 11 is not made, we would be left in a situation where a number of sectors are left out. That amendment may be agreed along with amendment No 4, which I fear could be a bad amendment, and that is why I am worried about how we get into that area. I want amendment No 11 and my other amendments to be made to make sure that we have that cross-sectoral representation.

Turning to the Alliance amendments, I fear that there is a misunderstanding in Alliance and possibly the Green Party about what the definition of shared education could possibly be. I suggest that they should maybe read some of the work that has been carried out on shared education, as that is where this society is going. I realise that, certainly after getting his hair cut, Mr Agnew has maybe lost his radical edge. What more evidence do you need that he is becoming much more of a conservative and a reformist? The very point in what Mr Agnew was talking about is the argument to move to a single, secular education system, if that was what we were going with.

The very point of the debate and where we are with shared education has to be that we are recognising that there are many different sectors and that, effectively, we are where we are in this education system. If you were starting from scratch, you would find that this Minister or, indeed, any other Minister, may not design the system that we

have, but how do we make the best of it? How do we get community use of schools or schools from different sectors sharing without lifting any sector above another? How do we get that sharing that we want to see?

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I will certainly give way when I finish this point.

Educational outcomes have to be at the top of the list when we are talking about the point of shared education. From a societal perspective, I hope that other benefits flow from that for better community cohesion and harmony. However, the very essence of any education system is to produce the very best education for our kids across whatever sector they happen to be in, and the Minister should always be striving for that.

Mr Agnew: I thank Mr McCallister for giving way. I assure him that I have not lost my radical edge, and I am certainly not conservative with either a small or a large "c".

The Member said that "we are where we are", and the point has been made before that we would never have designed an education system like this. Does he accept that, with falling pupil numbers, we were moving away from those sectors, given that more and more schools were having to become integrated to sustain themselves? In doing this, we are stopping that move towards greater integration.

Mr McCallister: I do not agree with that. There are places where it will be desirable to keep schools open, such as Newtownhamilton High, where we need to share and want to keep a school in that area. I would always make the case for having a school in my constituency. Down High is an excellent school. It is effectively non-denominational, but to lose a school from that area could seriously damage community relations. You almost make a town a cold house for one section of the community. That is why sharing, where possible, driving up educational standards and extending the choice that any school can offer in its curriculum is what I want to see.

I had no disagreement with — indeed I supported at Consideration Stage — the Alliance Party amendments around integrated education. However, in this instance, where the amendment is being lumped in with shared education, it is not appropriate. That is where I disagree.

Mr Allister has resumed his seat, and where I disagree with him is in his argument that if we do not pass the Minister's amendments around shared education and community use of schools, we somehow leave a legal anomaly. The Minister is bringing a Bill, and that is sometimes almost the only way to get the Executive and this Department called to action. The Minister is bringing a Bill, and, at least from the perspective of the amendments having been passed at Consideration Stage, there is a collective view from the Assembly that shared education is a good thing and something that we as an Assembly should be moving forward on.

On Mr Allister's broader points about the speed of the Bill's passage, it will be of no surprise to him that I spoke strongly against that. Probably, one of my highest-profile converts to that cause was none less than the First Minister of Northern Ireland, who questioned whether accelerated passage may have been a little rash and did not give all sectors time to participate as meaningfully as possible in the debate.

However, I look forward to hearing from the Minister and hope that he does not let us down on his shared education Bill. Otherwise, we will have to put in about five questions every day to ask him where it is and when it is coming. However, those are my reasons and, around the community use of schools, I strongly urge Members to think carefully about whether we are almost writing in a protection for certain schools that, even though we collectively pay their way, we are letting them off the hook of engaging meaningfully over how we sweat the assets of premises that we all, as taxpayers, built. That is why I particularly urge Members to think carefully, because there is no plan B on the community use of schools. At least in shared education, the Minister has a plan for the community use of schools. Otherwise, there is no plan, and he is letting some sectors off the hook.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): After that hair-raising contribution, I call the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, to wind up the debate.

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Members for their contributions. I have listened carefully to the arguments that they put forward and shall address a number of the specific points raised. I apologise to Members for maybe going back and forth on their contributions, but I will try to cover them as succinctly as possible.

The House, as has been pointed out, has already rejected an amendment that would place a duty on the authority in relation to integrated education and the amendments around the standing committees would have no practical effect. I listened intently to Mr Lunn's contribution about his discussions with the Bill Office and the Speaker's Office. Without wishing to bring the wrath of either of them down on me, I found it an interesting interpretation of Standing Orders and the legislation that governs the House. That is because it appears, certainly from Mr Lunn's interpretation, that if an amendment is defeated at Consideration Stage by the use of a petition of concern, it can be reintroduced at Further Consideration Stage. I am not sure —

4.45 pm

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will let the Member in. I am not sure that that would be my interpretation of Standing Orders or legislation governing the House, but, as I said, I have no intention of bringing the wrath of the Speaker's Office or the Bill Office down on me.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not want to bring that wrath down on my head or anyone else's, but it is an interesting problem. I am not sure whether it has cropped up before. Fair enough, you should not be able to bring an amendment straight back again at Further Consideration Stage, but if the argument is that it was defeated at Consideration Stage on a cross-community basis, that means that it was defeated by a petition of concern. If it had been defeated by majority vote as well, we would probably not be making the point, but it was not. It was passed by majority vote. Frankly, I think that there is something there for the Speaker's Office and the Bill Office to think about for the future.

Mr O'Dowd: This is not the time to be debating Standing Orders on legislation, but, regardless of your opinions on them, petitions of concern are a perfectly legitimate tool to

use in the Chamber. It is not up to others to interpret them one way or the other.

I have already answered some of —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I need to say that Members will be familiar with admissibility criteria for amendments to Bills. Members should contact the Bill Clerks for further guidance on admissibility.

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. See what you have done now? You have brought the wrath of the Bill Office down on us. *[Laughter.]* As for the other points raised during Mr Lunn's contribution, I have made quite clear that, at a personal level, I would have no difficulty in supporting an amendment on the integrated sector, but it has to be married to those other sectors that also have departmental duties, and those sectors include the Irish-medium sector. During the previous debate, I spoke in favour of those amendments. The problem arises when you separate them. Regardless of what wrath it will bring down from where or whom it will irk, the principle of inclusivity, which the integrated sector promotes, has to be adhered to at all times, in my opinion. I will return to some of those matters as we move on.

In the case of shared education and integrated education, I am of the view, and I have said this to the House numerous times before, that it is not a case of either/or. Shared education is one strand of building community relations and better community networking among our schools. Integrated education is another ethos. Judge Treacy recently ruled that integrated education is defined as an ethos within the school. It is not simply the bringing together of Protestant and Catholic children. I hope, and I will sincerely outline this as I bring forward the shared education Bill, that young people will be brought together in a meaningful way to learn about each other's differences from each other.

That brings to mind Mr Agnew's comments. I do not believe for one second that our children are sent to non-integrated schools by their parents to be taught that they are different. It is not the purpose of non-integrated schools to be taught that you are different. That is certainly not my experience of my engagement with the education sectors. I accept that, in the minority of cases —

Mr Agnew: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will in a moment.

In the minority of cases, some parents may regrettably chose a school to send their child to to ensure that he or she does not engage with anyone other than those who have a single community identity, but, in my engagement across many levels of education providers, I have never come across a scenario in which a school is providing education to teach children that they are different. I have experienced many inclusive educators and many inclusive schools in our society that teach our children about respect: to respect themselves, to respect others and to be a respectful part of the community.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. I will give him the benefit of the doubt that he misunderstood my comments as opposed to misrepresented them. My point was that, when you send children effectively to the same campus but put them in different uniforms, give them a different principal and have a different ethos in the school, it emphasises their differences rather than promotes their similarities, which integrated education does. That was my point.

I at no point claimed that any sector or school is teaching or effectively encouraging sectarianism. I never made that assertion.

Mr O'Dowd: I suggest that the Member reads Hansard tomorrow. Then, he will find out exactly what he did say.

I will move on through the comments. I have to say that most of the debate concentrated on the shared education provisions and the Alliance Party's proposals on integrated education. Most Members touched on them as they spoke either for or against the proposals. It appears that the majority of the House is opposed to the Alliance Party's amendments and understands the reasons why I am bringing forward my amendments on the various elements, which were originally Mr McCallister's amendments in the Consideration Stage of the Bill. It might be useful if I touch on those now. As I said, a number of Members referred to them.

Before I refer to Mr Allister's comments, I want to echo the condolences to the family involved in the tragedy this morning. It was a shocking, terrible event. I assure the Member that my prayers and thoughts are with the family involved. While not wanting to cross over a PSNI investigation, I will raise his comments with the relevant board and ask it to report back. Although I suggest that there may be some crossover between that and the PSNI investigation, I assure the Member that I will raise his comments with the relevant board. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family involved in that tragedy this morning.

I will move on to the hard-nosed politics of the debate. You and I seldom agree on anything, but we do agree on the reasons why I brought forward the amendments. Without wanting to sound condescending, I will say that there is an important lesson for Members and the Assembly: if we are bringing forward legislation and amendments, it is very different from bringing forward a motion to the House, because once those become legislation, they have implications. The outworkings of that have implications for the services that we deliver to the public and the public servants we expect to deliver them.

First, the reason why I brought forward my amendments on the shared education element and the community use of schools is to ensure that the practical outworkings of the legislation are workable and enforceable going into the future. In relation to questions on the consultation on the Bill and whether or not it is ESA, it is also worth noting that, even if this Bill had gone out to consultation, I would not have asked the question about shared education. The shared education clause that is in this draft of the Bill is there as a direct result of an amendment that was brought forward by Mr McCallister during Consideration Stage. The Assembly debated it and accepted it. Now, it is part of the Bill. So, it would not have formed part of any consultation that I brought forward anyway.

I was not forced to bring forward legislation on shared education. I do not wish to be seen to be picking on Mr Agnew again, but my intention has always been, since the publication of the ministerial advisory group's report on shared education, to bring forward legislation that sets out the definition of shared education. So, I had no intention of including shared education in this Bill; the Assembly decided, and I respect the right of the Assembly to do so. My amendments clarify the role of the authority in that.

In relation to the community use of schools, again, my amendment is necessary, in my opinion, to clarify the role of the authority because we are asking public servants to carry out the duties of the authority. If we allow the Bill to go through as it is currently outlined, we are actually asking them to carry out a duty for which they have no legal authority. The Education Authority can encourage and facilitate the community use of all grant-aided schools. It is only the promotion that is restricted to the controlled sector. As the owner of controlled sector schools, the authority will be able to act in a promotional manner in them, but it will not be able to do that in schools that it does not own. Whether Members are annoyed by that or not — as Mr McCallister has quite rightly pointed out, taxpayers pay for these schools — the legislation currently does not facilitate it.

I published guidance to schools about a year ago. At that time, I said that, if schools did not embrace and increase the use of their schools by the community, I believed that the Assembly would have no other choice but to bring forward legislation to make them do so. Again, it goes back to the point that we are not passing motions here; we are passing legislation. There is no legislation in place that would impose a duty on the authority to enable it to act against any school that refused to carry that out.

I will let the Member in.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister. I have two points. In the previous Assembly term, David McNarry brought forward legislation, and it was dropped mainly because, at that time, it looked as if the Department was going to do something.

The Minister's wider point was that we have to be very careful when we are legislating. The point about making sure that the Department has a drive in shared education was exactly my intent; the point about making sure that the Department took seriously the community use of schools was exactly the point of putting it in. For years, we had a shadow education and skills authority, with no chance of getting the legislation to back it up. Millions of pounds was spent on it. How does that sit with his view on legislation?

Mr O'Dowd: It sits very well with my view on legislation. I cannot bring legislation through the Assembly unless, first, I get it through the Executive and then I bring it through its stages in the House. Before us today is a compromise from front to back. I am sure that, if any other Members were writing an education Bill, it would be different from this. It is one thing writing an education Bill; it is another getting it passed in the Assembly. What we have before us today is a compromise. That does not divert from my point: we can pass Mr McCallister's amendment, but it will mean nothing because the authority will not have the legal duties to enforce it on all schools.

I am not dismissing the community use of schools. About 80% of our schools estate is involved at one level or another in the community use of schools, so it is not as if we are facing major resistance. Some schools still refuse to do it, although I think that they are making a huge mistake. The Assembly can always return to legislation on the community use of schools; it is its right to do so.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. Whilst it is a scandal that the Programme for Government sets no targets for integrated education, given the express commitment in the Good Friday Agreement, it does set targets for shared education. There are two targets. The first is to:

> *"ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015"*

and the second is to:

> *"substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015".*

Will the Minister provide us with an update on how his Department has performed to date in relation to this to give some reassurance to those who doubt the sincerity of his shared education plans?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will understand that I do not have those facts and figures in front of me, but I am more than happy to share them with him. Another Member referred to the fact that shared education was mentioned in the Programme for Government and integrated was not. Programme for Government commitments do not trump legislation; Programme for Government commitments are political commitments to be delivered by the Executive. Legislation is passed by the elected body. In that case, it would have been Westminster. The Programme for Government cannot trump that. If the Executive, the party, my Department or I wished to undermine or negate the legislation on integrated education, I would have to bring legislation to the House to do it. I have no intention or wish to do that. The principles and demands set out in that piece of legislation are fair and deliverable.

I am going to return to Mr Agnew, and it has nothing to do with his haircut. It fits in quite neatly with the comments about having a legal duty to do something. When you have a legal duty to do something, particularly in the case of integrated and Irish-medium education, you are being put in a position where you have to positively discriminate in their favour. When you positively discriminate in favour of one group, another group may believe that it is being discriminated against.

Mr Agnew issued a press release to the 'County Down Spectator' on 3 July 2014. He covers that very point. The initial comment is not in quotation marks, but the next one will be. Mr Agnew said that he was worried that Irish-language schools, integrated schools and places with high numbers of kids getting free school meals are now getting priority treatment. The legislation tells me that I have to give them priority treatment. He said in the article that, because of north Down's demographics, local schools would miss out.

5.00 pm

This is a quotation:

> *"Also the minister was clear that there was some positive discrimination in favour of Irish medium and integrated schools."*

The article continued:

> *"Mr Agnew added, "I'm worried the goalposts have moved"."*

Yes, the goalposts have moved, because I am living up to my statutory duty in the legislation in relation to integrated and Irish-medium education. That is what you demand of me, but you cannot demand that of me and

then issue a press release saying that you are worried about me doing it. That goes back to my point at the start of this debate: Members are voting on legislation today not on motions. Pieces of legislation have outworkings and actions that flow from them. So, if the intention of the legislation concerns you, do not pass it. However, if you are supportive of the intention of the legislation, do not criticise it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): As amendment No 2 is an amendment to amendment No 1, we shall need to dispose of it before I put the question on the substantive amendment.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 21; Noes 76.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Ramsey.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Hazzard and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Amendment No 1 has already been formally moved.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I believe the noes have it.

To clarify and to clear up some confusion, we have voted on amendment No 2, as it was an amendment to an amendment. We will now vote on amendment No 1. I hope that that is clear.

Amendment 1 has already been moved.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I will not call amendment No 3, as it and amendment No 1 are mutually exclusive, and amendment No 1 has been made.

Amendment No 4 has already been debated. Amendment No 4 made: In page 1, line 14, leave out subsection (4) and insert

> *"(4) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools."— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 5, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 6, 9, 10, 11 and 18. The amendments relate to membership of the Education Authority and technical matters. Members should note that amendment No 10 is consequential to amendment No 9.

Before I call the Minister, I ask those Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so quietly.

Clause 5 (Amendments, repeals and other consequential provision)

Mr O'Dowd: I beg to move amendment No 5:

In page 2, line 21, leave out from "which amends" to end of line 24 and insert

> *"unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly."*

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 6: In clause 6, page 2, line 35, at end insert

> *"(2) Other words or expressions which are defined in Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 have the same meaning in this Act as in that Order."— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

No 9: In schedule 1, page 3, line 24, leave out "11" and insert "12".— *[Mr Hazzard.]*

No 10: In schedule 1, page 3, line 30, leave out "3" and insert "4".— *[Mr Hazzard.]*

No 11: In schedule 1, page 3, line 34, leave out sub-head (iii) and insert

> *"(iii) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of integrated schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;*
>
> *(iv) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of voluntary grammar schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;*
>
> *(v) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of controlled grammar schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests; and*
>
> *(vi) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of Irish Medium schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests."— [Miss M McIlveen.]*

No 18: In the long title, after "Authority;" insert

"to confer power on the Department of Education to make grants to sectoral bodies;".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis an díospóireacht seo a oscailt ar an ghrúpa seo.

I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on this group of amendments. I am proposing three technical amendments, which I ask Members to support.

Amendment No 5 seeks to provide for all orders to be subject to approval by the Assembly in draft. That is necessary following the amendments made at Consideration Stage to clause 4 of the Bill as introduced. The original clause provided for the Department of Education, by order, to make such supplementary, incidental, consequential or transitional provisions as may be required in connection with the purpose of the Bill. The clause distinguished between orders that would amend or repeal an Act of Parliament or NI legislation and those that would not. The former will be subject to approval by the Assembly in draft form while the latter will be subject to the negative resolution procedure. That would have allowed my Department to act quickly to deal with any unforeseen problems that arose from the implementation of the Bill's provisions. However, the agreed amendment to clause 4 as introduced left out "negative resolution" and inserted "affirmative resolution". The effect of the amendment is that orders that amend or repeal legislation will be subject to approval by the Assembly in draft, while any other order will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. That distinction is meaningless, as the process in each case is effectively the same.

In advance of the debate, I wrote to the Members who tabled the original amendment to explain why I was tabling amendment No 5. I hope that they and all Members understand the rationale behind what I am proposing and agree with me that that is a sensible and practical step to take.

Amendment No 6 provides for clearly defined definitions for a number of terms, such as "school premises", "grant-aided schools", "controlled schools", "transferors", and so on. The education system that we have, as Members will be fully aware, is peppered with numerous descriptors that can be interpreted in many different ways. Therefore this small but important technical amendment ensures clarity and consistency in the use of many of those terms.

Amendment No 18 is a technical amendment to make a change to the long title of the Bill. This is necessary to cover the new clause 4 on the funding of sectoral bodies. There will now be a reference in the long title, which states:

" to confer power on the Department of Education to make grants to sectoral bodies;".

I now move to membership of the authority. Amendment No 11 seeks to provide representation on the Education Authority for voluntary grammar schools, integrated schools, controlled grammar schools and Irish-speaking schools. I should say that this is at the expense of having any publicly appointed community members on the authority.

I feel that it is important that we reflect on the purpose of the Bill for a moment. This is not the ESA Bill. Instead, this Bill seeks to make the minimum structural and technical changes necessary to align education administration with the reform of local government. As I said previously, a future Education Minister and Executive should return to an ESA Bill.

As I explained during the Consideration Stage debate, membership of the authority has been carefully balanced to give a broad representation, while, at the same time, recognising established rights. I acknowledge the concern regarding the absence of representation for grammar schools, although it is possible and reasonable that the transferors may choose a representative from the controlled grammar schools as one of the board members.

As voluntary grammar schools are funded directly by the Department and have no direct funding relationship with the education and library boards, there are questions as to why their representation is necessary.

I believe that to have no community members appointed to the education board would be a mistake, particularly if we are to create a modern, fit-for-purpose authority that commands the respect of the community. But, again, I also understand that there have been acts of compromise on all sides of the House to facilitate this and other amendments. As is the case in any compromise, every side has had to give and take a little. Amendment No 11 is not one that I would have drafted, and I doubt whether other Members, if left to their own devices, would have drafted it on their own. However, it is a compromise amendment, and I will not be voting against it.

Amendment Nos 9 and 10, particularly in light of amendment No 11, would allow for an increase in the membership of the trustees on the Education Authority. Given the reshaping of the authority under amendment No 11, and in the mood of compromise as I have mentioned, the overall make-up of the board of the Education Authority would provide a balance of political members, yet-to-be-decided community members and members drawn from the transferors and trustees. It has been carefully balanced to give a broad representation while recognising established rights.

Consequently, the Bill retains the weighting effect of the provisions that have applied to the balance of transferors and trustee members within the ELBs since 1986. That provided for four transferors and three trustee members. Amendment No 11, if agreed by the House, would adjust that balance and, in those circumstances, I understand why amendment Nos 9 and 10 have been put forward. Increasing the membership of the trustees to four would help to address the imbalance in representation that amendment No 11 would create. So ends my comments on the second group of amendments.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): At this point, I extend my party's sympathy to the family involved in the tragic accident in Cloughmills this morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with them at this very, very sad time.

During Consideration Stage I outlined, on behalf of my party, our views on the proposed Bill, in some detail. I do not propose to repeat that detail. We are content with the broad approach that the Minister is taking in an attempt to move the reform of education administration forward. Indeed, as the First Minister, my party leader, stated last week, he had discussed the idea of amalgamating the five education and library boards as far back as 2002. In our

2011 manifesto, we advocated that if we were to hold the ministerial post in Education we would move quickly to amalgamate the five education and library boards into one body as a first stage of a major reform of the system. For us, as a party, that is an option that has always been on the table.

The Bill is not the "dog's dinner", as Mr McCallister colourfully described it during Consideration Stage. These are major steps towards much-needed and managed reform. It ensures that, for the first time, the controlled sector has a voice and that the authority does not give any other sector priority over that. I hope that that will not be unpalatable for Mr McCallister or, indeed, his dog.

5.30 pm

Until now, the Minister and his Department have had a different approach, which, instead of moving the situation forward, has led to increased frustration in the system and continued in-fighting amongst the various sectoral interests. Thankfully, the ESA Bill is now consigned to the shredder, and we now have an approach that will see five boards merged into one. A new streamlined Education Authority is to be established under the terms of the 1986 Order. The new body will continue to protect the rights of transferors and trustees and ensure that there is democratic accountability through the appointment of political nominees. The users of the Education Authority's services will also be represented in the community representation.

Our approach has also ensured the continuation of a choice of schools in a pluralist system of provision, as well as beginning the process of ensuring that there is fair treatment for all sectors. In the previous debate at Consideration Stage, there was much discussion about the need for all the sectoral interests being represented in the new authority. Most of the amendments tabled at that stage attempted to deal with the issue by increasing the size of the board. Whilst we were not unsympathetic to the calls from the various sectors for a seat on the board, as a party, we were unable to support many of those amendments as they diluted or unbalanced the representation on the board in the context of the 1986 Order. I said then that we did not want to see ESA by amendment.

As I also pointed out in the previous debate, equality for all in the Bill and the integrity of the 1986 Order have been twin pillars upon which our consideration of the current legislation has been built. However, we recognise that there is a need to ensure that all the various interests are involved in the strategic management of the new authority. That would mean that continued reform and improvement of our education system in the interests of children and young people will have the support of all. That support is crucial if we are to equip our young people with the attitude, skills and knowledge to enable them to be effective contributors in the twenty-first-century global economy.

Consequently, we have sought to provide leadership on this issue since the passing of the Consideration Stage of the Bill. We have engaged positively with all sectoral interests and various parties in the House in an attempt to resolve any perceived feelings of exclusion and achieve a consensus on how best to include those interests while maintaining the integrity of the Bill. We believe that amendment No 11 achieves that purpose.

The amendment rose out of a conversation that my party had with Seán Rogers of the SDLP, as we sought to ensure that the authority was able to represent all sectors in a way that ensured that the authority remained balanced. Seán is unwell at present and cannot be here today, but I would like to pay tribute to him for the assistance that he gave us in this matter. I would like to send him my best wishes and wish him a speedy recovery. While, in the end, they did not sign the amendment, I am delighted that the SDLP whip has indicated to us that his party will be supporting the amendment. I would also like to thank John McCallister, Trevor Lunn and Steven Agnew for recognising immediately the value of what we were seeking to achieve through the amendment.

At a time when there is criticism of the parties at Stormont, this amendment is an example of how cross-party agreement can be obtained for the benefit of education as a whole. Mr Kinahan will recognise too that all parties involved have shown their willingness to step away from representing narrow sectoral interests to consider the needs of education across the sectors. That, in my view, represents a major step in the right direction.

The amendment proposes that the Department appoint individuals to the four community interest seats on the authority following consultation with the bodies that represent the integrated, voluntary grammar, Irish-medium and controlled grammar interests. The first three interests were mentioned by all the other parties during the previous debate. The controlled grammar is included because, although it will now be part of the controlled new sectoral body, it is the transferors who are represented on the new authority, and, as Members know, the transferors have never had any representation or responsibility for controlled grammar schools.

My party sought all-party support for the motion, and, as Members can see, it has cross-party support in the House. It is hoped that others who felt unable to sign the motion will, nevertheless, give it their backing at the end of the debate. It is also worth noting that, should we receive that support, we are content that amendment Nos 9 and 10 also pass. The reason for that is that, throughout the passage of the Bill, we have consistently sought to ensure that the spirit of the 1986 Order is protected in the process. Amendment Nos 9 and 10, which increase the trustee representation on the authority, are still in the spirit of the 1986 Order.

As a party, we have attempted to provide leadership on the issue. We need to see education moving forward, and that is best done by ensuring that all sectoral interests are included within the tent. For too long, we have had an unequal playing field in education, with some interests playing both inside and outside that tent. The Bill, with amendment No 11, will not stop that behaviour in the short term, but, with the establishment of the new authority with all of the interests included, there is an onus on all the partners to set aside their differences and begin to work in the interests of all the children and young people of Northern Ireland. Anything less than that will be a disservice to those young people and those they serve. As a party, we are committed to working for a single education system that celebrates diversity and promotes cohesion. The Bill begins that process, and the inclusion of the amendment would ensure that everyone has an opportunity to play their part in shaping an education fit for

the 21st century. We will also support amendment Nos 5, 6 and 18.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On the back of what the Chair has outlined, I will concentrate on amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11. We are happy to support the technical amendments as outlined by the Minister.

Going back to a point raised by Mr Lunn about Sinn Féin tabling an amendment and everything else, Sinn Féin, with other parties, talked about a compromise position, which I am disappointed was not accepted. I think that it was inclusive to give membership for the integrated, Irish-medium and voluntary grammars on the board, but it would still protect the four community places, which, I think, are so important to the authority. Unfortunately, that has not been accepted. However, in the very spirit of compromise around the Bill, we are happy to see amendment No 11 go through. A compromise is the best way to look at this, but it is disappointing that there is no longer a voice for the community on the authority. Some parties need to ask themselves how they can argue in the Education Committee and bemoan the lack of community voice when it comes to education decisions — they often point out that the interests of sectors often trump that — and yet come in today and back an amendment that removes the community voice because the sector that they are closest to now gets a seat on the authority. I do not want to labour the point, but I think that it is a double standard. If we wanted to ensure that the community voice was on the board, the Sinn Féin idea for the inclusive amendment, which gave a seat to the Irish-medium, the integrated and the voluntary grammars while protecting the four community places, would have been a preferable option. It is also significant, as the Minister outlined, that only the chairperson is now appointed through a fair and open appointment process of merit, and that is something to be looked at.

With regard to controlled grammars — again it is getting back to the point of balance — I think that that is where amendment No 11 tips the balance and why it is necessary that amendment Nos 9 and 10 come into place. The controlled grammars could have been represented by a place from the transferors, and the interests of the controlled grammars could have been secured that way. I believe that amendment No 11 —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: Go ahead.

Mr Wilson: Does the Member accept that the controlled grammar schools are a distinctive part of the controlled sector and that their interests and their needs are sometimes different from other controlled schools and, therefore, it is important, if we are going to have a balanced body, that there is representation for that sector, especially given that the controlled grammar sector has infinitely more students attending its schools than, say, the Irish-medium or integrated sectors?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I cannot get away from the fact that, to me anyway, this is a duplication of representation. The interests of the controlled grammars still would have been best served — certainly adequately served — through representation of the transferors.

I turn to our amendment Nos 9 and 10, which would simply redress the imbalance created by amendment No 11, as outlined by the Minister. That is what they have to do. The four places each for the transferors and trustees give balance and representation while recognising the established rights and the growth of the Catholic sector in recent years. I am happy to support the technical amendments outlined by the Minister.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I beg your brief indulgence because an issue has come to light in the last couple of hours. The lives of a number of community safety wardens, who work tirelessly in my city, have been threatened by so-called dissident republicans, and all have had to go home from work today. I just want to make the point that the people who made the threats have nothing to contribute and stand in stark contrast to the community safety wardens, who work tirelessly every night for our communities. I thank you for the opportunity to make that point.

This is a rare occurrence in the House. I have been here for about three and a half years, and it seems that compromise has broken out. It is sort of strange and hard to get used to, but it is a good thing. I am not sure what 'The Nolan Show' will do with it tomorrow, but it is good that we are finally at the point at which the legislation can pass. It is important for all the young people progressing through school that we finally get this work done. I echo the Chairperson of the Committee's words about Seán Rogers, who is not able to be here, and his work on the Committee. I said that during the discussion on the earlier group, and I want to repeat it.

Our view is that the Bill is imperfect, again, but we are in a situation in which we can find a level of agreement that might not have been imagined a while ago. Like Mr Hazzard, we would far prefer there to be an opportunity for community representation so that people from early years, for example, and those from organisations representing young people who are not in education — maybe young offenders or whatever — were included in the Bill. The SDLP tabled an amendment at Consideration Stage and is glad that people can now represent the Irish-medium and integrated sectors.

Our position on amendment No 11 was that we were happy to accept it, if people across the House were happy to accept amendment Nos 9 and 10. I am glad that we have got to that position and that greater balance will be given to representation on the board. That is a good thing. Like anything that is a compromise, we do not agree 100% with the Bill. It is imperfect, but it is good that we have finally got here. We have probably the most balanced board that we can expect to have, and we are glad to see that. When you expect to stand up here and have a row with people and it does not happen, it takes the wind out of your sails, but I am glad that we are now in this position and glad to support the amendments that I talked about.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome this stage of the Bill, particularly the chance to take it forward. As the Chair said, we need to keep in mind the interests of children and bettering the education system, which is where the Bill is meant to take us.

Amendments Nos 5 and 6 are technical. I will not go into them in detail but will happily support them, and I understand why the Minister is putting them in.

When we talk about the membership of the board, amendment No 9 is really the nub of the whole Bill. I

remind Members that, last time, I detected in the Chamber that we were all virtually on the same page, but, due to petitions of concern, we were all going in the wrong direction. It became essential that we all spoke to one another and tried to find a way forward. Although what we have coming up is not perfect, we have all had to give way and have found a way forward. On that, I congratulate everyone for working together. I too pay tribute to Seán Rogers for all the hard work that he put in, as well as all the other parties. Everyone got involved, and that is something that it is unusual to see in the Chamber. It was a case of everyone working together to find some agreement that we could all live with.

5.45 pm

I particularly wanted to see all sectors on the board. Like Chris Hazzard, I did not want to see us losing the community or the other four places. I would like to have seen another four places on the board, but that is something that we have ended up having to give, because one of the sectors did not want to lose the strength that it has. I sometimes wonder whether we need to move away from the 1986 agreements and try to have some vision of where we are going. I hope that the shared education that we are all looking at, even if we all have slightly different ideas on it, is where we are going. I therefore hope that all the members of the board in the future will not just act for their sectors but will try to look at a way forward for our children and their future.

I have some unease about the fact that we are giving the trustees another place. It may seem fair when you relate it to 1986, but, after all we have seen going through the papers about their lack of interest in integrated education and, at times, almost opposition to shared education, I have some difficulty with the fact that we are giving them another place on the board. However, that is what we are willing to sign up to so that we get everyone on board, and I hope that everyone will carry on in that way into the future. I am pleased that we have the integrated, voluntary and, indeed, Irish sectors on the board. There were many who did not feel that we should have the Irish sector, but we have come up with a compromise, and we should all be extremely pleased that we got there.

We will support amendment Nos 9 and 10 on the understanding that amendment No 11 will be supported in return, but I mark very clearly to the House that I have discomfort. I want to see everyone on that board in the future trying to lead us towards the vision of shared education. That includes keeping the integrated sector on board. We must all work together.

The final amendment — amendment No 18 — is about giving grants to sectoral bodies. A lot of the agreement today hangs on the controlled sector getting its body, and I am very pleased that, at long last, it looks as if it will get it. I also feel that we must keep looking at giving the other sectors their bodies and try to get some equality into the system. We have an integrated system that has a different arrangement and does not have the same power. We need to try to get it so that it is the same but, equally, does not have preference. We have the same with the voluntary sector. We need to find a way forward so that it has its own sectoral bodies and it too has the same strengths as CCMS has. We must not forget that CCMS is in the strongest position of all. It already has a very good body and runs very good schools, but it is better placed than everyone else. We need to make the whole system much more equal.

It is not a perfect result, but I am glad that we have got there. There was a lot of hard work from everyone. I look forward to seeing the Bill go forward.

Mr Lunn: We will support all the amendments. Amendment No 5, on the effective implementation of a greater use of affirmative resolution, is fine with us. We have no problem with that or with amendment No 6.

I do not think that anybody has a particular problem with amendment Nos 9 and 10, but they link in to amendment 11, which is what I really want to talk about. Any of the amendments that were proposed the last time by Sinn Féin or the SDLP, may I say, in particular — and Steven Agnew's, which I think was withdrawn because it was slightly defective —

Mr Agnew: I would not have said "defective".

Mr Lunn: Well, there was something missing, I think.

Any of those would probably have been a better result, frankly, than amendment No 11, which we are looking at now. It is a fair point to make that at least five parties around the Chamber would prefer that there was space for community representation on the board. I am glad to see the DUP compromising, because we are all a bit war-weary now, and we need to move on and get something done. What we have here is the best result we can achieve without facing another petition of concern. That is what it means, but we are where we are. Amendment No 11 gives everybody something and not everybody all they wanted.

Amendment Nos 9 and 10 are on the back of that. Look at the two sectors involved: the controlled sector and the maintained sector. Frankly, I do not know if they are the same size or not in terms of pupil population, but there is probably not much in it, so equal representation is OK. All of us, except for the DUP, would have been able to live with a slightly bigger board to bring in whatever balance was necessary plus some proper community representation, but it is not to be.

Amendment No 18 is the one about conferring power on the Department to make grants to sectoral bodies. I am surprised that it does not say, "the controlled sector body", to be honest. I think the DUP might give you a sign, Minister, to hang in your office just to remind you that you have to make grants to controlled sector bodies. However, it is fair enough. As for Mr Eastwood's comment that there has been a level of compromise, it is called war-weariness really, but "compromise" will do. As for what 'The Nolan Show' says about it, does anybody really care? We will support all the amendments.

Mr Craig: Like others, I will start off by remembering today the family who have lost their young one. Our sympathies and prayers are with that family indeed. It reminds us all about the dangers that there are around the issue of transport to schools.

Like others here, I support amendment Nos 5 and 6. I will not waste anyone's time today by going into the technical nature of them, but we are relatively supportive of them. Amendment No 11 is the one which obviously there seems to be cross-party support for today, though some did not actually sign it. It is a level compromise to try to ensure

that all the education sectors have a say on the new authority. With that in mind and as my colleagues have stated, we are minded to support amendment Nos 9 and 10 with regard to amendment No 11 being successful. As I said, we will welcome amendment No 18, even though the words "controlled sector" are not in there, as the honourable Member for Lagan Valley stated. We will still support that.

The Bill has been a long time in coming. In fact, it feels like my seven years on the Education Committee now. I remember my first day on it: ESA was still being debated. I remember making the very simple suggestion "Maybe we should just go for a single board. Would that not be the simplest way forward?", only to be shot down in flames by others. Here we are, all these years later, debating that same issue and principle. It is not a case of "I told you so"; it is a case of "I only wish they had discovered this six years ago".

There is a need for all sectors to be represented on the body. I believe that what we have got today is a reasonable compromise on that issue. I am fairly hopeful that the new authority will be able to take on board the issues that all the sectors have. It is interesting because here, for the first time, there are not just transferors on the authority but people from the voluntary grammar sector and other sectors. That will be an interesting mix. It will be interesting to see how that all plays out.

I wish the authority all the best. The one thing that I realise is that it will face huge challenges, and the tragic news that we heard today is but a symptom, unfortunately, of some of the very serious issues that it will have to face up to. With that said, I will sit down.

Mr Agnew: I speak to a group of amendments on which, if not complete agreement, there does not seem to be any dissent. Little is left to say. I am glad that I was able to be part of the compromise solution. We each laid out our stall at Consideration Stage of what we sought to achieve. I welcome the fact that the integrated sector will be represented on the new authority. That is important, particularly because the Minister has stated all along that it is not an administrative body but a strategic body. Therefore, it is important that each sector's voice be heard.

Credit has to be paid to the DUP, because, despite some of its Members' representation of Irish, we have seen the party sign up to an amendment that gives the Irish-medium sector a place on the board. That is to be welcomed. It is progress. I suspect, for that reason, that 'The Nolan Show' will not report on it, because progress does not make the news. However, we have seen progress made here today. I welcome that and will let the Assembly get on with its business.

Mr McCallister: Thankfully, I strike a slightly more positive note on this group, although I remind the Minister that it is for the Assembly to change the law if it sees fit. Members should table amendments. It is up to Departments to deal with those as best they can. I suggest that they accommodate them rather than row back from them. That is the purpose of this legislative stage.

In general, this is an example of why accelerated passage is not a particularly good idea, because without it you would have time to tease out much more of the issues. Miss McIlveen was keen to say that this is not quite the dog's dinner that I referred to. I am still not convinced that I can get my dog to eat this dinner, but we are where we are on the Bill. I support this group of technical amendments: amendment Nos 5 and 6; Sinn Féin amendment Nos 9 and 10; and the effectively cross-party amendment No 11.

I commend in particular Miss McIlveen as the Committee Chair and her DUP colleagues for going the extra mile in trying to accommodate various sectors. While we would have liked different bits in the Bill, and people would have liked more community representatives on the authority, it is and was important that, given the time pressures, we achieved getting in an amendment that is acceptable to the majority in the House. That is where the pressure came in. I know that Mr Lunn is about to leave, but, after hearing his contribution, I was almost surprised to see his name put to the amendment. Good work has been done with colleagues, and I also pay tribute to Seán Rogers and wish him a speedy recovery. I hope that it is not too long before we see him back in the House.

6.00 pm

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

It was not easy for some parties to come to this compromise. In previous debates and at Consideration Stage, Mr Agnew and I were happy to make the case that integrated, voluntary grammar and Irish-medium schools should be represented. I know that that was not easy for every party, particularly in the circumstances. However, I think that the Chair of the Committee has shown leadership, both as the Committee Chair and within her party, in achieving that. I, for one, was more than happy to sign my name to the amendment and to be associated with it. I think that it is a good, workable compromise and one that seems to be attracting support from across the House. I also support the ministerial amendment No 18, so I am pleased to say that I support all amendments in this group.

Mrs Overend: I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I think that the temper has been more cordial than the initial and previous debates that we witnessed in this Chamber. I could say that they were depressing, with personal attacks as opposed to proper political policy debates.

I reiterate the concerns of my party that the Bill was pushed through under accelerated passage. Consultation and scrutiny did not happen, and that is regrettable. It might have been easier to find a compromise if there had have been an opportunity to discuss the Bill in Committee Stage or after public consultation. You never know, we might have been able to come up with a better compromise or solution.

I congratulate my colleague Danny Kinahan for instigating discussions between parties to find a compromise. I understand that they may have started in Flanders fields when Mr Kinahan and Mr Rogers were there with the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I commend the other participants in those discussions, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, the DUP and Sinn Féin. Now we find ourselves with this compromise. The public may be surprised to hear about it, and I hope that, at this stage, those in the education sector — the principals, teachers, governors and staff — find that the result of this Education Bill is something that delivers an improved working environment for them and, ultimately, an improved and better education for our children.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabhail leis na Comhaltaí uilig a ghlac páirt ins an díospóireacht seo. I thank all Members who contributed to the debate.

I suspect that we may be on the verge of an agreement on the next steps in reshaping our education administration. It is long overdue, but, all the same, it is a huge step forward. Compromise is not a dirty word. It may be uncomfortable, but I recognise the steps that have been taken by all sides of the House tonight to move this programme forward. I think that our political and, more importantly, our education system is in a better place for it.

I also once again pay tribute to our education and library boards and CCMS, who have continued to deliver education services to our schools through very uncertain times and, at times, very difficult times. We all owe them a huge degree of gratitude for the work that they have carried out. They, our teachers and our education staff all deserve certainty on the way forward, and the work of all political parties in the Chamber has ensured that we can now move forward with that certainty.

Community places has been discussed as part of the ongoing debate. As legislators, we may wish to return to that in the future. I think that the board or the authority is diminished by the fact that there are no community representatives on it. However, that will be a matter for the Assembly at another time if that body continues for a considerable period in the future.

As I said earlier, the long-term way forward is for a future Education Minister and Executive to return to an ESA Bill. Not to disregard how any votes will go on this matter, we have all been able to make compromises this evening that will bring the Education Authority a step closer. If we can make similar compromises in years to come, I believe that we will be able to deliver an ESA in future.

I will not concentrate on Members' comments because I believe that Members are in general agreement that all these amendments will pass. Of course, they have their individual opinions on different aspects of the Bill. I just want to clarify for the record that amendment No 18, which refers to the funding of sectoral support bodies, is a technical change to the long title of the Bill. It in no way impacts on how sectoral bodies will be funded or amends the amendment from the last stage that ensures that the controlled sectoral support body is named in the Bill. It is just a technical amendment.

I think that the controlled sector support body will make a significant difference to education in that sector. I have no doubt that it will be able to learn from and engage with CCMS, which has made huge strides forward in the Catholic sector over many years. While others might look jealously upon CCMS, the success story of CCMS is largely down to CCMS itself. It made strategic decisions at the right time; it made critical decisions at the right time and moved the programme forward.

In conclusion, success has many fathers; failure is an orphan. I have no doubt that over the weeks and months ahead, many people will claim the success of the new Education Authority. From my point of view, I have spent seven long years trying to get some form of public administration into the education system. I do not mind who claims success, but I do believe that the true story of that success will be the delivery of an effective, efficient education system to young people.

Amendment No 5 agreed to.

Amendment No 6 made:

In clause 6, page 2, line 35, at end insert

> *"(2) Other words or expressions which are defined in Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 have the same meaning in this Act as in that Order.".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

Amendment No 7 made:

> *In clause 7, page 2, line 39, at end insert"(za) section 2(3);".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

Amendment No 8 made:

In clause 7, page 3, line 2, at end insert

> *"(c) paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 1.".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

Schedule 1 (The Education Authority)

Amendment No 9 made: In page 3, line 24, leave out "11" and insert "12".— *[Mr Hazzard.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 10 is consequential to amendment No 9.

Amendment No 10 made: In page 3, line 30, leave out "3" and insert "4".— *[Mr Hazzard.]*

Amendment No 11 made: In page 3, line 34, leave out sub-head (iii) and insert

> *"(iii) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of integrated schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;*
>
> *(iv) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of voluntary grammar schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;*
>
> *(v) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of controlled grammar schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests; and*
>
> *(vi) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of Irish Medium schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests.".— [Miss M McIlveen.]*

Amendment No 12 made: In page 6, line 37, leave out from "will" to end of line 38 and insert

> *"shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(3).".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 13 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 14.

Amendment No 13 not moved.

Amendment No 14 made: In page 6, line 38, at end insert

"(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority.".— [Mr McCallister.]

Amendment No 15 made: In page 6, line 39, leave out from "will" to end of line 40 and insert

"shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(4).".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 16 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 17.

Amendment No 16 not moved.

Amendment No 17 made: In page 6, line 40, at end insert

"(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority.".— [Mr McCallister.]

Amendment No 18 made: In the long title, after "Authority;" insert

"to confer power on the Department of Education to make grants to sectoral bodies;".— [Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Education Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

I ask Members to take their ease before the Adjournment debate.

6.15 pm

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs).]

Adjournment

Loane House, Dungannon: Proposed Closure

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I am delighted that Loane House has been selected as the topic for the Adjournment debate. This important issue came to my attention when I visited a neighbour to find out how her husband was keeping. She told me that he was in Loane House receiving excellent care and that the nursing staff were friendly. However, she said that there were strong indications that Loane House was earmarked for closure. Sadly, my neighbour's husband has since passed away, but that was my inspiration, as a public representative, to try to save this facility.

I heard many neighbours' sentiments over and over again during the campaign to gather over 8,100 signatures opposing the closure of Loane House. A copy of the petition was handed to the then Speaker of the Assembly, Mr William Hay MLA, on 2 July. The huge number of signatures on the Loane House petition reflects the public's satisfaction with the excellent services and facilities provided by the Southern Trust, which, in its consultation document, notes:

"It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the level of medical cover necessary at Lurgan and South Tyrone hospitals. This is partially due to a difficulty in attracting and recruiting specialist doctor grade staff in stand-alone/off-site units."

However, an Assembly research paper obtained on the services at Loane House states:

"A multi-disciplinary team of professionals including medical, nursing, social work, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy ... provide care to patients with medical and rehabilitation needs during their stay in Loane House."

So, it is not clear what the difficulties are with the provision of the required level of medical cover. In an overview of the range of care needs for patients placed in Loane House, the research paper states:

"These hospital beds are necessary for patients who are ready for discharge from an 'acute' hospital bed but not medically fit for discharge and/or their rehabilitation needs cannot be facilitated in either their home, a nursing or residential facility. These patients require ongoing daily medical care from a consultant-led medical team, specialist assessment and intensive rehabilitation."

Loane House is a complementary service to Craigavon Area Hospital.

The Older People's Commissioner, in her response to a consultation by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, said that she had concerns that the creation of a specialist stroke unit would mean the closure and relocation of stroke rehabilitation beds at Daisy Hill, South Tyrone and Lurgan hospital sites. She pointed to the travel distances from Daisy Hill and South Tyrone hospitals as being of particular concern, as it will mean that patients and visitors will have to travel much further.

The Assembly research paper states that Dungannon and surrounding areas represent 63%, nearly two thirds, of all admissions. Regarding catchment population, the number of admissions by local government district in 2013-14 was 152 from Armagh; 200 from Dungannon; 92 from Cookstown; and 20 from other areas including Craigavon, Magherafelt, Omagh, Fermanagh and Ballymoney. So, looking at the issue of local capacity, it is clear that there will be a much broader impact on mid-Ulster and north Armagh. It is also stated that 464 patients from the Southern Trust area — not the council area — are referred to Loane House per annum.

There are 45 non-acute hospital beds in Loane House and eight of them are used for stroke patients. The closure of Loane House would lead to a further blocking of acute beds in the trust's two acute hospitals, neither of which can cope with their workload as things stand.

The emphasis in the consultation document is on stroke services, as you would expect, but there is no mention of rehabilitation from other medical and surgical conditions, such as heart attack, heart failure, repair of fractures etc. When looking at the trust's consultation document, the section on hospital rehabilitation services in Lurgan and Loane House states that in 2012-13 there were 128 patients and in 2013-14 there were 166. That is a year-on-year increase of 30% in the number of patients requiring rehabilitation services in those facilities.

If the community stroke services have been so successful, why has there been an increase of 30% in the numbers requiring rehabilitation in Lurgan and Loane House? Perhaps community stroke services do not have the human and economic resources to cope with the present workload and, if that is the case, how would they cope with the increasing demands put on them if Loane House were to close?

Some 20 years ago, the then health boards introduced Care in the Community. We had the same ideals as those of Transforming Your Care, which is to reduce the time spent in hospital by increasing availability of community-based services, and enabling patients to return to home quickly following an acute hospital inpatient stay. High ideals indeed; but it did not work then, and it is not going to work now. Community services, from home help to community nursing services, are already stretched and are faced with more cutbacks as we heard in recent weeks. Care in the Community did not work 20 years ago because it was underfunded and under-resourced.

In section 4.1 of the Southern Trust consultation document, which is the overview of stroke care, phase 3, which is the discharge home with community support, notes that:

> *"Patients from the Newry and Mourne area requiring in-patient rehabilitation can be transferred to Daisy Hill at day 16".*

However, there is no mention of what happens to patients from Armagh, Dungannon and all those rural areas. Of course, we are the Cinderella of the Southern Trust. So, what will happen to those patients on day 16?

The Southern Trust, having already announced a phased reduction of beds in Loane House, will probably secure the closure of the unit by stealth. There is a strong feeling that the Southern Trust will just ignore the results of the consultation, that a decision has already been made, and that the consultation is purely a paper exercise.

According to the trust's own figures, strokes are increasing by 33% year-on-year in the North of Ireland. That being the case, the expected need for inpatient rehabilitation in Lurgan and Loane House should increase as follows. I have already mentioned the first two figures; that in 2012-13 there were 128 patients and in 2013-14 there were 166. In 2014-15, there may be 220 patients; in 2015-16 there may be 293; in 2016-17, there may be 390, and in 2017-18, there may be 519. By the time the new unit opens in 2017, the number of patients requiring inpatient rehabilitation will have gone from 166 to 519, which is an increase of 300%. Where will those patients receive inpatient rehabilitation?

Bed capacity in Craigavon Area Hospital is under pressure in most months of the year. This year, the winter bed crisis started in September despite the fact that the Met Office tells us that it was the driest and warmest September since 1910. We do not agree with the proposed relocation of non-acute hospital beds from Loane House, South Tyrone Hospital, to a new building development on the Craigavon Area Hospital site. As well as the fact that it will take a considerable period of time, it will also cost the taxpayer millions of pounds. Given the existing budgetary pressures, I believe that that is a non-runner.

In a sustainability development assessment carried out by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust — which took me three weeks to receive — it states that the policy will impact on rural areas but, in its wisdom, the trust felt that there was no need to carry out a full rural impact assessment. The document suggests that, in this context, a full rural impact assessment should be considered, and we as a political party believe that this full rural impact assessment should be carried out.

We also believe that a full rural impact assessment would show that a section of people in our community would be even more disadvantaged by having to travel 30 to 40 minutes over and above journeys that take up to an hour at present. If you are to consider that, for relatives who have to visit daily, you could multiply this disadvantage by up to seven times a week. There is a very strong feeling out there that centralisation of services is the end game, and we who live in that constituency are not happy about this proposal. I ask the Minister to sincerely give consideration to all of the issues that I have raised.

Lord Morrow: I apologise for my few moments of late arrival. The other debate closed marginally quicker, and I was on my way to the Chamber when the debate started. I congratulate the Member on securing the debate this evening on the future of Loane House. Those of us who live in that area know the importance of Loane House and the wonderful service that it provides.

Loane House is a step-down unit for elderly care. It is not a trust-owned residential or care home. It is well placed as a central hub in what was a very successful thriving

hospital in south Tyrone before the then Minister, Bairbre de Brún, ordered its running down in favour of larger acute services elsewhere. In June 2000, the then Minister, Bairbre de Brún, announced the removal of acute services, including geriatric input at the site. At that time, her colleague Francie Molloy publicly stated that Ms de Brún had promised that the hospital would not be closed and he believed that acute services would be restored to the area. Almost one year to the day later, the trust confirmed that acute service closure would be permanent in the downgrade of local hospitals, and that is taken directly from the Hayes report and can be easily checked out.

The threat to Loane House is the continuation of this downgrading, which flies in the face of fact-based evidence and public opinion. Loane House has a tremendous reputation for quality care with dignity and respect for patients. Elderly persons are vulnerable in many ways, and closing this facility will be detrimental to the well-being of those in the hinterland that it serves. Along with colleagues not only from the political world but the community itself and medical and disability sectors and, most importantly, representatives of patients, families and carers and others, I have lobbied strongly against the trust's decision. I believe that it is ill-informed and that the consultation has been a gross waste of time and money because little heed is paid by the trust.

Sometimes, I can well understand why the public become disillusioned with what is called "consultation", because it does appear that, despite what the consultation throws back — I can recall very vividly the thousands, yes, thousands, of people who stood in the market square in Dungannon and protested vehemently — they are pushed to one side, and their voice is not heard. It appears that no heed is taken of the voice of the community any longer.

The suggestion is for patients to be moved into other larger facilities, some distance from Dungannon and the South Tyrone Hospital site. Geographical factors are a major contributor to this argument. While the emphasis is doubtless on the best possible care for the patient, it must also be remembered that family and friends will both need and want to visit, and the distances to be travelled to alternative facilities is significant, especially as many such visitors are elderly themselves, and public transport and road infrastructure is not the best.

The distance to Craigavon Area Hospital is 22 miles or thereabouts. Lurgan Hospital is some 24 miles away, Omagh hospital is 34 miles away, the South West Acute Hospital in Fermanagh is 52 miles away and Armagh Hospital is some 18 miles away.

6.30 pm

Let me also state that I think that there is sometimes a myth abroad. Yes, a new A4 dual carriageway has been built from Moygashel, Dungannon to the Ballygawley roundabout. However, that is the smaller part of the journey, because you have still to negotiate the long distance from Ballygawley roundabout to Enniskillen on quite narrow and very busy roads.

The rural community does not have the luxury of facilities on its doorstep, nor does it have facilities within a distance in single figures. Quite the contrary. We should be ever-mindful of the wider impact that such closures have on rural communities generally. In recent years, we have seen the closure of our rural schools, post offices and police stations and the demise of what we would call the local shop or store. The hospitals are next on the hit list, and the rural community feels very sore about that. It seems that one facility or service after another is being picked off and that there is no stopping that.

If you are a rural dweller, you will be penalised more than if you are a urban dweller. That should not be the case, and there should not be an attempt to force rural dwellers out of the areas in which they have been born, bred, reared and brought up and into an urban environment. The local community is no longer prepared to be treated as the poor relation. Why should it?

Every time that there is a cut or the threat of a cut, rural communities invariably take the hit, or it appears that way at least —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Lord Morrow: That is despite their paying the same rates and taxes as their urban and suburban counterparts.

There is much more that I would have liked to have said. It would be good for the Minister to come up to Loane House to see for himself what exactly is happening there. I extend that invitation to him this evening.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate.

I commend my colleague Bronwyn McGahan for securing the Adjournment debate and for the energy that she has put into the campaign to save Loane House. The 8,000-plus signatures that she placed before the Assembly in July is testimony to the efforts she has put into something that she passionately believes in and that should remain in the community in the Dungannon and Clogher Valley area.

As she said, the large number of signatures in support of Loane House is reflective of the public's satisfaction with the excellent services and facilities that are provided at present. Some of those who signed the petition said that it would be shameful if Loane House were to close, given the quality of care that the facility provides.

I also know the family that Bronwyn visited when she became aware of the campaign. I have been in communication with her all the time during the campaign.

Another comment made on the petition was:

> *"The nurses are brilliant and they have really helped my mother in her recovery."*

Loane House is a vital community service that must be kept open and properly resourced.

I want to focus on one particular aspect of the trust's figures, which Bronwyn mentioned. It is that there has been a 33% year-on-year increase in strokes in the North of Ireland. Those figures are very concerning for us as a society in health terms, and I know that the Minister would like to see an education programme around better health so that fewer strokes take place in future. Some 150,000 people annually on these islands have a stroke. It is the largest cause of disability in the North of Ireland and the third most common cause of death. Rehabilitation is a major part of treatment, and stroke sufferers have complex medical needs. Loane House can play a major role as

a rehabilitation facility, not only for stroke patients but for those with other minor, non-acute ailments. With the predicted rise in strokes, the expected need for inpatient rehabilitation in Loane House will increase significantly. By the time the unit opens, the number of patients will have increased by 300%. One has to ask where those patients will receive inpatient rehabilitation.

In its consultation, the Southern Trust states that it wants to improve the quality of care delivered to everyone who has a stroke, regardless of age and type of stroke, and ensure that its community has the best possible care and treatment for stroke victims. The best way in which it can do that is by keeping Loane House open.

Mr Elliott: I, too, apologise to the proposer, in particular, and to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for missing the start of the proposer's speech. As Lord Morrow said, the previous item of business moved on slightly quicker than we imagined it would. Anyway, I welcome the opportunity to debate the topic, and I thank the Member for bringing it forward.

South Tyrone has suffered a lot from a reduction in services, particularly medical services. We see that now at Loane House, but, prior to that, we saw it in other services, and none more so than in the South Tyrone Hospital, which lost many services over a number of years. One of the more recent losses was the reduction in the time available for the minor injuries unit. It was, and continues to be, very well used for the number of hours that it is open. It is unfortunate that it lost some of those hours in recent times. Unfortunately, it almost appears that Loane House will be the next in line for a reduction in services. It is a facility that provides a quality service for those suffering from stroke conditions, and it provides an excellent rehabilitation service. I have talked to the officials about that, and they have indicated that it is maybe much easier to provide the level of care that is required at a bigger unit. I know some of the people who have been inpatients in Loane House, and their families, and they would have no hesitation in saying that the level of care and provision that they got was excellent. I put on record that they have no difficulty with that. Those who have gone through the system at Loane House do not have any difficulty with the provision of services that they got.

Another factor, which has been brought out by other Members, is the localised nature of the service and having a family member close by and being able to visit that family member with ease, instead of having to travel the long distances that Lord Morrow and others have related. Fermanagh or the Clogher valley area is not particularly close to a facility at Lurgan or the Craigavon Area Hospital, for instance. It is that extra distance that makes a huge difference to the families, especially when you have to travel it every day.

It will have a serious impact on rural communities. I listened to what was said about the rural communities. It would be detrimental to the rural communities, but not as detrimental as it would be to the inpatients in Loane House and their families. One of the most difficult aspects of this issue is the patient not being close to their families and their families not being close to the patient.

I ask the Minister whether there are any opportunities to develop services at Loane House. Maybe its services could be widened to include more than the rehabilitation of stroke patients. Are there opportunities for the rehabilitation of other medical conditions for inpatients, or maybe even respite care? I am interested to hear whether the Minister has looked at any other opportunities for the facility, or if the Southern Trust has recommended any other opportunities. Lord Morrow has invited the Minister to Loane House. I invite him to ask the Southern Trust whether there are any other opportunities and proposals. We could have a discussion about those at a later stage, rather than just taking a decision that will, I am absolutely sure, go against the consultation responses and the overall responses, thoughts and needs of the area.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At this stage of the evening, there is not a pile left to say or do, apart from wait for the Minister's response. Hopefully, it will be reflective of the comments that have been made to date.

We are debating a very serious issue, which affects people from across a considerable geographic area; it is not just a Dungannon issue. As Bronwyn outlined, people come from a considerable number of places to avail themselves of the excellent facilities on offer in Loane House. As we have heard, the Southern Trust is undertaking a consultation process that could spell the end of Loane House, which has served elderly and vulnerable members of the local community for decades. There is considerable community anger at the proposal. Over 8,000 people have signed a petition calling for Loane House to remain open, and my colleague Bronwyn McGahan submitted a petition here in July.

The trust is proposing that, in future, all inpatient hospital services will be based at Daisy Hill Hospital or Craigavon Area Hospital; that will mean that inpatient services at Loane House will transfer to Craigavon. The trust, in its spin, claims that it is caring for older people at home with more complex needs, through the development of new community services, day hospitals and engagement with local communities. Conditions that were previously treated in hospital can now be managed without the need for a hospital admission, and that has led to a reduction in demand for beds in Loane House in recent years, especially during summer months. That is what the trust is saying; it says that that is how it is dealing with the community. People do not need to go to the hospital any more; they can be dealt with adequately at home. It also says that about two thirds of the 45 beds are empty. In my opinion, that is not as a result of a lack of need but a lack of willingness by the Southern Trust to adequately utilise the much needed facility and explore options for using the facility in a way that meets the changing needs of our health service.

Personally, I do not agree that the current non-acute hospital model has to change. I think that the current service is a very effective alternative to an acute setting for people who do not require such treatment. There are 45 non-acute hospital beds in Loane House, eight of which are used for stroke patients. As I have said, the local community is strongly opposed to the closure of the facility. I found a couple of quotations that indicate the strength of feeling and logic behind that. One person said, "it is a good place" and the rehabilitation is "second to none". Someone else said:

> *"The nurses are brilliant. They have really helped my mother in her recovery."*

This is not about an institution, a building or a facility; it is about the people who use it. Asking elderly, vulnerable

people to completely move out of the area that they have lived in all their lives and travel 30 or 40 miles to access rehabilitation services, which then means that their loved ones, their family and children and those around them who generally support them have to travel that same distance to visit them, will have serious consequences on the mental well-being of the person who is in there for rehabilitation.

We are dealing with elderly, vulnerable people, some of whom are suffering from complex medical needs, and they need the support of their family, friends and neighbours around them at this time. Transferring them somewhere where they will not know anybody and where people will be more reluctant to travel to visit them is not, in my opinion, a sensible idea.

We have been told by the Southern Trust that everything will be OK because community services are in such a great state that people will be fit to live at home and will not need rehabilitation in hospital; but they are saying that if they do need it, they can travel to one of those other hospitals. Let us take a look at how the community services are providing that. All of us as political representatives regularly engage with people who are employed as home helps. They travel round the country and look after people who are trying to live in their homes; they have 15 minutes to go into a house and do everything that they need to do. Fifteen minutes is just not enough to provide the very basic services needed by people who are not well and who are trying to live at home.

The other aspect that home help gives you is a bit of mental stimulation, and 15 minutes is not enough to meet the basic requirements of people. If any of our trusts were serious about sorting the issue out, they would do away with those 15-minutes of time when people are expected to provide home help. The front line staff who are providing the home help are completely under-resourced and underfunded. They are being asked to work for poverty wages but are providing a key service, which not only allows people to live at home in their communities for longer but saves the health service a fortune because it means that people do not have to stay in hospital.

6.45 pm

However, I do not think that the driving agenda behind this is to facilitate people to live at home longer. If that were the case, home help staff would be paid properly, they would have adequate support, and they would be getting a proper contract and terms and conditions. The agenda is not to move patients to another NHS facility in Craigavon; I think that has been thrown out there as some sort of a ruse. From what I can see of how the health service is going, the driving agenda here is to put more people into privately run nursing homes in the local area. It is not about sending them to another hospital; it is about driving the private sector and putting people into private nursing homes.

The clear message that I want to come out of the debate —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Flanagan: — is a call for the Minister and the trust to support public services, to support Loane House and to maintain the excellent services that are on offer in that wonderful facility.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone for proposing the Adjournment debate. I have been impressed with the considered and valuable contributions made in the Chamber today. Six MLAs for the constituency have made a contribution. I hope to respond to as many of the points raised today as possible, but, if time does not allow, I am more than happy to write to individual Members if I have not covered the points that they raised.

First, I think that it is important to set in context what care the Southern Trust delivers on a day-to-day basis and the environment in which it operates. The Southern Trust area has a population of 358,600. That is the fastest growing population in Northern Ireland, with an 18% increase since 2000, compared with the Northern Ireland average of 7·4%. That growth is projected to increase by a further 15·4% by 2023, versus an average for the rest of Northern Ireland of 7·2%. It includes the largest 0-17 years population group, which is expected to grow by almost 15% by 2023, compared with the Northern Ireland average growth of 6·5%; there has been a 21% increase in births since 2001, compared with a Northern Ireland average of 15%; and those aged over 65 will increase by 33%, with a 45% increase in the number of people with dementia.

As Members know, there is also a large ethnic minority population in the Southern Trust area, and 16·9% of births are to non-UK mothers compared with the Northern Ireland average of 12·6% for 2001-2010. In 2013-14, there were 142,000 attendances at emergency departments, 101,000 hospital admissions and a staggering total of 234,000 outpatient attendances in the Southern Trust area.

What that all adds up to is this: there will be an increase in the number of people with long-term conditions and, therefore, an increasing demand and over-reliance on hospital services. The growing expectations of our population and fast-moving opportunities in technology and medical interventions also have to be considered. And, of course, there are challenges. The Southern Trust's annual budget of £435 million is not enough to meet the level of projected growth. The trust has faced considerable challenges, and it will continue to face those challenges in the years ahead. That challenge is exacerbated by the financial position of which everybody in the Chamber is well aware and which many have referred to.

However, despite the scale of the challenges, the trust has performed well. The Southern Trust's acute hospital network has been recognised amongst the 40 top hospitals in the United Kingdom for 2013, and it is the third year in a row that that has occurred. That is an achievement that the team can be proud of. The top-40 awards are based on an evaluation of 22 indicators covering safety, clinical effectiveness, health outcomes, efficiency, patient experience and quality of care. So, the Southern Trust has a very good track record. The trust is doing well, and it is well led and focused on the task in hand, which is to deliver high-quality safe and effective care in the most efficient manner.

That brings me to the trust's proposals, the subject of the debate this evening. I have listened to Members' contributions and their understandable fear that the downturn in beds means a loss of service. In this case, nothing could be further from the truth. Within two weeks of my appointment, I went down to trust headquarters

in Craigavon and met the senior team. I was extremely impressed by its dedication and perseverance in securing the best services that it can for the people whom it serves. I have known most of that team for the last five and a half years. I have met them on many occasions, and it is one of the strongest teams that we have in position in Northern Ireland.

A few years ago, the Southern Trust won the award for the best telemedicine service in the United Kingdom, beating off competition from over 100 trusts. The Southern Trust can be very proud of that. As Members will know, when statistical tables are produced on the effectiveness of health-care provision in Northern Ireland, the Southern Trust is invariably at or very close to the top. So, we have a well-performing trust, and that leads me to believe its assurances on the effectiveness of its decisions. I have heard the trust speak of its vision for improving services for vulnerable patients, and that is what this is about.

The trust's vision for the care of older people and the modernisation of stroke services is that everyone has the right to equal care and that everyone, wherever they live and whatever their needs, will be treated in the right place by the most appropriate person in a timely and compassionate way. The proposals will provide the flexibility to ensure that inpatient services currently focused and provided at Loane House will be provided at Craigavon. Of that, I have been assured. Indeed, no one has contested the fact that there will be alternative provision in Craigavon. They may not agree with that, but they accept that it will happen.

It is not just a case of changing the location of services now that most people can and want to be looked after at home or in the community. We are committed to supporting older people to be as independent as possible for as long as possible rather than spending long periods in hospital. If you talk to patients, they invariably say that they want to spend as much time as possible in their home surrounded by their family and community.

We now care for more older people at home through various measures. Specialist community teams look after patients with conditions such as like heart failure, diabetes, breathing problems and stroke. The teams are supported by technology such as telemedicine, which I mentioned earlier, and telecare. We have local one-stop assessment clinics for older people who need expert assessment but do not need to be admitted to hospital and a re-enablement service to support people to regain their independence after an illness or injury. Again, the stats show that the Southern Trust is well ahead on re-enablement. There is much to congratulate the trust on. That is undoubtedly the way forward, and this proposal allows the trust to advance that approach.

Hospital care is also changing now that all agree that hospital care should be for only a short period for acute illness or injury. The majority of patients who transfer to Loane House will already have been a patient in Craigavon. One of the Members opposite said that they were being drawn in from a wide area; the vast majority have already been under the care of Craigavon. With the continued development in community-based care, more patients could be discharged straight home, and that is part of the whole Transforming Your Care process. This is a positive for older people and their families and carers because it shortens the length of hospital stay, reduces the number of moves needed and restores people to their familiar environment as soon as possible. Mr Flanagan made the point that people want to be close to their community, and that is exactly what it delivers.

It is incredibly important, especially in the face of the financial challenges that I outlined, that we use our hospital resource wisely, effectively and efficiently. Many hospital services are now provided without the need for an overnight stay, and our hospital services must now be based on evidence and provide what works best, in the right place and by the right people.

When older people need to be in hospital, their care should be of high quality, in an appropriate setting and provided by highly skilled teams of staff with access to diagnostics, specialist knowledge and treatment.

We should also do all we can to avoid multiple transfers from hospital to hospital.

Every Member this evening has paid tribute to the staff in Loane House. I will certainly accept Lord Morrow's invitation to visit Loane House. It is somewhere that I have not been and I think that would be useful. I would not for one moment undermine the care that people receive in Loane House, but times are moving on, medically, and we need to provide the best care in the best location. We will avoid multiple transfers, so, in essence, the changes really do represent the potential for improvement over the current arrangements. Developments in community care mean that patients who are suitable can remain supported and independent at home for as long as possible.

I have heard various Members decry the consultation. I am always quite interested in consultations, because, in my constituency, if a consultation decision goes against me, it is a dreadful farce that is meaningless and does not take into account the views of the community. If it goes in my favour, it is the most wonderful consultation since time began. You cannot have it both ways.

Lord Morrow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: Do I have time?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Very briefly.

Lord Morrow: I thank him for giving way. Just on the consultation process, there was consultation on the future of South Tyrone Hospital; it meant nothing. There was consultation on the minor injuries units hours; it meant nothing. There was consultation on this; we will see what it means

Mr Wells: I can also say that there was consultation on the future of Slieve Roe House in Kilkeel, where the decision to close it was reversed, and I therefore thought it was the most wonderful consultation exercise.

To finalise, older patients who need hospital care can now receive it in a more appropriate clinical setting, where there is consultant-led care 24/7 and access to the complete range of diagnostics and specialist clinical advice for patients who have multiple conditions and complex needs.

Adjourned at 6.56 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 November 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was out of the country last Monday during Question Time, but I note from the Hansard report that junior Minister McCann accused me of some form of dereliction of duty during my time as Victims' Commissioner with regard to Máiría Cahill, specifically accusing me of not informing police when Máiría Cahill told me about the abuse that she was subjected to.

I am happy to make the House aware that, when I first met Máiría Cahill, she had already informed the police of the abuse and that, therefore, there was no action for me to take. I welcome the opportunity to provide that clarification.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has put that on the record.

Order. Before we proceed to today's business, I want to return to the matter raised by Mr Swann last week about whether it is in order for a Member to remain in the Chamber for Question Time when a question listed in their name has been withdrawn.

There are a number of reasons why a Member's question may be withdrawn, and it is perfectly in order for that Member to attend the Chamber for that Question Time. That being said, as outlined in the Speaker's ruling on 29 November 2012, such occurrences are expected to be exceptional.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Further to your ruling on that matter, is there any obligation on the Member who remains in the House to give an explanation as to why he has withdrawn his question?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): There is a very simple answer: no.

Committee Business

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

> *That Mr Colum Eastwood replace Mr Seán Rogers as a member of the Committee for Education. — [Mr Ramsey.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The next item on the Order Paper is the second motion regarding Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion, and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

> *That Mr Maurice Devenney replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Committee for Social Development. — [Mr Weir.]*

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Environment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Minister of the Environment wishes to make a statement.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): In compliance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the twelfth British-Irish Council (BIC) meeting held in environment sectoral format in the Sefton Hotel, Douglas on Wednesday 15 October 2014. The Northern Ireland Executive were represented by Jonathan Bell MLA, junior Minister to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and me. This report has been endorsed by junior Minister Bell, and he has agreed that I should make the statement on behalf of both of us. The meeting was part of an ongoing series of meetings of the British-Irish Council since the first summit of 17 December 1999, which identified the environment as one of the issues for discussion.

The Isle of Man Government were represented by Richard Ronan MHK, Minister of Environment, Food and Agriculture, who hosted the meeting. The UK Government were represented by Dan Rogerson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for water, forestry, rural affairs and resource management, who chaired the meeting.

The Irish Government were represented by David Walsh, assistant secretary in the environment division. The Welsh Government were represented by Dr Andrew Rees, head of waste strategy branch. The Government of Jersey were represented by William Peggie, director and deputy chief officer in the Department of the Environment. The Government of Guernsey were represented by Yvonne Burford, Minister for the States of Guernsey Environment Department. The Scottish Government were represented by Callum Blackburn, policy manager on the circular economy in the Environment and Rural Affairs Department.

The meeting focused on sustainable consumption and production, in particular the development of the circular economy and tackling barriers to green consumption. Ministers discussed the development of the circular economy that is taking place in each BIC jurisdiction and the European Union. Jamie Butterworth from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation provided a presentation to Ministers summarising the foundation's research, which indicates that transitioning to a more circular economic model could bring significant economic benefits, help to buffer future materials price increases and volatility, reduce material costs and restore natural capital. Such an approach could also make economies less dependent on raw materials and thus less dependent on price volatility and supply-chain risks.

Ministers agreed to work together to explore the potential of extending coverage of voluntary agreements across different industries and different BIC jurisdictions. They agreed that it would be useful for member Administrations to continue sharing best practice and to work together on the potential to develop tools and data sets to measure progress in moving towards a circular economy. They shared best practice in and the challenges that are faced to promoting green consumption in their jurisdiction. We also considered international evidence such as the Rio Earth Summit +20 conference that was held in June 2012, when heads of state and Governments adopted a 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns, and work by the European Union to improve the availability of reliable and comparable information on the environmental performance of products.

We acknowledged the challenges faced by consumers over the quality of information given, availability of green products and "greenwashing" claims, and we noted behavioural barriers to increasing uptake of green products, as well as information failures. We considered the need for better information for consumers as well as encouraging business to recognise the opportunities from reducing the lifestyle impacts of their products and assisting consumer choice. Ministers appreciated that retailers were in a powerful position to influence more sustainable consumption through their operations and supply chains and noted the work done to date by retailers and other stakeholders. Ministers agreed to further share information and data on consumer behaviour and to explore the possibility of adopting green guidance schemes already in place in some BIC jurisdictions.

Following on from the twelfth BIC environment ministerial meeting held in Scotland in 2012, Ministers reaffirmed the threats posed to BIC jurisdiction ecosystems from invasive non-native species. We noted that new EU regulations on alien and invasive non-native species were due to come into force on 1 January 2015 and agreed to continue collaboration and cooperation between all BIC member Administrations, including holding a second workshop in early 2015.

Ministers noted that Sellafield had been raised at every ministerial meeting since the establishment of the work sector in 2000 and further noted the paper produced jointly by Ireland and the Isle of Man on their concerns about the site. That brings that long-standing action point to a conclusion. Ministers welcomed the improvement in British-Irish relationships over the years, which had led to greater information sharing on Sellafield between the Governments of the UK, Ireland and the Isle of Man. As a result of those ongoing productive working relationships, which have also been facilitated by the British-Irish Council, Ministers agreed that further information sharing on Sellafield could be left to the three relevant member Administrations to pursue at a trilateral level outside of BIC.

Ministers agreed that the fourteenth ministerial meeting will be hosted by the Government of Guernsey and that the theme will focus on waste and include an update on biosecurity.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his statement. He is probably aware that the Committee for the Environment, together with Belfast City Council councillors, went to VITO and Metabolon in Germany and Brussels to look at waste sites. It is very much about the circular economy. I am very surprised that the participating Ministers at the summit did not include much on the economic development aspect of waste. All of it, from our experience of visiting the two sites, is very much about seeing waste as a resource and tying it in with research and economic development. What steps will the Minister take here in Northern Ireland to improve the partnership between his Department, perhaps Invest NI, DETI, our universities and the private sector in promoting the circular economy? Sorry for the long question.

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Lo for her long question. I am well aware of the good work done by the Committee in collaboration with others, including Belfast City Council. It is right that the Committee and I, as Environment Minister, look at and learn from best practice, not just in the other BIC Administrations but further afield, as she has done, in Europe.

She is also quite right about the economic opportunities afforded by the creation of a more circular economy. I concur entirely with her that there should be more joined-up working between my Department and possibly DETI in assisting the private sector, councils and NGOs here to exploit the economic opportunities that clearly exist. For too long, there has been a mindset not just here in the North but across other jurisdictions that what is good for the environment is not good for the economy, and vice versa. I am very much of the view that the environment and the economy should not be at loggerheads. Environmental regulation has often been seen as a threat to economic development, but we should identify the opportunities and enable people, us included, to exploit them.

12.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): In case there is some confusion, we give a little latitude to Chairpersons of Committees in asking questions, but we do not encourage long questions from Members who come after Chairpersons.

Mr Weir: I do not know whether that is directed at me or more generally. I thank the Minister for his statement. He made specific reference to the key importance of retailers in their influence on sustainable consumption. Has he planned meetings with the major retailers? How else does he intend to have that conversation to see what influence can be had on retailers about sustainable consumption?

Mr Durkan: Retailers have an integral role. Obviously, they are at the coalface when it comes to influencing consumer behaviour. They can do that in many ways, not least by setting the prices of products. It is imperative that there is partnership working between my Department and retailers, but it should not be limited to that. I want a much more collaborative approach from and with other Departments and sectors, not solely retail. There is a lot more that we can do on educating people. However, as Mr Weir rightly points out, it is generally retailers that call the tune when it comes to dictating consumer behaviour. It is vital that we do all that we can to ensure that they do so responsibly. That will bring benefits to our economy, as I outlined in a previous answer, but also, importantly, to our environment.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My question relates to the third-last paragraph of the Minister's statement. Will the Minister detail the key concerns identified by the Irish Government and the Isle of Man authorities regarding Sellafield? Further to that, did the Department make any input to this document?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McElduff for that question. The concerns expressed about Sellafield by people in different jurisdictions have been well documented publicly over the years. Indeed, concerns have been raised in the Chamber on occasion by colleagues of Mr McElduff on any potential or perceived impact of Sellafield on Northern Ireland and the population of the North. My Department continues to monitor the impact not just from Sellafield but from any nuclear power station in Britain. I have been convinced that the impact on the people of the North is negligible, but that is no reason for complacency. We will continue to monitor to ensure that nothing that could harm the people here is being permitted.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement. Following on from Mr McElduff's question, the Minister talked about the impact on people here, but was there any discussion on the impact or potential impact on marine life from Sellafield discharges?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Eastwood for that question. I reiterate my assurance that, in conjunction with colleagues from the NIEA, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, discharges into the Irish Sea and their impact on the coastline and marine life of Northern Ireland will continue to be comprehensively monitored. Officials from my Department play a part in ensuring that the UK's obligations under the 1992 Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic are monitored. This includes ensuring that effective evaluation takes place of actual discharges into the marine environment and that national plans are in place for the monitoring and control of future discharges. The monitoring programme includes checks on radiation levels on the coastline at approximately 50 locations around Northern Ireland, as well as routine checks on the levels of radioactivity in seaweed, shellfish and fish. The adequacy of that monitoring programme is reviewed annually and, when appropriate, will take into account any changes in the discharges of radioactivity from Sellafield.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he expand on the notion of the green guidance schemes that he referred to in his statement? Will he ensure that any such schemes can be carried out within current budgetary restraints and current staffing levels?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mrs Overend for that question. It is vital that we have accurate green guidance systems that people will believe. I referred in my statement to alleged "greenwashing" practices, and there are concerns that, on occasion, manufacturers and retailers make claims about the greenness of their products that do not add up. That is something that we have to take account of.

It is also important that the standards and measures used to assess the greenness of products is uniform across all jurisdictions. My role in influencing that is limited. However, by working with Ministers in the other jurisdictions, I think it is something that we can see progressed. As I said in answer to Peter Weir, it goes much wider than that: we need buy-in from retailers and partnership with manufacturers.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his statement. Continuing the theme of waste and waste reduction; given the success of the carrier bag levy and the support that the public have given that environmentally friendly scheme, how much work is being done with retailers and other stakeholders, whom I assume include manufacturers, to encourage a major cut in the production of waste before the retailer stage?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mrs Cameron for her question. She quite rightly heralds the success of the carrier bag levy, a success that has been contributed to on a major basis by our working relationship with retailers. The levy moves into phase two in the new year. That is something that we have been liaising closing with major retailers on, as, without their buy-in, it will not succeed and we will not continue to

see the environmental benefits that we are seeing. We can and will see more benefits as we drive down consumption and the number of carrier bags being produced and used. Partnership has been key to the success of this initiative and will be key to its further success and improvement.

Lord Morrow: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. In his statement, the Minister told us that Sellafield has been raised at every meeting since 2000: I do not know whether that is 14, six or 26 meetings. Is he telling us that Sellafield is more secure or less secure as a result of the report that he referred to in his statement?

Mr Durkan: I thank Lord Morrow for that question. This has been a standing agenda item at BIC meetings on the environment sector since 2000. I do not think that this has gone away as an issue, but it has been decided by the British-Irish Council that it is an issue best dealt with on a tripartite basis between the Governments most directly involved. Obviously, that includes the Government of Ireland, the Government of the UK and the Isle of Man Government. We are not going to stop our monitoring of any potential impacts from Sellafield. However, as outlined already in answer to earlier questions, the impact has been shown to be negligible.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister state whether the Arc21 project is viable, given that there is a general move towards a zero-waste objective?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. We might be moving to a circular economy in the long term so that, one day, this becomes a region in which recycling is the norm and in which we produce minimal waste and make minimal use of natural resources. In the meantime, though, increased prosperity means that Europe as a whole is actually generating more, not less, waste, in particular via a huge volume of single-use items and constantly updated technology devices that most of us in here use. The truth is that we will not have a true circular economy in Northern Ireland until the globally effective economic drivers needed to make it happen are put in place. We are nowhere near seeing true prices being charged for raw materials that reflect their full environmental cost. As it is, Europe's approach to a circular economy already encompasses energy from waste as a viable and, indeed, environmentally preferable alternative to landfill, in accordance with the waste hierarchy.

Supporting the concepts of a circular economy and zero waste does not mean that we can avoid confronting uncomfortable realities about waste in Northern Ireland, including the need for facilities that will drive down the scope for illegal activity and provide a viable alternative means of disposal of waste that cannot be landfilled. Also, it would probably make sense for Northern Ireland to recover energy from waste locally rather than export that waste to generate energy elsewhere while having to import energy at a potentially inflated price.

Does the Arc21 proposal offer a solution? An article 31 planning application is under consideration, and permitting applications are being processed, but I am sure that Members are aware that there are local concerns about those proposals, which have manifested themselves in a huge volume of objections.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That concludes questions on the statement.

Executive Committee Business

Pensions (2012 Act) (Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

> *That the Pensions (2012 Act) (Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

My predecessor, Mr Nelson McCausland, pointed out on a number of occasions that, when dealing with pensions, it is easy to get lost in the maze of technical provisions and pensions jargon. I echo those sentiments and agree with him entirely. The rule we are considering is somewhat technical. Whilst I will try to keep my comments at a fairly high level, some jargon is unfortunately inevitable, but I will do my best to keep it to a minimum.

I will start by providing a brief background to the regulations. In 2011, the Supreme Court considered the meaning of "money purchase benefits" in pensions law, in the case of Bridge Trustees v Houldsworth and another. Whilst the court accepted that pensions law had developed on the basis that a money purchase benefit could not develop funding deficits or surpluses, the court decided that certain benefits that could develop surpluses or deficits could still fall within the definition of a money purchase benefit. The judgment potentially could have placed some benefits outside the scope of a wide range of protections, such as scheme funding requirements, the pension protection fund and the financial assistance scheme.

The Assembly sought to regularise the issue by enacting section 27 of the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2012 to, in effect, restore the policy intention by limiting the definition of money purchase benefits to those benefits where there is no risk of a funding deficit. Section 27 has retrospective effect to ensure that, where appropriate, schemes can have their past actions validated. It is anticipated that only a very small number of schemes will be affected, the majority of which will be those offering a mixture of money purchase and non-money purchase benefits. The regulations make consequential and supplementary amendments to primary legislation in light of the commencement of section 27.

A further set of regulations, the Pensions (2012 Act) (Transitional, Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations 2014, make amendments to subordinate legislation, including transitional arrangements.

In particular, the regulations provide an alternative method for trustees or managers to revalue certain types of benefits, known as cash-balance benefits. A cash-balance benefit is where a pot of money, which may be a notional pot, is built up through contributions but there is some form of promise about the amount accumulated. No promise is made about the level of pension to be provided. The cash-balance method allows the sum available for a cash-balance benefit for a deferred member to be revalued by any method that is applied to the benefits of active members, where the trustees think it appropriate to do so. The regulations also add decisions made by the board

of the Pension Protection Fund that relate to benefits affected by the clarified definition to the list of matters that are subject to review under schedule 8 to the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. Under that provision, an interested person can ask the board to review the decision, and the board must refer the matter to a reconsideration committee.

In summary, the regulations, together with the transitional regulations, ensure that there will be consistency so that members, employers and trustees understand which benefits fall within the definition of money purchase benefits and have clarity about how their schemes should operate. That will ensure that the protections designed for benefits that could be affected by funding deficits can operate as intended.

12.30 pm

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee for Social Development considered the Department's proposal to make the Pensions (2012 Act) (Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations at its meeting on 19 June 2014 and considered the statutory rule at its meeting on 4 September. It was supportive of the regulations, as the Minister has already pointed out quite comprehensively. The Committee noted that the rule will make consequential and supplementary provision in the light of the commencement of section 27 of the Pensions Act 2012. Section 27 obviously clarifies the definition of money purchase benefits in existing law.

The Committee acknowledges the positive impact of the regulations, which came into operation on 27 July and are broadly technical in nature. It is assured from the Department's regulatory impact assessment that the impact of the regulations on business, charities or voluntary bodies is beneficial. They ensure that pension schemes that have treated benefits as money purchase can continue revaluing benefits in accordance with the rules of the scheme, rather than having to comply with existing legislative requirements for benefits that are not money purchase. They also ensure that decisions on affected benefits made by the board of the Pension Protection Fund are subject to review. In conclusion, the Committee for Social Development recommends that the statutory rule be confirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Storey: At the outset, I am pleased by the consensus across the Assembly and the comments that the Chair of the Committee for Social Development has made. I thank Mr Maskey and the Committee for the positive way in which they have dealt with them. It is important that trustees, employers and scheme members are clear about which benefits fall within the term "money purchase benefits" and that members' benefits continue to be protected as intended. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Pensions (2012 Act) (Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

Education Bill: Final Stage

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle uasail. Ba mhaith liom Bille an Oideachais a mholadh. I beg to move

> *That the Education Bill [NIA Bill 38/11-16] do now pass.*

First, I pay tribute to the staff and boards of the education and library boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Youth Council, who have continued to deliver services during the long period of uncertainty. Thanks to their efforts, schools and the educational experience of children have been largely protected from the effects of that uncertainty, and we owe them a great deal of gratitude. The Bill that is before us will end uncertainty and provide much-needed clarity for all those involved in education administration and will provide modern, fit-for-purpose arrangements for education administration.

I remain convinced that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is the optimal solution and that the Bill provides a platform from which we may return to ESA at some point in the future. In the longer term, the way forward is for a future Education Minister and Executive to return to an ESA Bill. We have all made compromises to agree the Bill before us and avert an unwanted mismatch between our education and local government arrangements. If we can make similar compromises in the years to come, we will be able to eventually deliver an ESA. However, returning to the present, it is clear that time has run out.

In the absence of agreement on ESA, I have brought forward the Bill to ensure that our education administration will be compatible with the new district council structures that will be effective from 1 April 2015. It is a short Bill with two purposes. It is intended, first, to provide for the establishment of the Education Authority. Primary legislation to establish a single body represents the most practical, efficient and achievable way of restructuring education administration to be compatible with the reformed local government system. It transcends contentious boundary issues whilst offering savings in the cost of education administration through the rationalisation and regionalisation of services. The Education Authority will replace the five education and library boards and their Staff Commission. It will have the responsibilities of an ELB, as set out in the education Orders, including ELB employer responsibilities. Otherwise, employer responsibilities in the education system will be unchanged. The Youth Council, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) will be unaffected.

The Assembly has also decided that the Bill should place a duty on the authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education and the community use of school premises and establish standing committees for those purposes. The provisions on shared education will not be commenced until after my proposed stand-alone Bill on shared education has provided a legal definition of the term.

The second purpose of the Bill is to support my commitment to fund the establishment and operation of a new body that will provide representation and advocacy for schools in the controlled sector. The establishment of that body will address a long-standing deficit in representation

for controlled school interests in our education system. The Bill is, therefore, minimal in the interests of securing consensus and is largely focused on securing the structural and technical change necessary for compliance with local government reform.

Most of the debate during the passage of the Bill centred on the membership of the authority. That is an area in which the simple continuation of the arrangements for ELBs under the 1986 Order was practically not an option. I had proposed a membership based closely on the provisions previously agreed for ESA, an agreed and fit-for-purpose model for the governance of regional level education administration, which was a chair appointed by the Department and 19 members comprising a balance of political members, community members and members drawn from the transferors and trustees. It is a matter of regret to me that the Assembly has decided not to have community representation on the authority, and the board will be diminished by the fact that it will have no community representatives. However, that may well be a matter that the Assembly will wish to return to in the future.

Let me acknowledge the contribution of Members from all parties in reaching consensus on the Bill, but, let us be quite clear: this is only the beginning. Of course, in preparation for ESA, significant progress has been made in planning the delivery of services on a consistent regional basis. However, there are significant challenges ahead. It is not a straightforward task to harmonise the services that have been provided by five discrete organisations over the last 40 years, and the deadline imposed by local government reform means that we must move quickly to have the administrative essentials in place by 1 April. It will be a large-scale change management programme that will continue to be embedded over a number of years beyond 2015. We must develop common procedures and policies for finance, ICT and HR, estate management, health and safety, transport and catering. We must have staff transfer schemes in place, and we must complete the work we have begun to implement regional programmes for governance support and professional development. The change programme will be supported by a communications strategy to ensure that schools and other key stakeholders are fully informed throughout. It is my intention that the programme should be managed in a way that does not impact on the day-to-day delivery of services to our schools.

A LeasCheann Comhairle uasail, is orainn atá an fhreagracht talamh slán a dhéanamh dár riarachán oideachais ón 1 Aibreán 2015 agus an Bille Oideachais tríd a chéad chéim. It is our responsibility to secure the future of our education administration system from 1 April 2015. Passing the Education Bill represents the first step. Molaim an Bille don Tionól. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I welcome the Final Stage of the Education Bill. The reform of the administration of education has been many years in the coming. This is the third time since 2007 that a Bill has come before the Assembly for consideration, and whether it is third time lucky remains to be seen. However, we have seen significant strides forward for the controlled sector. At long last, the largest education sector will have a representative body that will place it on a more equal footing with the maintained, integrated and Irish-medium sectors. That is something that my party has fought long and hard for throughout the Education Bill's various incarnations, and we are delighted that this is coming to fruition.

We are also seeing the merger of the five education and library boards instead of an ESA. Again, that is something that my party advocated as far back as 2002. As it was a merger of the five boards, it was important for us that we kept to the spirit of the 1986 Order. Despite some criticism, we as a party have done that.

I am delighted that the principle of shared education underpins the working of the legislation, and I am happy to have supported Mr McCallister's amendment on that in the knowledge that legislation on the matter is in the pipeline. My party strongly advocates that principle as part of my party leader's vision for the future of education in Northern Ireland. It is important that the Minister moves swiftly to legislate on shared education in order that the new Education Authority can commence its work on it. I look forward to that coming before the Education Committee, which is working on an inquiry into shared and integrated education.

It is also extremely pleasing to see the cross-party support that was achieved to permit voices from other sectors on to the board. For shared education to truly come into being through the new authority, those voices need to be part of the conversation. That is also the case in making wider community use of our school estate. Those voices would not have been adequately represented by any other grouping on the authority. When considering the arguments on whether such representatives should be on the authority, it needs to be borne in mind that grammar schools educate one third of our post-primary children, the transferors do not represent the controlled grammars and the smaller sectors of integrated and Irish-medium education educate another 8% of our children.

The recruitment of a chief executive was a key concern. It was important that the Bill reflected the need for that recruitment to be fair and open and not a coronation. It was also necessary to ensure that the authority's role in that recruitment was protected. The legislation recognises that an interim chief executive needs to be appointed to allow for the initial establishment of the authority, but it ensures that the authority will appoint the first and subsequent permanent chief executives. That is important for the integrity of the authority in the eyes of the public. It is satisfying to note that, despite attempts to the contrary, no sector is being given priority over any other in the workings of the authority. It is hoped that allowing a more level playing field will create an environment in which we will deliver the best for our children.

As I read over the Hansard reports of the debates on the legislation, it was interesting to note those who delivered, those who were recognised for delivering and those who merely claimed that they had delivered. I am pleased that the record shows the work that my party has put into the legislation. I thank those from across the Chamber whose hard work and advocacy have helped to mould the legislation into something that I sincerely hope will benefit all our children. I look forward to seeing the detail of many of the programmes for change and to working through that in Committee.

As I said in an earlier debate, we are committed to working for a single education system that celebrates diversity and

promotes cohesion. The authority created by this legislation is a significant and important step towards that goal.

12.45 pm

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I start by paying tribute to all those who, day and daily, devote their life to the education of our young people. All of us who work in the education portfolio know only too well the work and devotion that those in the education and library boards, as they currently sit, have contributed over the years, so it is only right that we pay tribute to those people.

We must bear it in mind, when discussing this, that our children and young people in education must be at the forefront of what we do in the administration of an education system. That is something that we often forget, and, sometimes, it was missing from the debate. They, too, deserve a world-class administrative body, so I hope that the new authority can set the direction of travel for the next number of years. As the wants and needs of our young people continue to shift and evolve in tandem with global developments, our education system must be flexible and visionary. I hope that the new authority can help to set all our children on a path to fulfilling their abilities and talent. All too often, in the past, our system suffered real variations across the board in efficiency and access to vital educational services such as special educational needs services. The authority must set itself the task of ensuring that a pupil in Downpatrick can access the same support services and potential that is available to any pupil in Belfast and in the same time frame, which is also very important.

The new authority must set as an important, urgent issue the support and development of our teachers and school principals. We need to ensure that our teaching staff are valued and feel supported in their career development at all stages.

To summarise, I welcome the fact that the Irish-medium and integrated sectors now have a place granted by right on the board of the new authority. They are growing, developing sectors with very specific needs that must be encouraged and facilitated by the authority, so it is a good thing that they are there. It is disappointing and, indeed, a mistake that the Assembly has decided to remove the places for community, as the community needs to play a bigger role in our education system and in driving forward with education change. That is a disappointing turn. The board needs to be characterised in the years ahead as strategic and visionary, not bound by sectoral and dogmatic thoughts, and the community might have helped to drive that forward. I welcome the fact that we are now passing the Bill on through. It is welcome change, and, since we have all given a little, our system is the big winner.

Mr Eastwood: I do not intend to speak for too long; we covered most of the points last week. We are glad that we are at this point. It is unfortunate that it took seven wasted years and wasted about £17 million, but we are at this position now, and that is a good thing. It is the result of some cross-party work. We passed amendments last week that, in our view, were imperfect but provided a balance across the sectors and across the ability ranges. We would have liked an amendment at an earlier stage and would like to have seen more community representation, whether it is for early years or for kids who are not in education, employment or training or any of the other community sectors that we would like to have seen represented. We do not have that, but we have a Bill, and we were nearly in danger of not having that. I am glad that we can now finally move forward and that we remember at all times that this is about the children who go through our education system. We hope that we can ensure that they will have the best education system that we can get.

I am glad to see the integrated sector and the Irish-medium sector being represented on the board. That is a very good thing. I implore the Minister at this point, given that the decentralisation agenda has largely gone off the boil in many Departments, to use this opportunity to make a commitment to the constituencies that are really struggling with unemployment. My constituency has the highest unemployment across Britain or Ireland. This would be a tremendous opportunity for him to make a commitment to that constituency by putting the headquarters of the new Education Authority in Derry. I will leave that with him and hope that we will have a positive response.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the Bill, particularly having got it to this stage, and I congratulate everybody. Like others, I really look forward to seeing the new board supporting all the schools and all the principals, supporting their training and ensuring that there are enough resources. Again, I ask the Minister to concentrate on making sure that resources get to the five library boards in the meantime so that they can carry on with their job as well as they can.

As many of you know, we wanted ESA, but we wanted it in a simpler form. We were disappointed with the first ESA and, again, with the second ESA. Most importantly, something that has to be raised today is the lack of consultation. We opposed the acceleration of this, and the Assembly needs to find some way that allows for the fast movement of a Bill but, at the same time, allows for some form of consultation. It is wrong that we all ended up getting there and rushing and not always having the chance to talk to some of the key people outside.

There were 10 petitions of concern at Second Stage, and it is excellent to see that no petitions of concern have happened since. A petition of concern is really just a sign of failure — a failure of the Assembly — when we should be sitting down and working together and finding consensus. Like the Chair of the Committee and others, I congratulate everyone for having got us to where we are.

We need a long-term vision for education, and I hope that the Bill is, just as we have been told, only a beginning. It is an interim measure. I am keen that we get the interim chief executive appointed and in place and then move to what we, as a party, put in the Bill, which was that the new chair would be selected on the basis of merit through a fair and open public competition. We also look forward to seeing that everyone who goes on the board is chosen so that they really represent the area that they are meant to represent.

We need to find a way forward. When this started, I was concerned that we were looking at a board that still left CCMS with a sectoral body and no one else. I am pleased that we know that the controlled sector will get a sectoral body, although we wait to see exactly what type it will be. We have a choice: either you have no sectoral bodies or everyone should have them. If we are going to have sectoral bodies, it should not just be controlled; it should be the voluntary and all sectors — the integrated, the Irish. Everyone should be on the board on an even keel. I, too,

am sad that there are no community places, and I think that was wrong. Therefore, the onus now falls on the board and all those working there to ensure that they consult continually and talk to the community and all the different groups all the way through.

When we were at the previous stage, I was shocked to be rung up and told that there was no one on the board to represent the secondary sector. I thought that that was completely wrong and that they were there through the trustees or through the transferors. However, the mere fact that that criticism was made means that the onus really is on the transferors, the trustees and all the others on the board to ensure that all sectors, particularly the secondary, are there and are represented. We need to move on to a point where the sectors are not just looking after their own; they also need to look for a long-term vision and plan.

I look forward to hearing more about the Minister's plans on shared education. As you know, we in the Ulster Unionist Party see a single shared education system as the way forward, encouraging everybody to share not just through the sectarian divide but through the academic divide and to find a way for all of us to work together so that we get the integration of education all the way through the system. We need to find that way forward, because it is not just the children who are at school now; it is the next generation and the next generation. As they all move towards that shared system, it has to be better for Northern Ireland.

I pay tribute to the staff, senior officers and members of all the education and library boards and say a huge "Thank you" to everyone in the system who works so incredibly hard to make sure that our children have a good education. They give long, long hours. We all need to give them a very big "Thank you". I look forward to seeing everything fall into place as the Bill moves forward, but I want to re-emphasise that it is an interim Bill. We need to find a way forward, and this is a good start. As Mr Hazzard said, everyone gave a little. I support the Bill.

Mr Lunn: Like everybody else, I welcome the passage of the Bill. For those of us who have been with this since 2007, including the Minister, the current Chair and, indeed, the previous Chair, who has just left the Chamber, this is quite a good day. It is the first time that we have been able to discuss the final passage of significant education legislation in seven and a half years. As the Chair said, it is third time lucky, even if it is a bit light compared with what some of us would have preferred. It will bring some sort of order to the administration of the education system and is long overdue. The five boards have struggled manfully in the last few years with diminished resources, staff acting up and all the rest of it. Like everybody else, I pay tribute to them and to the staff of the Department, who have soldiered on trying to fill the vacuum, frankly, of our failure to do something like what we are doing today.

It is fair to say that none of us got all of what we wanted — in fact, some of us got hardly anything that we wanted — in the Bill, but, for all that, it is a good day. At least we will have a single authority and proper representation on that authority. It is good that people have decided to accept that the smaller sectors need a voice just as much as the bigger sectors. We now have integrated, Irish-medium and the controlled sector body, which is an equally good thing, and representation for the voluntary grammars and the controlled grammars, which was in one of our original amendments that people did not accept. That is the way legislation goes. I accept what just about everybody, except the DUP, has said: it is a pity that there was no room for community representatives on the board. As the Minister said, we will perhaps have to revisit that at some stage. It is something desirable that we had to leave out because of the need to obtain a compromise, but, hopefully, we can come back to it.

Speaking as an advocate for the integrated sector, I think it a pity that, under the Bill, the shared education movement now has slightly preferential status over the integrated movement. Perhaps that, too, is for another day. Integrated still has its protection under the 1989 Order. We have also at least been able to clarify some attitudes around the Chamber, particularly to integrated education. If I may so, the Ulster Unionists have espoused it time and time again but do not seem able to vote for it. The DUP does not espouse it quite so much, but its attitude seems to be at odds with that of its leader. The Minister's party managed to vote in favour of an Alliance amendment at Consideration Stage and against it at Further Consideration Stage, even though it was exactly the same wording. I pay tribute to the SDLP, which has finally come out clearly in favour of integrated education. I particularly welcome Mr Eastwood's comments at Consideration Stage and Mrs Kelly's reported comments at the weekend, which give us a wee bit of hope that we need only change the hearts and minds of three other parties and we will be there.

This is a good day for education. Even if the Bill is imperfect, it is better than what we had yesterday, so I happily support its passage.

Mr Agnew: Education and health are usually the two big-ticket items in government policy, and, if we are to describe today as a good day for education, we have to accept that we have a Bill that is reflective of the level of ambition that we have come to expect from our Executive. It is fair to say that, after seven years of trying to produce an Education Bill, two attempts at ESA and now the single Education Authority, something is better than nothing.

I do not imagine, however, that too many parties will go into the next election cycle with that as their headline message: "We will deliver something that is better than nothing".

1.00 pm

We obviously know about the disagreement on academic selection, but if this was a paper submitted to a transfer test, I am not sure that the Executive would quite make the grade to get into a grammar school.

It was mentioned that the Bill has come through accelerated passage. Again, that is a symptom of the breakdown at Executive level and the inability to get agreement, particularly on this issue. Rather than characterising the Bill as having been agreed to, it would be better to say that there was little or no dissent and it was deemed best to get the Bill through as quickly as possible before somebody found a problem with it.

The Bill perhaps takes us a small step in the right direction, but it is little more than that. I am pleased that the integrated sector in particular will have a seat at the table on an authority that has been described by the Minister as a strategic body; other Members mentioned that. It is important that the integrated sector has a say and gets it voice heard when strategic decisions are made. Unfortunately, we still have a power structure within

which the largest sectors will have the largest say and will, therefore, continue to be the largest sectors, maintaining our segregated system for at least another generation.

I listened to the debates about the need for a controlled sectoral body. Whilst I have not objected to that, I have to question the argument that the integrated and Irish-medium sectors have an advantage because of their legal position, given that the integrated sector has 62 schools out of 1,200, and the Irish-medium sector has even fewer schools. It is hard to argue that those are the big beasts punching above their weight in the education system. Positive action is still needed to promote and grow those sectors. That should not only be what is required by law but be the policy of the Executive. Unfortunately, the Programme for Government has shown, through its support and the continuing Executive drive for a shared education system, that true and genuine integration is still not at the heart of government policy. That is regrettable. I will continue to highlight and to press on that issue.

As I said, we have a Bill that is better than nothing. As Mr Lunn put it, it leaves us in a better place than we were in yesterday. It is, however, an indictment of the system and the structures that we have here and, indeed, of the parties on the Executive, if this is the best that we can deliver for children in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister: I hosted an event here last week, and a school principal asked me whether Members truly appreciate what goes on in our schools. My answer was that I believe that there is genuine support among Members for the good work that goes on in our education system. It may not always feel or look like that, given that we have laboured so long over this stage of reform. I congratulate the Minister for getting a Bill that looks as if it might, barring a disaster, be passed in a short time. I will let the Minister decide, to borrow Churchill's words, whether this is the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning.

I want to make some observations on the Bill. It was no surprise that I was very critical of accelerated passage. I respectfully suggest to my Alliance colleagues that, even though they felt that they did not get much, they should never have accepted accelerated passage. They have, hopefully, learned a valuable lesson from that. They should have wanted the legislation to be scrutinised by the Committee.

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Certainly, Mr Lunn.

Mr Lunn: Mr McCallister is at his normal game of blaming the Alliance Party for everything. The Committee decided that it would accept accelerated passage. In fairness, the only voice against it came from the Ulster Unionists. I think that if we had talked from now until next Christmas, we would not have got anything further in the Bill than what we got.

Mr McCallister: That sort of makes the point. Maybe the next time you are asked to agree accelerated passage, you will join Mr Kinahan in his very wise view.

Miss M McIlveen: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes, Miss McIlveen.

Miss M McIlveen: Just to clarify, the Committee did not give permission for accelerated passage. The House gave permission for accelerated passage.

Mr McCallister: Thanks to the Committee Chair for that clarity. I remind everyone that I voted against it at that point, as did Mr Kinahan and Mrs Overend.

Mr Agnew: And me.

Mr McCallister: And Mr Agnew; I hear him shouting to one side of me.

I am grateful to Miss McIlveen for referring to the amendments that I pushed for around shared education and the community use of schools. I am grateful not only to Miss McIlveen but to other parties and colleagues for supporting the amendments. With the emphasis on shared education, I think that there is a real opportunity for the Minister to act quickly and bring forward his proposed legislation on it and define it so that it can be a game changer for how the Assembly and Executive view shared education.

Having listened to some of the debate on integrated education versus shared education, I think that it almost misses the point of what sharing is about. We want parental choice in our education system. We want a faith ethos in parts of our education system. We want to give people choice and experience. Most of all, we want good schools. It always has to be about the education outcomes for our children and what is going to deliver those outcomes. That is where we want to get to.

Sharing our education system is about extending choice and widening the curriculum offered to pupils. That is what I want to see. I want the focus to be on education outcomes. If we get good societal benefits from sharing, so much the better. However, the primary focus has to be on education outcomes. That is where we have to go with this.

I hope that the Minister moves as quickly as possible in getting a Bill to define shared education. The very fact that the House supported the amendments means that there is willingness and eagerness to move in that direction. Of course I expect robust debate and the Bill to be thoroughly scrutinised in Committee. However, that will all be to the good in making those changes. All of that very much depends on accepting that, in sharing, you will have different models in our education sectors and different sectors to share with. That is why I am a little at odds with Mr Kinahan's point about there somehow being a single shared education system. I am not entirely sure what is meant by that. We must share across the sectors, which is something to be encouraged and worked at through the amendments that I secured to the Bill. I want to keep that going.

Community representatives have been mentioned. It would have been desirable to have kept that in, but there was a recognition that there had to be important negotiations and compromise by every party in the House on that, and I commend all the parties involved in that, particularly the Committee Chairperson for the work and leadership that she gave, even when it was not always a particularly easy sell to some of her party colleagues. I also commend the work of Mr Kinahan and Mr Lunn. Just so that Mr Lunn gets that in Hansard and he does not feel that it is all bad news: I was paying tribute to the Alliance Party there.

One of my biggest criticisms, just to share some of the blame, is that I have always taken issue with the number of petitions of concern. It may interest Members to know that, in purely unionist-signed petitions of concern, we upped the numbers by about 20% in one day during one stage of

the Bill. We went from 40 petitions of concern since 1998 to over 50 in one afternoon at Consideration Stage. I think that that is an extraordinary abuse of the system, which is why I am not a supporter of petitions of concern. To have 22 amendments and 10 petitions of concern is wrong.

That said, it took a great deal of hard work and effort in a short space of time to get the Education Bill to where it is today. I congratulate the Minister on eventually guiding it through the House. I also congratulate the Committee Chairperson and other relevant parties for bringing forward and ensuring a worthwhile debate, which gave the Bill as much scrutiny as the Assembly could afford.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an tsuim a chuir comhaltaí sa díospóireacht seo agus gabhaim buíochas leo as cur le céimeanna an Bhille seo. I welcome the interest that has been shown on all sides of the House, and I thank those Members who have contributed during the various stages of the Bill.

Many specific points were raised, and I will address as many of them as possible. The Chairperson of the Education Committee, Miss McIlveen, set out the work of the Committee and the role that her party played in bringing the Bill forward. As I said in my initial remarks, I welcome the fact that the vast majority of the political parties have played a positive role in the passage of the Bill. I ended my contribution to Further Consideration Stage by saying:

> *"success has many fathers; failure is an orphan." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 99, p212, col 1].*

I suspect that many Members' contributions come from that point of view. As I said at the time, we are about to — I hope — pass a Bill, which I, as Education Minister, can support. It is not the Bill that I would bring forward if I were the Education Minister in a majority Government. I suspect that it is not the Bill that other parties in the Chamber would bring forward. It is a compromise Bill that is effective. It will bring, despite the negativity of Mr Agnew, the most radical change to the structure of education for 40 years. It represents a radical departure for education and will allow us to move forward in line with the review of public administration. We are in an Assembly that requires compromise and that requires parties to shift their positions and work with each other to deliver more effective and efficient public services.

During his deliberations, Mr Hazzard said that, throughout this, we need to keep central focus on children and young people because they are what the service is about. He is absolutely correct. Mr Eastwood mentioned that he welcomed the eventual arrival of the Bill after seven years of deliberation. Yes, there have been lengthy deliberations around the Bill, and perhaps those deliberations cover Mr Kinahan's point about his disappointment that there was no Committee Stage or consultation for the Bill. However, we have debated education structures intensively for the last seven years. The public and the educators were seeking delivery, and I think that we are about to deliver.

1.15 pm

I believe that Mr Eastwood is joining the Education Committee: I welcome him and wish Mr Rogers, who was a member of the Education Committee, well for the future.

Mr Eastwood asked about the location of the Education Authority's HQ. That will be a matter for the authority, and I suspect that that will not be its first act of deliberation. There is a lot of work to be done by the authority on putting structures in place and moving forward through its change programme. However, education already has a very devolved body of management. Our current education and library boards are out there among communities and have headquarters in various locations. The Department of Education already has a significant staff complement in Derry, in Waterside House, but I have no doubt that, once the Education Authority moves to its location strategy, Members will quite rightly lobby for their own constituency. The point was well made that we should look to locate quarters, buildings, staff and jobs in areas of high social deprivation. That is a fair enough point.

I have already covered Mr Kinahan's contribution on consultation issues, but I am glad that he welcomes the progress on the Bill. We have moved forward. He also referred to the fact that, at Consideration Stage, we had 10 petitions of concern, while at Further Consideration Stage, there was none. That was a result of parties working together behind the scenes. That work often goes on away from the media glare, and it can and does deliver results.

I spent a lot of time at Further Consideration Stage challenging Mr Agnew. I am tempted to do the same at this stage, but I will resist. His negativity is misplaced. I note that he gave an interview to one of morning papers, in which he refers to his and Mr Allister's "naughty corner". I think that Mr Allister's negativity may be in danger of rubbing off on him. He should take a brisk walk around the Building each morning to take the fresh air into his lungs and come at it again.

John McCallister again referred to accelerated passage. He was almost tempted to open up that debate again. It was with great reluctance that I made the proposal for accelerated passage. I did not want to circumvent the authority of the House in any way, but the timescales were against us at that stage, and the issue had been well debated at that time. Despite that, Mr McCallister was able to help shape the Bill, by bringing forward his amendments on shared education and the community use of schools. It shows what even an independent Member can do when a Bill comes to the Chamber. It also shows that, although the Executive have responsibilities to bring Bills to the Chamber, once that happens, the sponsoring Minister in many ways loses control of it. It is then up to Members to convince other Members of the merits of their amendments. Mr McCallister showed that quite effectively with this Bill.

As to the shared education legislation, I assure you that I am working my way through the best way to bring that into the public domain, and I certainly will not circumvent the role of the Assembly. I want it to go through the full legislative debate. However, the weekend's events will also inform the House that shared education will be a hot topic. There are different views on what shared education means and what its role is in comparison with the integrated sector. I suspect that there will be a healthy and lively debate around that legislation, and I look forward to that.

It is time for the Assembly to act. The Bill will secure a new future for education administration. It will provide stability in our education system and ensure consistency in services. A single education authority will overarch the

issue of compatibility with local councils. It will have much of the strength of the business case made for ESA, which promised significant savings, many of which have already been realised. By contrast, a future that does not involve the complete amalgamation of the five education and library boards will require increased investment, given the current depleted and unsustainable nature of the existing boards.

I recognise that education stirs passion like no other public service, perhaps excepting Minister Wells's health service. It is right that Members make their views known and advocate on behalf of particular interests or principles. However, steps have been taken by all sides of the House to accommodate differences. I believe that this demonstrates Members' recognition of the importance and urgency of the legislation. We cannot continue with our current structure of education administration. There is no do-nothing option. The present Bill is the only option to ensure that our education administration does not fall foul of local government reform.

Molaim don Tionól é. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Education Bill [NIA Bill 38/11-16] do now pass.*

Private Members' Business

Health Budget

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this 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.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly rejects the maladministration of the preceding Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with regard to his departmental budget, which has led to recent announcements from health and social care trusts regarding reductions in front-line services; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure adequate equality impact assessments are established as a matter of priority before any final decisions are made.*

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to bring this important debate to the Floor of the House today. I want to start my comments by acknowledging the current pressures in the health service, pressures that, I expect, will continue. They are pressures from a growing and ageing population; increasing pressures on front-line services; increasing demands on emergency departments; a 7% increase in GP activity; a 21% decrease in district nurses; and pressures from a policy of shifting left from acute services to community and primary care with a transitional budget that is not in place and without an agreed strategic framework that will target health inequalities, which will actually increase.

Whilst these and other pressures are acknowledged quite publicly, it needs to be referenced that our current health budget is £4·6 billion. It has been protected through budgetary processes. Health was allocated £80 million in the October monitoring round and an additional £200 million in the draft Budget, which I welcome. We would all like to see more. However, here is the hard question: does our current health budget provide value for money? Is the money going in the right direction? How much waste is in the system? Does our current spend target health inequalities, which, I reiterate for the record, exist most starkly in west Belfast, north Belfast and Foyle?

On 31 July 2014, in a written statement, the Minister of Finance and Personnel stated:

> *"DHSSPS exceeded its Control Total by £13.1 million. This was, in my view, due to poor budget management within the department. The DHSSPS had more than three years since the Budget for 2014-15 was set to ensure it could live within its budget and in that context it was hugely disappointing that it then registered such a significant overspend."*

It is also worth noting that the Health Department reported an underspend of £10·2 million in capital terms. DFP's 2014-15 in-year monitoring guidelines explicitly establish that Departments must work on the basis of agreed

budgets only. In other words, they must plan on the assumption that bids will not be met through the in-year monitoring process. Although an overspend of £13·1 million represents less than 0·3% of the Department's resource budget, the overspend should be an indication of the difficulties that the Department had in controlling its expenditure in the financial year.

When considering the maladministration of the budget, the Department's reliance on bids in monitoring rounds is worth noting. It is also worth noting that the Department bid for £67 million in January, which jumped to £160 million in June. That is sizeable shift in bid. What was really going on? In a Committee evidence session with the former Health Minister, the Chief Medical Officer stated:

> *"I became aware of the budgetary pressures when they emerged, at the same time as the Minister has indicated, in the summer of 2013."*

If those pressures were identified in August 2013, why did the meeting with OFMDFM not take place until 6 April 2014? Why was the doomsday scenario paper not brought forward until the summer of 2014? At the same evidence session, the former Health Minister acknowledged that there was, indeed, waste in the system but could not tell us how much waste there was or what percentage of the overall budget was waste. It was also acknowledged that the transitional fund in which all of us had placed our hope for the implementation of Transforming Your Care (TYC), which was costed at £70 million, had actually spent £42 million and was now not even a priority bid.

Dealing with the need for proper scrutiny and oversight, the former Health Minister was very dismissive and refused to support the call at that time. I am glad that the new Health Minister has accepted the need for additional scrutiny and proper oversight mechanisms. Maybe someone had a word with the current Minister.

In the draft Budget announced last month, Health, as I stated, received an additional £200 million. The Minister has told us that the monitoring rounds will be about protecting front-line services. However, that is in stark contrast to the policy direction that the trusts have taken, which simply reads as an attack on front-line services. So-called contingency plans include axing 100 hospital beds and the temporary closure of minor injury units. Many in the House and beyond will question the term "temporary". The Northern Trust proposal to temporarily close 27 intermediate rehabilitation beds, including seven beds in the Mid Ulster Hospital and 20 in Dalriada Hospital, has, quite rightly, received much media comment and public outrage. It should be reversed immediately. The Western Trust proposal to temporarily merge palliative care and the rehab wards of Tyrone hospital has been put on hold. How can we be advancing a policy of Transforming Your Care, which is a shift left of £83 million from acute care towards community and primary care, when we are slashing the very services that are required for delivery?

Whilst I agree that trusts have a degree of autonomy, the Minister is ultimately responsible for policy direction and for ensuring that it is delivered across the entire health service. It is time, therefore, to put up or shut up. If TYC is the policy framework, the Minister must prioritise and implement it in full. If it is TYC, he must ensure that any potential cuts — I use the word "cuts" — across the service are subject to full equality impact assessments to mitigate negative impacts on section 75 groups and to protect front-line services. Let me be very clear about this: screening in and screening out policies are not full equality impact assessment processes.

It beggars belief that, when we are faced with extreme cuts, we hear of £34 million paid to senior consultants in bonuses over the last five years. We hear of a 20% increase in administration at the health board, which has 550 staff and a £25 million spend on annual salaries. We hear of £55 million to £65 million paid annually to the independent sector for elective care. We hear of the cost of external consultants and the cost of 191,000 cancelled appointments last year alone. That is a stark reminder of maladministration in the budget and the need to do as the policy says and protect our front-line services in order to deliver better health outcomes for all our communities. I support the motion and oppose the amendment.

1.30 pm

Mr McKinney: I beg to move the following amendment:

> *Insert after "front-line services;":*
>
> *"believes that a contributory factor has been the failure of the Northern Ireland Executive to properly fund and implement the strategic plan Transforming Your Care and that the trusts' announcements are inconsistent with that plan;".*

The SDLP tabled an amendment to the motion to express our deep concern at the Northern Ireland Executive's failure to protect our health service. With the exception of Minister Mark H Durkan, Executive Ministers either endorsed or failed to oppose the draft Budget, and our front-line services will see the impact of that. The original motion is, let us be very clear, an attempt to distract from Sinn Féin and the DUP's joint responsibility for this draft Budget. I hope that those who are joining the protest around Dalriada recognise that, in doing so, those parties are now, in fact, reneging on their backing of the Budget.

I take the opportunity to commend the staff who work tirelessly on the front line of the health service day in and day out. They are hard pressed as it is, and these cuts will put further pressure on them and their ability to deliver high-quality care. It is important that we acknowledge the excellent work done by these front-line staff. Remember that we are on their side when we criticise the intolerable pressures, such as lengthy GP queues, accident and emergency pressures, waiting times for elective care and flimsy domiciliary care packages. However, we are not on the side of a system that imposes such intolerable pressures on those valuable workers and on our patients.

In fairness to those in charge, while we saw a privatisation agenda at the heart of it, some of the aims and objectives in TYC are admirable, shifting funding and care into the community to ease the strain on the hospital side. However, the plan was never in the Budget; it was to be funded out of monitoring rounds. It consistently failed to achieve that sufficiently. Meanwhile, hospital budgets were cut, and the community side was not funded, leading to significant pressures on both. The plan was not so much flawed as strangled. We have spent the year quizzing the previous Minister, this Minister, the Department and the board. Eventually, at breaking point, we called in the Audit Office, as it is its job to evaluate value for money. It has

agreed to do that, and I look forward to seeing the results of its endeavours in due course.

Meanwhile, it is clear — the previous Minister acknowledged it publicly — that there is significant waste in the health service. Last year, £50 million was spent on bank and agency staff; remember that 30% of that goes to private administrators. Also last year, £50 million was spent on sickness, and 360,000 appointments were cancelled in the system by patients and by hospitals. There is a huge increase in private sector operations to cover the waiting lists that come about as a result of that, so we pay twice. Of course, today, we heard news about £40 million of fraud in the system.

What is the answer? What have we got from the health service? Faced with financial pressures, the trusts have been asked to draw up plans for cuts, and that is what they are doing. They are slicing all round them. We know the detail of cuts in areas like Ballycastle. We had hoped, in fact, that protesters would be here today, but, with the debate starting earlier, I assume that they have not yet arrived. I welcome those who will travel later to listen to the debate. There will be cuts in Armagh, Omagh and Downpatrick and in minor injuries units, such as the one in Whiteabbey.

The trusts — this is a very important issue — are making their own independent decisions with no demonstrable focus — I cannot see one — on a strategic plan for the future of our health service or even their own future. The Health Minister, I regret to say, is hiding behind the trusts. The plans are ill thought-out. Indeed, the Minister is on record in the Chamber as saying he has concerns over Dalriada, and we have all heard the comments from his parliamentary assistant, who has major concerns about the cutbacks to the minor injuries unit and hospital services in Bangor. If they are concerned, what should we be?

Let us get back to what the plan was supposed to be about: putting health care into the community, where it will be cheaper and closer to the need. Look at how the cuts that have been proposed — they are called contingencies, but they have all the potential to be long-term — are cutting in the community. We all know that there are health service pressures — we have to be mature about that — both financially and in terms of provision. We would be really foolish to ignore them, but we will continue to ask, "Where is the strategic direction?".

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Will the Member give way?

Mr McKinney: I will, Minister.

Mr Wells: It is important that I intervene at this stage. I accept that some of the decisions that have been forced on the trusts are counter-strategic and are not where we want to be. However, we have to find £70 million, and we have to do so in four and a half months. It would be useful if other Members would indicate their alternatives if they feel that the trusts' decisions are so radically wrong.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for his intervention and his admission. This comes back to my central point: the Budget was flawed. If you are willing to go back, renegotiate on that and encourage colleagues to do something differently, including the colleagues to my right, I will accept the logic of that.

I want other questions answered. How long has the plan been in the making? Has it been constructed in line with Transforming Your Care? It is clear that you are saying that it has not. Are the trusts just operating to the bottom line? It seems clear that that is what you are saying. How do we know that the trust cuts will not just impose greater pressures on other trusts? If Whiteabbey is going to shut, that will have an impact on the Belfast Trust and the A&E centres there. It is bound to have that effect. Who ordered the plan? The board or the Department? It could not have been you, Minister, because you are only in the job, and you have made that very clear. You are worried about Dalriada, and your parliamentary assistant is worried about Bangor, and the public are really angry over the other decisions. We also know that there is not a plan and that this is just another cut. Minister, given what you have just said in your contribution, I call on you to fundamentally take charge and stop these cuts now while we have a proper strategic review. Then, you can prove that, if you are going to cut anything, it will be consistent with a long-term plan to improve our health service and return proper services to the community.

The cuts are affecting areas like Derry and Strabane and west and north Belfast. It is an indictment that, 16 years after the Good Friday Agreement and seven years since devolution was re-established, those areas still top the UK league table of deprivation. The reduction in front-line services will unquestionably have a detrimental impact on the health service and will put patient care at risk. If we are to secure the best quality care possible for patients, we need the best quality doctors and health-care professionals, and the instability around the cuts will put all of that at risk.

I urge you to forensically examine the budget to expel waste. As I have already outlined — I thank you for your contribution — we had a quick scan over the headline figures, which amount to many, many tens of millions of pounds.

Minister, I urge you to underscore a strategic plan. You have admitted in the House that these cuts run contrary to that. My worry is that the cuts will impose greater costs on the overall budget and on other trusts, and we have need to pause the system now to ensure that that does not happen. I have already said that we need to be mature about the pressures but clever with the cuts.

Mrs Cameron: As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I refute the allegations and insinuations made in the motion. I am not in the habit of pointing fingers or apportioning blame, and I feel that the motion is simply an attempt to distract from the real successes and the reasons for the pressures in the health service.

Since 2011, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has delivered £490 million of budgetary savings, with a further £170 million planned for 2014-15. That has been delivered despite the increased costs in relation to the allocated funding and the rising demand for services. It is abundantly clear that the previous Minister was dedicated to making savings where possible and delivered substantial reductions in spending.

I am aware that the Members opposite are not keen to focus on the good news stories in the health service, but I am happy to point out the previous Health Minister's successes in, for example, the context of Transforming Your Care. Since former Minister Poots took over the health portfolio in 2011, there has been an enormous

22·8% reduction in the number of people waiting for 13 weeks or more for inpatient appointments.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she accept that not only are those who criticise the budget not prepared to accept the good news stories, of which there are many, but, when they say that there are ways to save tens of millions of pounds without hurting front-line services, they do not mention even one pound's worth?

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

Mrs Cameron: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Member for his intervention. I am sure that we will hear more about those savings plans as the debate continues.

The number of people waiting longer than 12 hours in accident and emergency units has fallen by 50%, and the number of qualified nurses and midwives has increased by 800.

The health budget is often described as a bottomless pit, with no amount ever being enough to address all the issues in the service. At the end of the financial year 2013-14, rather than returning a collective underspend of £43 million to the Department of Finance for reallocation, other Departments chose to report an underspend in order to protect their future budgets. I appreciate that an overspend of £13·1 million was identified in 2013-14, but, had other Departments taken collective responsibility for the health of the population of Northern Ireland, that extra funding would have gone a long way to alleviate the deficit, leaving the Department on a much stronger footing.

On equality impact assessments, each trust employs an equality officer to provide guidance on statutory equality obligations and implement the advice of the Equality Commission. The trusts produce an annual equality report, outlining the progress made in executing section 75. It is the role of each trust, not the Department, to ensure that those statutory obligations are met. The trusts are fully aware of their obligations and requirements, and the Department will seek assurances from them that their equality responsibilities have been met.

I move on to Transforming Your Care. From its inception, the former Minister was clear that the process would take up to five years to complete. It was always anticipated that the change of pace would be directly influenced by the availability of resources and that the focus would be on getting it right the first time rather than having to revisit mistakes at a later date. Despite the current financial difficulties, there have been significant advances in carrying forward the TYC process, and I fully expect that this will continue in order that it is seen through to full implementation.

It is clear that there has been a radical change in the demands on our health service that was first identified in the autumn of 2013. In looking at the difficulties that we currently face, we must not underestimate the demand that an ageing population and the number of people presenting for treatment are placing on the service. By way of an example, the Department faced an increase of 7% in demand for domiciliary care in 2013-14. That is a huge increase, and its impact is felt across the health service. Demand can be expected only to increase in the coming years as our population continues to live longer.

Whilst £80 million was made available through the June and October monitoring rounds, a further sum in the region of £160 million would be required to maintain the current level of service.

No one wants to see the closure of minor injuries units, wards or reductions in outpatient clinics, but a good safe service must be maintained, particularly in unscheduled and urgent care.

1.45 pm

In bringing my remarks to a close, I point out that it is somewhat rich of the parties that choose not to make tough decisions on welfare reform, on revenue matters such as the HGV transport levy or on measures to deal with massive fraud to the taxpayer that could be tackled by the National Crime Agency to question others on Budget matters in an opportunist and self-serving fashion. Those who have to suffer from cuts being imposed as a result of the failure of parties to accept the need for change might do well to ask those parties why they were prepared to sit back and let this happen and what millions have been lost to the health service as a result of their actions. I oppose the motion and the amendment.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The Minister and his party may refute the allegations of maladministration of the budget, and, to be fair, I do not think that the management of it was entirely to blame, and it is, rather, a combination of factors. Maladministration played its part, as did the hopeless allocations made in the first place. In 2011, we warned that the budget did not add up and that this year — the fourth year — would be very difficult for health. We are now seeing the end product: operations postponed, temporary closures and lives and livelihoods disrupted.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Obviously, as the person who was responsible for the Budget at that time, I can remember being in discussions with the Minister from her party. Will she accept that the only Department that got a real-terms increase in the Budget in 2011 was the Department of Health and that every year in monitoring rounds, it got at least an additional £60 million — *[Interruption.]* — that enabled the services to be continued and that neither she nor her party suggested that one penny be deducted from any Department to add to the Health Department's budget?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an additional minute. I ask Members to make your interventions short, please.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the ex-Minister for that lengthy speech, for the phone going off and for reminding us about that issue. If he waits his time, I will come to it in due course.

As I said, the fourth year — this year — would be difficult for health, and we are seeing the end product: operations postponed, temporary closures and lives and livelihoods disrupted. We warned that, by allocating £4·659 billion, the budget would compromise public safety. Even though we were supported by senior officials, including the Chief Medical Officer, we were accused of scaremongering and exaggerating, but not now. We said that the budget for this year could have just about worked on £4·8 billion, yet we were told that there was no money left and that the cupboard was bare, even though OFMDFM had found enough money for pet projects such as the social investment fund, and we all know how that worked out.

The then Finance Minister, Mr Wilson, went to great lengths to assure us that health had got a good deal. He told the previous Assembly that it had got a settlement worth being "proud of". In fact, his leader even went on to bemoan those who were not cheering about the settlement and labelled them "obscene".

Members, we all remember the words of the Minister's predecessor only weeks before he was sacked. Flanked by senior officials, he said that the budget for this year did not add up. He spoke of a £140 million deficit and went on to say, as it got to the last £40 million, £60 million and £80 million, that the impacts would be felt very harshly. These were comments that were made despite additional finance from monitoring rounds; that were made from a better financial position than set out in the original Budget, and that would no doubt be branded as obscene by the First Minister if they had been made by any other political party. Nevertheless, as noble as the previous Minister's Damascus road conversion was, the simple reality was that he left it too late. He took up office in March 2011, but it took him three years before speaking out. Are we to believe that he did not look at his budget more than a month in advance? Of course not. He knew what was coming, yet he chose to do nothing about it.

As I said earlier, the public are now suffering the human cost of when budgets fail. The Minister's predecessor will have known that, even in ordinary circumstances, asking for a one-off £160 million bailout would have been undeliverable. It may have been a slightly different story if the Executive had at least known that it was coming. He may not be entirely responsible for the current crisis, but he certainly did not do anything to prevent it. In fact, he precipitated it.

Of course, the previous Minister and his colleagues go to great lengths to stress the savings that have been achieved before this year. Indeed, it may surprise them that I congratulate them for that, but let us not assume that these were the first cuts that were ever implemented by the Department. If you remember, Michael McGimpsey had to deal with a £700 million reduction in his spending during the 2008-2011 comprehensive spending review period. Nevertheless, despite what the DUP may have thought when drafting the Budget, they could not cut their way out of the problem with the 2011-15 Budget. As a result, we are where are we are today, which is a reluctant realisation that poor decisions were made.

Trusts are now left panicking to make cuts —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Mrs Dobson: — not based on which services can be reduced but on those which will save the most money.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party believes that there has been poor management of the health budget over recent years and, indeed, maybe mismanagement as the Finance Minister indicated. There also appears to be a counterproductive undermining or retreat from the implementation of Transforming Your Care.

It must also be said that the two parties behind the motion and the amendment are failing to take any realistic position on how the Executive can balance their Budget next year and over the remainder of this decade. Nor are they offering any compelling alternative to ensure that the funding of the health and social services sector can be placed on a sustainable footing and address the health requirements of our population.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: If I have time at the end, Mr Wilson.

Alliance recognises that the status quo in our health and social services sector is not sustainable. We have to welcome the development that people are living longer and we need to invest in new technologies, treatments, drugs and diagnostics. Our ultimate anchor point throughout those changes should be the maintenance of a quality public National Health Service that treats all citizens fairly and that is based on need, when they need it, and not at the end of a long waiting list.

Alliance continues to support the broad thrust of Transforming Your Care. It offers the potential for a much more strategic and integrated approach to the changing health needs of our population. However, we have increased concerns about its delivery or, perhaps, its non-delivery. We do not dispute that increased pressures are being placed on the health budget by changing demographics and other factors in our society. That is why we need to be prepared to do things differently in some respects — in fact, in many respects. However, major questions have to be asked about how we have stumbled into a major financial crisis this year, with considerable resources having to be diverted from other Departments to bail out the health service, with a similar situation proposed in the Executive's draft Budget 2015-16.

We are told that even those major Budget reallocations will be insufficient to meet rising demands, and we continue to see the effects of the cuts to health provision. Clearly, this situation has not emerged in just one financial year but has been building up over many years. It is obvious that there has been a state of denial over this looming crisis, with the notion that gaps could be plugged through allocations from the various monitoring rounds. That approach was blown out of the water with the crisis of how to address welfare reform in Northern Ireland and the financial penalties. To be clear: the problems with our resourcing of the health system predate welfare reform, but the failure of the Executive and Assembly to agree the way forward on welfare reform seriously complicates any solution.

Alliance is open to considering additional resources for health, as it is provided for in the draft Budget, but that has to come in the context of a proper strategic review of expenditure across the board.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: Hold on, Sammy, until I see how I get on. *[Laughter.]* We have a concern that Transforming Your Care, which was supposed to provide a better service for patients as well as make the system more efficient, is, due to its financial pressures, being slowed down rather than accelerated. Surely, that is a false economy.

That is borne out in the seemingly bizarre decision to suspend the minor injuries units in Bangor and other places. Such a suspension will only shift greater burdens on to already overstretched A&E services. The same can be said about Dalriada, Lagan Valley and Downe and in the reduction in domiciliary care. All of those measures will put pressure on our A&E units.

Alliance would encourage a greater focus on better public health, the reduction of smoking and alcohol consumption, and awareness of obesity issues and illegal drugs etc. We would also encourage a greater focus on early intervention and prevention and support for mental health issues. Cutting in those areas would be counterproductive. Surely, the Department must see that.

Some tough decisions over the facilities in the health estate across Northern Ireland will have to be taken. We are top-heavy in that regard. We will need to concentrate acute services and, at the same time, better resource community services and GPs. We would even consider whether there is surplus land within the health system that could form part of an asset-sale strategy for the Executive to allow that money to be reinvested in health provisions.

Alliance is also open to tough decisions around the reintroduction of prescription charges —

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

Mr McCarthy: — in limited circumstances. The Assembly has to step up to the mark.

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

Mr Wilson: You would have had an extra minute if you had given way to me.

Mr McCarthy: I am sorry that I cannot afford Sammy a few minutes. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please.

Mr McCarthy: I cannot even get finished.

Mr Wilson: You are not very good at budgeting your time. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I suggest that the Member who has just spoken is not very good at making his remarks through the Chair.

As Question Time begins at 2·00 pm, I suggest the House takes its ease until then. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Ms Paula Bradley.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Domiciliary Care

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how changes in domiciliary care packages, as part of Transforming Your Care, are impacting on service users and domiciliary care staff. *(AQO 7028/11-15)*

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Transforming Your Care recommended that homes should be the hub for care for older people. That is in keeping with my Department's policy direction to help people live independently, with the support of flexible, responsive and person-centred social care in their own home and community for as long as it is safe to do so.

As part of that, allocation of resources, including staff time, is based on a comprehensive assessment of individual need by the relevant health and social care trust. The actual length of time allocated for any one domiciliary care visit is the result of that individualised and professional assessment of need. Trusts have an underpinning responsibility to use their resources fairly and wisely and are responsible for assessing and prioritising needs within the resources available to them.

Mr A Maginness: I take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I do not think that I have had an opportunity to do that. Or perhaps I should offer commiserations on his appointment.

We have heard quite a lot about Transforming Your Care, but, in situations in which front-line staff are affected, and there may well be redeployment as a result, can the Minister reassure staff that, in the event of that happening, redundancy packages will be made available to those staff who are being redeployed?

Mr Wells: I assure the honourable Member for North Belfast that the contingency plans, which were the subject of the previous debate, have made it very clear that there will be no compulsory redundancies. Staff will be moved to adjacent facilities. For some of those individuals, that may not be possible. We will look at the potential for standard redundancies.

It is also worth saying that, at the moment, we provide 249,000 hours of domiciliary care in Northern Ireland to 25,330 people. That is a 5% increase on the same period in 2012. That gives an indication of my Department's commitment to that essential type of care. Certain areas of the media would have you believe that a cut has been made. We are actually increasing resources to that very important front-line care and hope to continue to do so. That has been emphasised by the fact that, in the October monitoring round, we bid for and, fortunately, received an extra £8 million, which has been allocated to the

Transforming Your Care implementation for 2014-15. That will support a wide range of measures, including how we enhance provision for the elderly closer to home.

Ms P Bradley: I think that everyone in the Chamber will agree with the principles of Transforming Your Care and with the fact that people are better served in their own home than in an acute setting. Can the Minister detail the domiciliary care provision across all of Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: In the Belfast Trust, we provide 47,000 hours; in the Northern Trust, we provide 48,000 hours; in the South Eastern Trust, we provide 58,000 hours; in the Southern Trust, we provide 53,000 hours; and, in the Western Trust, we provide 42,000 hours. That is a total of 249,000 hours of care. As the Member for North Belfast will see, provision is spread relatively evenly across the entire Province, and it is based entirely on the clinical assessment made by each individual trust. As I said, a total of 25,330 people benefit from that care. I know from the feedback that I receive in the Department that, in the vast majority of cases, the individual recipients are extremely happy with the dedication of the staff concerned and really appreciate the service, which enables them to stay in their own home in their community.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. How are domiciliary care workers protected and supported in circumstances in which they sometimes find themselves vulnerable and, as has happened, accused of theft without there being any real bad intention? Sometimes, it is when they are dealing with clients with dementia or older people. How are staff supported in those circumstances?

Mr Wells: First, the vast majority of the staff in that field are dedicated, honest and professional, and they make an excellent contribution to provision in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately and very occasionally — we have all seen examples reported in the media — one or two individuals breach the fundamental trust that they should hold within the community. When that happens, they have to be brought to book in the normal legal way, and there have been prosecutions. They also have strong representation from the unions, which give those who are accused wrongly the protection and support that they deserve. However, I do not want those one or two incidents to overshadow the tremendous work that they do in the statutory sector and the large number who are employed by private contractors, which is a growing trend. In some trusts, it is a 2:1 ratio between private and public. Therefore, the normal rigour of the law has to apply, but with strong safeguards through the unions to ensure that those who are wrongly accused are given the full benefit of a strong defence.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister accept that decisions coming out of the trusts to significantly scale back domiciliary care packages, including reducing the number of visits, fly in the face of a supposed policy of giving older people more choice and more control over their care, as well as enabling as many as possible to remain in their homes? Does he accept that the current proposals —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Question, please.

Mrs Dobson: — will simply see more people seek residential care?

Mr Wells: I hope that I showed the Member for Upper Bann earlier that, in fact, the trusts have a very strong commitment to increase the number of hours, that there has been a 5% increase since 2012 and that we have secured additional resources in the monitoring round. A review of domiciliary care costs in Northern Ireland has been initiated by the Health and Social Care Board as part of TYC. The aim of that review is to obtain a better understanding of how domiciliary care is operating and to identify best practice within the various models of delivery in order to shape the future direction and operation of domiciliary care services.

With regard to her earlier point, I have to emphasise that the decision on the number of hours allocated to each client is based on the clinical assessment of the needs of that person by the trust. If it assesses that the need is 15 minutes a day, it is 15 minutes; if it is half an hour or multiple visits, that will happen. That is entirely the decision of the relevant staff in each trust. It is not based on budgets or bookkeeping; it is based on need. The stats show, and the overall quantum indicates, that there is a very strong commitment to that by all the trusts in Northern Ireland.

Multiple Sclerosis Respite Services

2. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will intervene to reverse the decision to remove multiple sclerosis respite services provided at Dalriada Hospital. *(AQO 7029/11-15)*

Mr Wells: In my statement of 30 October 2014, I said that my priorities were to ensure that services provided by the health and social care sector were safe and effective and to ensure that my Department achieved financial balance, as is required of all Ministers. To achieve those aims, health and social care trusts have produced a range of contingency proposals. Indeed, we debated those earlier. Each trust has provided me with an assurance that its services will remain safe and effective.

As part of its contingency plans, the Northern Trust has proposed the temporary closure of respite beds in the Dalriada Hospital for sufferers of multiple sclerosis. I regret that the trust has had to take that action as a consequence of the budget pressures. However, it will simply not be possible to maintain the current levels of service provision in the absence of the entire funding required of an extra £130 million. The Northern Trust has affirmed that it will endeavour to minimise the impact on front-line patient care. Respite services to MS patients will still be provided and everybody who requires respite will receive it. The trust will be working with everyone involved to ensure that service users' needs are central to the process moving forward.

Furthermore, the trust has also provided an assurance that anyone who has been booked in to respite care in November will have no change to that booking. My Department will monitor the situation closely over the coming months to ensure that the service provided to MS sufferers in the Northern Trust continues to meet the local population's needs.

Mr Swann: I acknowledge the Minister's answer. It is unfortunate that he did not actually answer the question that was originally put to him, and in the supplementary I will ask whether he will intervene to reverse the decision to remove the multiple sclerosis respite services that are provided at Dalriada Hospital. That was the question.

It was not about trusts or the provision elsewhere. The Minister should do us the decency of answering that section of the question.

Mr Wells: I thank the honourable Member for his supplementary. When I was a Back-Bencher, I found it very annoying when the Minister did not answer the question. So, if I am guilty of that, you are absolutely right to point it out. I think that as a Member for North Antrim who has been lobbying on this issue, he has to face up to some very difficult statistics. In 2013-14, the total number of bed days available at the Dalriada was 4,380. Of those, only 1,402 were used. That equates to a bed occupancy of 32% or an average of four beds occupied at a given time. That is a very stark statistic that shows that we are funding a lot of empty capacity there.

Secondly, there are 4,000 MS sufferers in Northern Ireland. I am acutely aware of the difficulty of that long-term condition. However, only 57 from the Northern Trust, two from the Belfast Trust and 10 from the Western Trust used the Dalriada respite care. That is 69 sufferers out of 4,000. Therefore, the trend of users was, unfortunately, quite negative. Many of those 69 have contacted me to tell me about the excellent care they have received in Ballycastle. I accept that, but, given the large number of potential users of that excellent facility, I am surprised that so few have availed themselves of it so far.

Mr Frew: I take the opportunity to thank the Minister for agreeing to meet some of the protesters from the Dalriada Hospital today at my request.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): This is Question Time.

Mr Frew: When the Minister states that 1,402 beds were used, does he note that the trust seems to care more about the empty beds than the patients in the beds? What engagement has the trust had with the service users and their families? How can he ensure that the trust will keep that engagement up throughout the next days, weeks and months?

Mr Wells: I assure the honourable Member for North Antrim that a large amount of my time in the last few weeks has been spent on this issue. I met a deputation led by the MP for the area, I have discussed it regularly with Mr Frew and I met a deputation led by Mr McKay on the issue. I am also receiving a petition today from those in Ballycastle who are very exercised about it, and I have received literally thousands of emails, text messages, Twitter messages, correspondence and phone calls about it. I am also pledging myself to meet the district council chair and a delegation from Moyle District Council. So, there will be a considerable amount of consultation on the issue, and I will want to hear from all those concerned. Of course, I also met Patricia Gordon and Brenda Maguire, who are officials from the MS Society Northern Ireland. Therefore, I am not taking this decision lightly. I want to hear from service users. I know personally three of the patients in that hospital, and they have all been on to me to indicate their perception of the care that they are receiving. Therefore, I am not going into this decision at all blind. I am taking it very seriously, and I have also met the trust to discuss it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before I call the next Member, I encourage Members and the Minister to ensure that they speak into the microphone in order that what they are saying is picked up.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, it is quite clear that, over the past couple of weeks, the steps taken by the Northern Trust to run down the hospital have accelerated quite significantly. My concern is that you have not made a decision yet and that we do not know when you will. Rather than allow the trust to continue to do that for another two weeks, can you let the House know when you will make a decision on Dalriada?

2.15 pm

Mr Wells: As I said to the Member from North Antrim, I have yet to meet the district council on that; I think that it has a very important democratic input. I also intend to visit the service at some stage to see for myself. I know Ballycastle extremely well, for reasons that I will not speak about today, but I am in Ballycastle many times in any given year. Equally, there are still some issues on the finances of it because the total from the temporary closure is £0·6 million, so it is a significant amount of money that we saved.

What I would be interested in hearing, from all the Members from that constituency — and also, to some extent, from East Antrim, because I also met Mr Oliver McMullan to discuss the issue — is whether they can come up with an alternative to the decision that would be more acceptable to their community. In all the debate that has been held before and all the questions about it, everybody decries the fact that the Northern Trust has come up with its decision, but nobody has suggested an alternative to it. At the end of the day, I have to ensure that the trust balances its books by 31 March. I have no option whatsoever to take a debt forward into 2015-16, so I have to ensure that I land this large spaceship called public health spending on a postage stamp called balanced budget. Now, is anybody going to give me any help on that? I suspect not.

Mr Allister: Is it the case that, in this very year, correspondence was issued assuring the future of Dalriada? If that is correct, did that not create a legitimate expectation that the Minister should feel honour-bound to live up to? Will he —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I think that the Member has asked his question.

Mr Allister: — live up to that commitment and postpone and abandon the closure of Dalriada?

Mr Wells: The letter that the Member refers to was not signed by me but by my predecessor. I am looking carefully at its contents because I think that it is relevant. However, my understanding of the wording is that it said that there were no plans to curtail future services provided at Dalriada. However, I expect that the Member has a learned counsel on those issues and he may believe that there was a future expectation. The advice that I am getting is that there was not but I accept that it is germane to the argument about the future of Dalriada.

Accident and Emergency Cutbacks

3. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the impact of recent Health and Social Care Board

cutbacks on services such as accident and emergency, particularly in light of winter weather pressures. *(AQO 7030/11-15)*

Mr Wells: My priorities are to ensure that the services provided by Health and Social Care are safe and effective and that my Department achieves financial balance, as required of all Ministers. I have allocated £5 million additional funding to address winter pressures in delivering unscheduled care. That money will be used to improve patient flow from emergency departments and expand capacity, as required, over the winter period.

Significant progress has been made in tackling lengthy waiting lists in emergency departments, and the first six months of 2014-15 have seen the lowest number of 12-hour waits in five years. I am looking to the Health and Social Care Board and trusts to improve on that in the coming winter.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister. Minister, I refer you to the previous question, the discussion around Dalriada and the concerns there. In that context, there is a deep concern that decisions taken by one trust will have a knock-on effect on the trust next door. While, on the surface and on paper, it might appear that money could be saved, in fact the cost will just be pushed sideways. Can you give us some assurance and evidence that that will not happen?

Mr Wells: I hope that the extra £5 million that has been allocated will assure the Member that that will not happen. That is additional, new, fresh resources to that particular field. I listened with interest to Mr McKinney's radio interview this morning on that very subject. It somewhat spoiled my breakfast, but it was interesting to hear what he said about it. I think that the number of instances where that could happen are quite rare. For instance, in the Western Trust, it is very hard to see how services could spill over into the Northern Trust, given the distances involved. It may be a Belfast issue that will arise.

Each health and social care trust has provided assurances that their services will remain safe and effective and has taken steps to support and protect front-line services. For instance, where minor injury units are temporarily closed — again, Mr McKinney raised this — provisions are to be put in place in the large emergency departments and discussions held with GPs and GP out-of-hours services to maintain effective flows for minor injuries. Appropriate alternative arrangements must be made in the case of ward or bed closures. Any restrictions in domiciliary care must be supported by an individual needs assessment and risk assessment.

Mrs Cameron: I am sure that nobody in the Chamber underestimates the difficulties that the Minister is under at this time. Will he provide a breakdown of the extra £5 million that is being directed to unscheduled care?

Mr Wells: To date, £2·3 million of that has been allocated to the trusts, including the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. The funding is to provide additional consultants and pharmacy staff, as well as hospital ambulance liaison officers in the Royal, Ulster, Antrim and Craigavon hospitals. It is also being used to introduce new models of working and to fund external support specialists to improve health-care systems and hospital performance. The remaining £2·7 million will be allocated to the trusts to fund measures to improve patient flow and expand capacity over the winter. The board has asked trusts to submit proposals. It is expected that £600,000 will be used to enhance out-of-hours capacity in primary and community care; £400,000 for each of the five trusts; and £100,000 to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. A further £750,000 will be provided from board baseline funds.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister concur with the commitment given by his Assembly Private Secretary (APS), Mr Easton, that the money will be found to keep the minor injuries unit open in Bangor? How exactly will that be done?

Mr Wells: The message that I outlined to my very valuable APS and others is that, if alternatives can be found, the South Eastern Trust —

Mr McCarthy: He gave a commitment.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Trust gave a commitment that it will look seriously at those alternatives. Here we are, well into Question Time, and not a single MLA of any description has suggested to me other ways that they believe would be more efficient —

Mr McCarthy: Ask him next door.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Wells: — to deliver a balanced budget and cause less pain to their community. It is one thing to totally denounce all the proposals to make the books balance, but another not to make one suggestion for anything that could be done to balance the books by 31 March 2015. *[Interruption.]*

Mr McCarthy: Will the money be found for Bangor?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order, Members.

Mr Wells: If Mr Easton or anybody else comes up with alternative proposals, I would be delighted to see them and would look very sympathetically upon them.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Questions 4 and 11 have been withdrawn.

Health: Cutbacks

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what prior discussions he, and his officials, had with the Health and Social Care Board and the health and social care trusts on the decision to cut back on services. *(AQO 7032/11-15)*

Mr Wells: Over the past months, my officials have been liaising with the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency and the five trusts to help identify all available savings opportunities that could be used to deliver a balanced budget in the last four and a half months of the financial year, ensuring that patient safety would not be compromised by any such proposals. I very much regret — I mean that — that such measures are necessary, but the challenges facing my Department are significant, and the £80 million of additional funding provided by the Executive in the June and October monitoring rounds did not address all the identified pressures. That means that the trusts have been required to develop and implement a range of contingency plans to ensure that we break even financially, an obligation that is required of all Ministers.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will know that my constituency straddles two health trust areas. He will also know that, last week, the health trust and the Western Board had the courage to say that they got it wrong in Omagh. Will the Minister now ensure that the Northern Trust has the decency to say that it got it wrong in Ballycastle? Will the Minister live up to the words of his colleague David McIlveen, who addressed a meeting in Cushendall last week, and do the honourable thing? Will he tell them to say sorry and change their mind?

Mr Wells: The Member for East Londonderry knows that there will be a major Assembly debate on this issue. I think that it is scheduled for 27 November. I will listen with great interest to the considered views of all the MLAs affected by the Dalriada decision. I hope that, by then, they will have come to me with alternative suggestions that mean that all of us can avoid this very difficult decision. That is where this issue is best considered after I have consulted widely with so many of the groups involved. My door is and has been open to people who want to speak to me about it.

I accept what the Member said about the Western Trust's decision. The chief executive announced last week that the trust was to suspend its decision on the palliative care beds in Omagh, but — there is a very significant but — she realises, as does her board, that it will have to come back with an alternative suggestion to make exactly the same saving. It is not a question of the trust's saying that this is unpalatable and, therefore, it will not come up with the money. It will have to make its books balance in the same way as the Northern, South Eastern, Belfast Trusts etc will have to make their books balance. They are all finding this extremely painful.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Does the Minister accept that the scandalous amount paid to senior consultants in bonuses would go a long way towards saving Dalriada and many other front-line services? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Wells: I have an awful lot of sympathy for what the Member for Londonderry says. In these very difficult financial times, I find it almost impossible to justify consultants' bonuses, enhanced payments, or whatever they are. There is a difficulty in that they may be part of a contractual obligation that we could have huge problems getting out of. I would like to say that they would far rather have a shield from the Minister than a mere £20,000 or £30,000 bonus — chance would be a fine thing. It is an important point. So many people are getting them and they cost us a lot of money. I think that they are an anachronism. They were a child of their time: we had to pay bonuses to retain and attract front-line consultants when many were moving down to the Irish Republic etc where big payments were made. We are looking at that.

I also remind the Member that we, as a Department, spend £1·5 million a year funding full-time union officials. The vast majority of union officials employed in the health trusts are paid directly and entirely by the Department. If we are to look at consultants' bonuses, we will have to look at that as well because £1·5 million would mean that we did not have to take any decision on Ballycastle or on Bangor.

Mr McGimpsey: I understand exactly where

the Minister stands. What efforts did the trusts make to make you, as Minister, aware that they were coming forward with the proposals at Bangor, Dalriada, Craigavon and so on? Has he asked them for their alternatives? As they are the ones delivering the services, they will have a range of alternatives — or did they simply plump for the ones that are now in the public domain?

Mr Wells: I thank the Member personally for the responsible stance that he has taken as an MLA on the Committee to the problems that the health service faces. There was a golden opportunity for him to wreak revenge on me, and I thank him for the fact that, in the interim few months, he has been —

Mr Wilson: He has time yet.

Mr Wells: There may be time yet, but he has been very responsible, and this is a very responsible question.

Yes indeed, there are other options, but I guarantee that, should I decide to implement some that I am aware of, there would be delegations from another part of the trust area, often led by the same MLAs who came to me to protest about the first set of decisions. We would simply be moving the problem down the road, because none of these changes in actual, physical services are popular. I would like to work with individual MLAs because they all tell me how bright and able they are. They all tell me how much they know about the health service that I do not, so, if they have their ear to the ground and know better, they should come and speak to me. Nobody would be happier than me if they could come up with a solution to the budget problem that keeps everybody happy and means that we end the year without going into deficit.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

2.30 pm

Health and Social Care Board: Conferences and Training

T1. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an explanation for information published following a recent freedom of information request about conferences and training in the Health and Social Care Board. *(AQT 1741/11-15)*

Mr Wells: I have read the recent press reports on the issue, and we have asked about it. The trusts and the board are implementing restrictions on conferences and travel. Indeed, at conferences that I attend as Minister, I notice that there are far fewer officials from the trusts and the board. We have also asked for a 2·5% reduction in administration costs to be taken out of the trusts and the board, which is an indication that we want the issue to be looked at.

The public find it difficult to understand the matter. Equally, we need to be careful, because we have some top-performing staff in the health service, and it is important that they travel to hear about best practice and learn about new techniques and new types of service. We have to learn from the rest of the world, because we do not have all the answers in Northern Ireland.

In the very difficult incoming financial conditions — Members, if you think that this year is bad, wait until 2015-16 when we will have to take even tougher decisions. One decision might be that we will have to restrict greatly travel, conferences and expenses of all those involved throughout the health and social care system to balance the books.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. I appreciate and understand that there are occasions when conferences may be essential and may prove worthwhile. Will he give us a figure for the total cost of conferences to date?

Mr Wells: The cost is certainly an awful lot less than the penalty that my Department is taking because of the failure to agree on welfare reform. Whilst these issues may be high in the public interest, particularly in the 'The Irish News', it is also important to realise that, even if we solve them overnight, it is a mere drop in the ocean compared with the £87 million hit that we are taking as a community because of the failure of Members opposite to agree to welfare reform. My Department's cut of that would normally be £32 million. If I had that £32 million, the last two hours would have much more pleasant for Members and me.

I have made the political point, but I still accept that it is absolutely vital that we look at this issue and make certain that we are getting good value for money —

Mr F McCann: You must have the figures in front of you.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Wells: I will ask departmental officials for the information and write to the Member with as much detail as I can.

Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital: Ash Villa

T2. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that managers in the Western Trust arrived at work last Thursday to an announcement that Ash Villa in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh, which caters for people with dementia and challenging behaviours, is to be closed at the end of the month, whether he was made aware of this or is the trust acting alone. *(AQT 1742/11-15)*

Mr Wells: I have to tell the honourable lady that I was not aware of it. I will be absolutely truthful with her, and I am waiting for a briefing. I do not believe that it is part of the contingency plans that were outlined to me by the five trusts. Perhaps it is a knock-on from the Omagh situation, but I am unaware of that. I will investigate this immediately and come back to her. Equally, if she has concerns, I am more than happy to meet her and service users to see what the significance of this decision is. I try to keep my eye on everything that is happening in Northern Ireland as regards potential closures and changes of service, but I have to say that this one passed me by.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for his honesty. Will the Department now work with the trust, as he outlined, to ensure that staff who could be affected at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital will be retained? As the Minister outlined, this is a major concern that arose just last Thursday. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Wells: In all these decisions, all staff who wish to remain in the Western Trust will do so. When Mr Poots took over as Health Minister, it was predicted that there would be 4,000 compulsory redundancies in the health service. That simply has not happened. No one who wishes to stay has been sacked or moved on in any shape or form, and I know that the Western Trust will make a similar commitment to Ash Villa. Those staff clearly can be used elsewhere. They are experienced, and there are plenty of opportunities in other parts of the Western Trust, within reason, of course, given travel-to-work times and distances. I will investigate that, and I will ask why the first I heard of it was when the Member raised it a few minutes ago. I would have been keen to have been notified of that decision.

Whiteabbey Minor Injuries Unit

T3. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what effect there will be and what provision has been made by the Northern Trust for the pressures that will inevitably adversely impact on the A&E at the Mater given the proposal by the trust to suspend operations at Whiteabbey minor injuries unit, which takes in part of greater north Belfast. *(AQT 1743/11-15)*

Mr Wells: That applies to not only Whiteabbey but to Armagh and Bangor. Three minor injuries units are going to be closed temporarily until the end of the financial year. I will be absolutely honest and straight with Members today: some of those proposals may eventually become the subject of consultation for permanent closure. I am not going to try to say here this afternoon that all of what is being proposed is a temporary arrangement.

We have discovered from previous changes to minor injuries provision that you do not get a commensurate rise in demand in adjacent units. Some people decide to wait and go to their GP, some decide to go to their GP out-of-hours, and some simply do not go anywhere. I am confident that the Mater or, of course, the Royal could take any of the additional stress covered by the decision. Of course, the staff still remain in position. It may be that we are able to transfer staff from some of those minor injuries units to an adjacent hospital so that extra trained individuals are available to treat whatever extra number of people come through the door.

I remind the Member that we have added the £5 million extra, which will be invested in emergency departments (EDs) throughout Northern Ireland. We will be watching that situation very clearly. I have had representations from MLAs about the Whiteabbey decision. Whiteabbey enjoys the benefit of being relatively close to the Belfast provision, unlike some of the rural situations, where it can be 20 or 30 miles to the nearest minor injuries unit.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his candour in relation to the issue I raised with him. Part of the problem is the failure to have a strategic approach to dealing with all the units and accident and emergency units. I ask the Minister to reassure the House that he will look at a more strategic approach and not allow this sort of piecemeal process to take place.

Mr Wells: As I said to the Chair of the Committee, some of what we are doing is counter-strategic. I accept that. However, the Member needs to understand the situation we are in: 63% of my entire budget is used to pay staff wages, salaries, national insurance and pensions. There is no way in which I can touch that and make any savings. It is three years before any redundancy saves a single penny. Another 12% of the budget is tied up in contracts. We cannot simply say to the contractors at, say, the new Omagh hospital, "Sorry, folks, we've run out of money. You're gonna have to stop work." That cannot be done. Legally, we have to sustain that contract and all others.

The actual proportion of my budget that I can touch is roughly 25%. Therefore, I am inflicting an awful lot of pain on a very small part of the budget, but it is the part of the budget that can be touched legally. If I were starting with a white sheet of paper with two years' notice and you asked whether I would make the decisions I am making at the moment, the answer, in many cases, is no. However, we simply have no option but to balance the books at the end of March 2015. There is no provision to carry over a debt; it simply will not be allowed. That is where the trusts are. They are trying to find, not sometimes the most logical decisions but the most deliverable decisions. Therefore, that affects the Member's constituents. Do I wish that I were not in this position? I would certainly have had a lot fewer sleepless nights over the last 54 days if I did not have to make those decisions, in conjunction with the trusts.

Domiciliary Care

T4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that we are aware that reducing cash outlays is extremely constrained and requires a reduction in services purchased, not least domiciliary care packages, whether we can be assured that domiciliary care packages will be maintained, particularly new admissions to independent sector residential and nursing homes. *(AQT 1744/11-15)*

Mr Wells: Some of the trusts, as part of their contingency savings, have outlined that, in the last few months, they are going to have to slow down the increase in packages given to the needy. Those who are in urgent need will still get a domiciliary package. For others, there will be a slight slowing down. Remember that that is in the face of an increase in the resources given to that particular sector, a 5% real increase over the last year and a commitment to provide extra money under TYC for this.

I have absolutely no doubt that individual MLAs will write to me to complain that things are not moving as fast as they would wish over the next four months. However, again, what I am saying is that these are needs-must decisions to balance the books. We all heard the Committee Chair's view on last year, when the Department overspent by 0·3%, £13 million of a £5 billion budget. That is the pain that we will suffer if we go slightly over budget. I cannot possibly consider a £70 million overspend. The criticism would be legion from Members. Therefore, we have to live within budget. Unfortunately, a lot of the next four months will be firefighting to try to do that rather than concentrating on what I would like to do, which is the long-term strategic planning of what is best for health care in Northern Ireland. I wish that I had time to do that, but I am really in a needs-must situation.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will be aware that the concern is that the elderly and vulnerable will not receive the services that they require, therefore putting them at unmanageable and unacceptable risk. Can he assure us that that will not happen?

Mr Wells: The trust chief executives have given me a commitment that the decisions that they are taking, whilst painful, will not endanger long-term, sustainable, high quality care. The difficulty that I have with this is that these are some of the finest managers anywhere in the United Kingdom, some of whom have excellent records, even in a UK context. We appoint them. We trust them with the task of coming up with the least worst options. It is, therefore, very difficult for me, having been in position for 54 days — though I can tell you that it feels like 54 years — to look over their shoulder and say that I know better or that I know better because some MLA has told me that he or she knows better. We have to trust them to make clinical judgements on what is best for their area.

When the Member was Minister, he, too, was often in the situation of having to trust his officials. I trust my officials. I think that they are doing an excellent job in terribly difficult circumstances. Over the last five years, I have had lunch, dinner and various meetings on numerous occasions with the chief executives and finance officers of every trust in Northern Ireland. For the first three years, they told me that, whilst the budget was stretching, it was deliverable and that they were going to do it with relative ease. Now, they are telling me that it is almost impossible. Exactly the same people serving the same communities are now telling me that we are in a very different situation due to demand. Do I believe them? Yes, I do.

Health: All-island Cooperation

T5. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with two health services on this very small island, to tell the House what efficiencies he is trying to find by encouraging far greater cooperation on an all-island basis, given that we all understand that we are in straitened economic and budgetary times, with decisions that have to be made. *(AQT 1745/11-15)*

Mr Wells: I met my counterpart from the Republic of Ireland in Armagh last Wednesday. We had a very good discussion on the very issue that the Member raises. One of the issues involved the cath labs up in Londonderry in his constituency. There is a proposal that those who have major cardiac events in Donegal can use the spare capacity in Altnagelvin. Twenty-seven per cent of the renal unit patients in Daisy Hill Hospital are from Louth and north Monaghan. We have also had the decision on paediatric congenital heart disease and interventions being moved down to Our Lady's in Crumlin. I believe that there are areas where we can cooperate. However, unfortunately, if anyone thinks that any of this is going to lead to alleviating the fundamental structural problem that we have with the health service budget in Northern Ireland, I am afraid that they are totally wrong. Basically, we carry £160 million-worth of unmet need into next year, and none of those proposals is going to come anywhere near to closing that funding gap.

2.45 pm

Mr Eastwood: Has much work been done on telemedicine to try to improve efficiencies and cooperation across the island?

Mr Wells: Indeed. Three years ago, the Southern Trust won the award for the best telemedicine service in the United Kingdom. The then Minister, Mr Poots, and I held a function here in Stormont to congratulate it, and there was not the slightest interest about that good news among the media. In Northern Ireland, we are already leaders in the field in the British Isles, and there is a huge degree of potential in using telemedicine to make our services more efficient and more responsive to the needs of patients. Again, that is a long-term process. My difficulty is that none of that will help me balance the books by 31 March

2015, but there may be Members here who know better than me and will help me do that.

Justice

Policing Oversight Bodies: Cuts

1. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his proposed cuts to policing oversight bodies, including the Policing Board, the Police Ombudsman and Criminal Justice Inspection. *(AQO 7042/11-15)*

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Policing oversight bodies play an important role in maintaining public confidence in policing and in challenging and supporting the PSNI to improve the quality of policing. However, they are not immune from the current financial position, which necessitates all areas of the justice system making cuts. All arm's-length bodies have been asked to assess the impact of cuts of 10% and 15% against opening 2014-15 baselines. I will continue to protect the front line as far as possible. I have provided additional in-year funding to the Policing Board and the Office of the Police Ombudsman through the October monitoring round to address pressures in those bodies.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that response. Does he not accept the fact that the regrettable withdrawal of funding from those bodies will harm their ability to investigate historical incidents in particular, thereby continuing to deny access to justice and truth to the many families who seek it?

Mr Ford: I accept the point that Mr Maskey makes, although I remind him that the Office of the Police Ombudsman was the only spending area in the Department of Justice that received an increase in its funding in cash terms in the past four years and that it is subject to the lowest cut this year, of only 4·4%. We are doing all that we can to protect that.

If he wishes to make a wider point about dealing with the past, I entirely concur with him. We desperately need different ways of dealing with the problems of the past, and that hopefully will emerge from the inter-party talks. It is absolutely clear that, funded for the present, the justice system cannot meet the needs of the past when it comes to the concerns that we have for victims to ensure that, where possible, they get justice, and if they do not get that, they get the truth.

Mr Givan: Will the Minister explain why he has decided to give only a third of the £29 million of additional funding that he received to the PSNI front line, while continuing to protect the Office of the Police Ombudsman? As he stated, he has given the ombudsman's office more money and limited the impact on its budget by making a cut to it of only 4%, yet he deprives the PSNI of the money that it needs to protect people today.

Mr Ford: The outgoing Chair of the Justice Committee certainly makes a good rant of it, but the reality is that we are not depriving the police or protecting other people at their expense. The largest area of expenditure in the Justice budget is policing. Therefore, it is inevitable that there will be an impact on the policing budget, given the scale of the cuts that were imposed on me by an arrangement that changed details in-year and was the will of the majority of Executive members. Effectively, the DUP and Sinn Féin members of the Executive imposed an in-year cut without any consultation and changed the rules for this year entirely. In the face of that —

Mr Givan: Are you going to resign over it?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Ford: In the face of that, it was impossible to do anything other than accept an inevitable cut in the funding for policing. I have been doing what I can to protect the front line and will continue to do so, but it is not possible to protect it fully on the basis of the cuts that were imposed.

Mrs D Kelly: The importance of dealing with the past is to stop it from poisoning our today, and it is part of the ongoing talks. Does the Minister share my concern about the increasing number of people with mental ill health? The increased inequalities in our society are weighing heavily on your Department's budget. Had there been better and more sensible dialogue looking at how we deal with mental ill health and inequality across the Executive, your budget might not be in the situation that it is in.

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mrs Kelly's point. I am not sure that I can claim a unique distinction in terms of mental health, but there is no doubt, as we look at the issues that come from the legacy of the past, that there are individuals who have suffered and who may well have their mental health concerns exacerbated by the failure to fund adequately investigations into the past. There is no doubt that that will continue to create problems. It is a further reason why we so desperately need to do something about the past and address it in a comprehensive and joined-up way that meets the needs of victims.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Legal Aid: Costs

2. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current annual cost of legal aid. *(AQO 7043/11-15)*

15. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Justice what his Department is doing to reduce legal aid costs. *(AQO 7056/11-15)*

Mr Ford: With your permission, Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 2 and 15 together.

The annual cost of legal aid continues to exceed the budget that was allocated on devolution. The budget for the current financial year is £75 million, with expenditure on legal aid estimated at £109 million. That has created a significant pressure on the budget of my Department, and I have had to make cuts in other areas to meet that demand. I have introduced a number of reforms to reduce the level of fees, without which the cost would have been higher. I will shortly implement further reform to Crown Court fees, and my officials are engaging with the legal profession on reform of fees for civil legal aid. I plan to introduce new civil fees from 1 April next year.

As I previously told the House, legal aid is demand-led. In 2010-11, for example, there were 1,742 cases disposed of in the Crown Court. That rose year by year until it reached in excess of 2,600 cases in 2013-14. While that increase

in disposals has had a positive impact in reducing the backlog in the Crown Court, it inevitably increased the cost to the legal aid fund.

It will not be possible to bring the cost of legal aid within budget solely by cutting fees, and it has been necessary to start to identify further options for reform. I have put forward proposals for reform of financial eligibility tests for civil legal aid, and I am consulting on a range of measures that would reduce the current scope of legal aid. I intend to ensure that the provision is sufficient to meet human rights obligations and to protect the most vulnerable in society.

The current level of spend cannot be maintained, and fundamental change will be required. That is why I commissioned the access to justice review part 2 to inform future developments. I expect the review to report by the end of the financial year.

Mr McCausland: In his budget, the Minister received an additional £29 million on the back of the pressures on the policing budget. Why, then, was only £13 million of that £29 million delivered to policing? How much of the remaining £16 million was devoted to legal aid? I welcome the fact that he has launched a further consultation on legal aid but would he agree that his actions so far have been far too little too late and that it is unacceptable that such a large amount of the additional funding is going to legal aid? He says that it is an issue that dates back to devolution —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has asked a number of questions.

Mr Ford: I think the Member has repeated the same point a number of times, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The reality is that the allocation that was given in the October monitoring round was to cover the pressing needs across the Department, and it made reference to policing costs and legal aid costs. As the House will be well aware, legal aid is a matter that involves a contractual obligation to pay, at this stage, and I had no option but to take a significant section of the £29 million to pay that. Had it been the case that the Justice Committee had moved more speedily on some of the reforms that I sought to introduce, we would be in a slightly less difficult position.

Mr Elliott: Those were interesting answers from the Minister. I totally accept the need for review and reform of the legal aid system and the reduction in the finances that go with it. However, does the Minister accept that there are other pressures within the Department of Justice, like avoidable delays, and will he tell us where he is going with those issues to reduce the justice spend in those aspects?

Mr Ford: Mr Elliott raises an interesting point about avoidable delay. I made the point earlier that, by speeding up cases through the Crown Court, we had actually reduced the problem of delay. However, avoidable delay is a problem that is not directly related to the issue of costs.

Mr A Maginness: I think that there is a political consensus that there needs to be a reduction in legal aid costs. However, will the Minister outline the specific savings that arise out of the change in the legal aid rules of 2011? What assistance has that been in reducing the pressures?

Mr Ford: In answer to Mr Maginness's point, I can say that the 2011 change to the Crown Court rules, to which I think he is referring, resulted in a reduction of approximately £20 million of legal aid expenditure. As I highlighted, because of the increase in the number of cases, that has to some extent been lost because of further cases going through, but, in an average year, that is what the benefit would be. It is, of course, only a small part of the reductions that need to be made, which is why at this point we are concentrating on civil legal aid costs.

Desertcreat: DOJ Delivery

3. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of his Department's delivery of the police, prison and fire training college at Desertcreat. *(AQO 7044/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the appropriate and robust governance structures were and continue to be in place for the Community Safety College project. It is a complex and important project that we have to get right, hence the importance of the current review. My Department, DHSSPS and the three services are together responsible for delivering an integrated facility that meets the three services' training requirements at an affordable cost and with sustainable running costs. The college programme team reports to the programme board, which, in turn, reports to the steering group. That group includes the departmental accounting officers of Justice and Health; the accounting officers of the three services; members of the Policing Board; and the chief executive of the Strategic Investment Board. The steering group then reports through the two Ministers to the Executive.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Is the Minister committed to the development of the Community Safety College on the Desertcreat site?

Mr Ford: As I made clear, I am committed to the Programme for Government commitment, which is to the building of an integrated college to provide facilities for the three services working together. In current circumstances, it is not possible to say that that is a commitment to the Desertcreat site, although, clearly, the amount of preparatory work that has been done for Desertcreat means that it is still the only site in consideration. The review that is being conducted may — I stress the word "may" — lead to that having to be examined.

Mrs Overend: If we are to believe the Sunday papers, it seems that those behind the scenes have already written off the college at Desertcreat. If the Department's failure to deliver the full package becomes more likely, will he agree to immediate consultations with other Departments to ensure that alternative suitable uses are considered for the Desertcreat site, that the money invested so far is not wasted and that the expectations for economic opportunity for the Cookstown area are not lost?

Mr Ford: I am not sure whether it is appropriate to say "some journalists", but I can say to the Member that, when I read things in the 'Sunday World' saying, "Sources close to the Minister", I tend to assume that they have made them up. That is certainly my position in this case. There has been no source close to the Minister of Justice nor, as far as I am aware, any source close to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who has said that another site is now the favoured one.

In the review that is under way, we need to look at the options to see what needs to be done to scope out the potential training needs for the three services in the future,

given that we are expected to see reduced numbers. As the Member will know, that is a matter that I promised the local MLAs will be carried out as expeditiously as possible in order that we can re-examine the position. However, we have to ensure value for money and a worthwhile project going forward. There are difficulties in bringing other Departments and other services into a training facility that has to operate on a secure basis because of elements that are there, but it is certainly an issue that can and will be considered if it is possible to expand the use.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be aware of my comments to him about how the difficulties with the way that this was announced have carried forward. I think that that has been less than appropriate, given the difficulties that it has caused, certainly locally in the constituency. Can the Minister assure the House that, going forward after the announcement of this review, whether it is a review of a review, or whatever the process is, due diligence will be adhered to in how this is handled and in who the people who are responsible give that information to in the first place so that it is not leaked incorrectly to the press, causing the difficulties that it has?

Mr Ford: I entirely agree with the point that Mr McCrea makes. Unfortunately, I am not sure that I am in a position to ensure that leaks do not happen. We know only too well across a range of public services in this place and elsewhere how frequently leaks happen. I will do my best to ensure that the facts are put on the table, as I did to him and other MLAs in meetings last week and to the Justice Committee last week and as I will do with representatives of the councils this week. It is important that those who hear the facts also help to ensure that it is the facts — not speculation — that are reported.

3.00 pm

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí. An aontaíonn an tAire liomsa go bhfuil gá le mion-fhiosrúchán a dhéanamh ar an tionscnamh seo, toisc nár láimhseáladh go maith é? Would the Minister agree with me that there is a need for a proper investigation of how the project was handled? There is consensus that it was handled very badly.

Mr Ford: I need to be careful, given that there is the potential for legal action, but I think that most Members will be aware that concerns have been raised about how certain aspects of the work were carried out in relation to contracts with some of the external advisers and consultants. I have been assured that those matters are being followed up, but we need to ensure that that is done in a way that maximises value for the taxpayer.

DOJ: Budget Cuts

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Justice how he has sought to protect front-line public services against the cuts to his departmental budget since devolution of justice in 2010. *(AQO 7045/11-15)*

Criminal Justice: Budget Cuts

6. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Justice what impact budget cuts will have on the delivery of front-line services in the criminal justice sector. *(AQO 7047/11-15)*

Mr Ford: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker I will take questions 4 and 6 together.

Throughout the Budget 2011-15 period, I have sought to protect front-line public services as far as possible against cuts to my Department's budget. In allocating budgets at the beginning of the four-year period, I ensured that front-line areas received the lowest percentage budget cuts, with areas of the core Department making significantly higher percentage savings. In relation to additional budget cuts this year, I have again ensured that front-line services have received the lowest percentage cuts. My core Department has experienced cuts of between 10% and 16% this year to allow funding to be reallocated to the front line. For example, the budget cut for the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been limited to 3·5%, and funding has been provided to complete the Prison Service staff exit scheme.

I outlined the impact of the in-year cuts to the Justice Committee on 1 October this year. Whilst those impacts have since been offset to a limited degree by the allocation of an additional £29 million to the DOJ, significant front-line impacts remain, including, for example, a severely detrimental impact on police resilience and capacity; an immediate impact on the operational prison regime; a significant impact on the courts system, including the closure of courthouses and a further reduction to essential front-line staff; and cuts to front-line probation services, including the number of probation officers and the ability to monitor offenders when caseload is increasing. In the absence of an agreed position on the past, the pressures facing the justice system in relation to legacy issues will continue to increase. Cuts will also impact significantly on the work and speed of legacy investigations in the police and the Police Ombudsman's office. It is too early to provide specific details about the impact of budget cuts in 2015-16, but the issues that I have set out will continue.

Mr Dickson: Minister, thank you for your answer and your commitment to ensuring the protection of front-line services. Will you confirm to the House that, despite the ring-fending of certain DOJ budgets, the reality of the effect of those budgets up to now is that your Department has suffered the highest cuts of any Department?

Mr Ford: That is exactly the case. Ring-fencing for the 2011-15 period did not mean protection for the Department of Justice; it actually meant a 7·2% cash baseline reduction across the budget, while the block as a whole, as I understand it, had a marginal increase in cash terms, although, of course, both also had a rather larger decrease in real terms. Then, in the June monitoring round, that ring-fencing arrangement was torn up, so that the DOJ took the largest cut of any Department, given the protection of Health and Education. Those are the circumstances that we have to live with, and that is why protecting the front line has become extremely difficult, despite having managed that fairly well for the first three and a half years.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. My concern is the 3% cut to the Prison Service — I think that that is the figure that he mentioned. What impact will that have on prison reform? We all know that prison reform is urgently needed, and my concern is that that cut will further delay, block or slow down — however you want to describe it — the reform of our prisons.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to Dr McDonnell for his support for the work being done by the Prison Service. The reality is

that those cuts are still at a relatively low level compared with other areas of the Department, although it is not yet clear what cuts will have to be imposed next year. Given the amount that has already been done in the prison reform programme, such as the significant reduction in staffing costs, we have managed to make progress. There has been an improvement in the reform work that is being done for prisoners at the same time as costs have been taken out, so far, but there is a limit to how far and how fast that process can continue. There will be costs to the Prison Service if those cuts continue to be taken out faster than the reforms can be made.

Mr Humphrey: I begin, Mr Deputy Speaker, by condemning those who attacked police officers last night in north Belfast. They have no place in society, and I hope that anyone with information will pass it on and have those people removed from society.

The Minister talks about front-line services. Given the budgetary pressures and the pressures on the police, does the Minister agree that the full implementation of the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland is essential? What progress has the Minister made in his negotiations and conversations with the SDLP and Sinn Féin to ensure that that happens?

Mr Ford: I, of course, endorse Mr Humphrey's remarks of condemnation of those who attacked the police last night. They put at risk the lives of police officers and, indeed, civilians in the area, including those from Brompton Park in the Ardoyne area, whom they would purport to represent. Such attacks must be condemned. I certainly join him in urging anyone who has any information whatsoever that might help deal with the perpetrators to come forward and give it.

I move now to his substantive question. Yes, it is absolutely clear that, had we the National Crime Agency in operation, it would bring some benefits — not huge benefits but some benefits. If it were able to operate in Northern Ireland, we could see some reduction in the current pressures on the PSNI. As far as the negotiations go, I have had further meetings with the two nationalist parties. We have yet to reach agreement on what I regard as the essential way of ensuring that we fight issues like human trafficking, child exploitation, fuel fraud and tobacco smuggling by using the resources that are freely available from the NCA.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the decision to move away from the commitments made by the PSNI in relation to the Bloody Sunday murders serves only to undermine confidence in the justice system?

Mr Ford: It would be easy for each and every one of us to identify cuts being made that, we believe, reduce confidence in the justice system. If the justice system is to have its budget trimmed in the way that has been carried out in-year by the majority on the Executive and as we face next year, there will continue to be cuts. That is an unfortunate inevitability. Whatever I do to protect the front line and the services that provide confidence, I cannot keep up the level of services. The budget is not available, and the cuts being imposed on me have to be passed on to the agencies of the justice system. That is simple fact. Unless Members are willing to accept that we need to do something about fundraising, they will need to acknowledge that cuts will be made.

Convictions

5. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to introduce similar provisions relating to reductions in the length of time that convictions take to become spent, as have previously been introduced in England by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. *(AQO 7046/11-15)*

Mr Ford: In maintaining a regime in which convictions can become spent, a three-way balance must be struck between allowing a person to put their past behind them, recognising the needs of employers and those who work voluntarily with vulnerable people and ensuring public protection and safety. We must always be particularly alert to the need to ensure that those who work with children and vulnerable adults are fully assessed.

I recently introduced legislation to make it possible for some old or minor convictions to be filtered out from an individual's criminal record. Beyond that, however, any proposal to adjust the period within which a sentence can become spent, similar to the changes made recently in England and Wales, would be a major change. Such changes for Northern Ireland would engage a wide body of interests across the Executive, the public and the Assembly as a whole. Given the scale of the changes involved, the breadth of interests and the issues involved, at this stage of the Assembly mandate, I have no immediate plans to introduce similar provisions. I will however keep a watching brief on the operation of the new regime in England and Wales.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the provisions will extend an important opportunity to re-access the labour market to individuals trying to move on from a conviction? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Ford: I agree with Mr Brady that that will be one effect, but I pointed out in my principal answer that there is a three-way balance, and it is not simply the ability of individuals to move on in the labour market that we have to take account of.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister agree that it would not be unreasonable to introduce minimum sentencing for those who abuse, rob and hurt our elderly population, many of whom live in fear?

Mr Ford: Minimum sentencing is not a normal part of UK practice. On a previous occasion in the House, Mr Allister reminded us of the danger of having minimum sentences for those who assault pensioners, when he referred to the case of a paedophile pensioner who was assaulted by the father of his victim. We need to be very careful of the implications of such matters.

Prisoners: Hospital Transport

7. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department intends to review arrangements for transporting prisoners to and from hospital appointments. *(AQO 7048/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I have no immediate plans to carry out a review of the procedures for completing scheduled hospital appointments. The Northern Ireland Prison Service takes appropriate and robust actions to ensure that prisoners who must attend outside scheduled appointments for

medical treatment are brought there safely and returned to prison as quickly as possible.

The Prison Service keeps its security procedures under review, including those for escorting prisoners outside the closed prison environment. The arrangements are also subject to inspection by CJINI, if required. The most recent inspection was very positive.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister agree that it is particularly degrading for prisoners returning from hospital to be subjected to a full body search, especially when there is no intelligence whatsoever to suggest that they require one?

Mr Ford: Mr Eastwood raises two particular points. Body searches are, to an extent, as degrading for those who carry them out as for those who are subject to them. That is why the Prison Service is moving in areas like that towards an intelligence-led approach. There is also a significant need to ensure the safety and security of prisons, prisoners and prison staff. We have not yet found an alternative to full body searches that ensures proper searching.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. In relation to the point made by Mr Eastwood, given that, in August 2010, an arrangement to bring in new technology was supported by the Anne Owers report and, indeed, only last week, the independent assessors came to the same conclusion —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can the Member come to a question?

Mr McCartney: — is it not unreasonable that, four years into the process, there is failure to get a technological replacement for a full body search?

Mr Ford: Mr McCartney is aware of the efforts made around millimetre-wave scanners, which simply proved to be not effective in the way required for prisons. At this stage, we await responses from others as we look at transmission X-rays. I am keen that we get that decision as fast as possible. We are currently in the hands of the UK authorities.

Mr Campbell: Can the Minister confirm that the administrative arrangements with each of the health trusts, under which hospitals that occasionally receive prisoners operate, are identical in every respect?

Mr Ford: No, I cannot confirm the arrangements for hospital appointments that may be made between the South Eastern Trust, which has responsibility for care in prisons, and the external trusts. If there are specific issues that you wish to write to me about, I will happily respond to you.

Prisoners: Careers Guidance

9. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Justice what careers and life guidance is given to prisoners who are about to be released. *(AQO 7050/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The Prison Service is committed to developing and embedding opportunities for prisoners through career advice and life guidance. That has been recognised as a key contributing factor to effective resettlement and rehabilitation. NIPS, working in partnership with a range of service providers and key partners, has introduced a personal development model and provides a range of advice for prisoners on lifestyle topics such as healthy living, managing money and working towards goals, as well as more career-orientated advice on skills for employment and making informed career and progression choices. Through NIACRO's Jobtrack, NIPS offers an employment-focused programme, providing individual needs-based advice and support regarding training and skills development to increase employment opportunities.

3.15 pm

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for that response. What help or guidance is available to the victim of a prisoner who is about to be released?

Mr Ford: The responsibility for providing advice and assistance to victims does not lie with the Department of Justice, although Members will be aware of the work that has been done under the victim and witness charter arrangements to ensure that we provide support through the criminal justice process to such victims.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That is the end of listed questions. We now move on to topical questions. Nelson McCausland is not in his place.

Addiction Service: Railway Street, Ballymena

T2. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice whether he sees that the proposed cut to the addiction service at Railway Street in Ballymena, which has saved the Department of Justice millions of pounds over the past 14 years, prevented drug-related crime and reduced prison admissions, will lead only to the revisiting of the devastating effects of drugs on the community in north Antrim and on the Northern Trust area in general. *(AQT 1752/11-15)*

Mr Ford: This is another of the difficult decisions that have had to be taken, given the scale of the cuts that are being imposed on the Department of Justice. It is fine to say that particular projects save money, but the simple reality is that the Department does not have the money to continue doing the sort of work that it has been doing in conjunction with community partners on projects like this. It is not the case, however, that all such work is being reduced. As I understand it, the Northern Trust continues to be funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on issues like drug addiction, and that funding will continue. In the current circumstances, however, it is simply not possible for the DOJ to continue to make its contribution towards that project.

Mr McKay: The project not only saves money but saves lives. The Department of Justice is putting a 100% cut on the project — not 14%, 10% or whatever. The Minister needs to rethink the amount of money that he is giving —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member come to his question?

Mr McKay: — to this project. Will he at least have the courtesy to meet me, the families affected by drugs and the staff in the centre to discuss how we can resolve the issue?

Mr Ford: If Sinn Féin Members are prepared to rethink their refusal to take money from those who have assets in this country and fund the kind of services that are needed by the people who benefit from the Railway Street referral

project, I am happy to reconsider how funds are allocated. However, unless Members of the Assembly recognise that we cannot cut a reducing cake to produce bigger slices all the time, it will simply not be possible to continue with the work that we seek to do.

Prisons: Staffing Levels

T3. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Justice whether he is satisfied that staffing levels in our prisons are sufficient to ensure the safety of our officers. *(AQT 1753/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Staffing levels are reviewed regularly in prisons and in different areas of the prisons. Risk assessments are carried out of what is appropriate and necessary, and it is certainly the case that that is ongoing work. I have no reason to believe, at this stage, that we do not have adequate staffing levels in every part of our prison system.

Mr Kinahan: Given the seriousness of recent attacks on prison officers and the fact that such attacks have doubled in the last three years, is it not the case that we need to do something now to change the situation so that officers are more secure and the Minister lives up to his duty of care to them?

Mr Ford: Although Mr Kinahan raises what appears to be a logical point, the reality is that there have been more attacks on prison officers during periods of the day when more officers are on duty than when fewer staff are on duty on landings, which would suggest that the reverse is the case. There is no suggestion, therefore, that it is the number of officers on duty on any particular landing at a particular time that has reduced the number of assaults.

Dissident Republicans: Security Status

T4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the security situation with dissident republicans, given this morning's potentially deadly attack on police officers in the Ardoyne/Twaddell Avenue area of north Belfast in which three officers could have been killed. *(AQT 1754/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Again, I repeat the point I made to Mr Humphrey earlier that it was clearly an attack that attempted to kill police officers but might also have killed civilians, including civilians on the Ardoyne side of the Crumlin Road whom those who presumably carried out the attack would purport to represent. Therefore, it must be condemned by all of us, and we must all appeal for information to be given, where it can, to assist to put the perpetrators behind bars.

As for my assessment of the situation; I, clearly, do not personally make assessments, but what is reported to me is that the situation remains with a severe threat directed against police officers in Northern Ireland. It is clear that some difficulties in Northern Ireland are exacerbated in some geographical areas more than others, and, frankly, Ardoyne/Twaddell is one of those that has most problems. There is no doubt that the continuing presence of protestors in Twaddell Avenue is leading to police officers having to sit on the Crumlin Road and is therefore putting them at risk of attack, not just from the sort of stone-throwing exercise that has happened at times from the unionist side but now in a very deadly way from the nationalist side of the line.

It is important that we all use all influences that we can to deal with that and encourage people to report crimes to the police, to cooperate with the police and to ensure that the good work being done by the PSNI is backed by local representatives and local people in that part of north Belfast in particular.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive reply in relation to the attack this morning. I share his condemnation of it and appeal to people to give information to the PSNI in relation to the attack, if they have it. I also share his view in relation to the Twaddell camp. Will he join with me in saying that the people who are protesting there have made their point and that it is now time for them to end that permanent demonstration and enter into dialogue with the local community?

Mr Humphrey: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Ford: Although I might agree with Mr Maginness that it is certainly time that those who sit in the camp at the top of Twaddell accept that they have made their point and that nothing further can be achieved, I am not sure that they are likely to listen to either Mr Maginness or me in that view being put forward.

I hope that Members, particularly those who represent North Belfast and who have links to those in the camp, will use their influence so that we stop wasting a significant sum of money every night of the year and stop putting police officers' lives at risk because they are forced to be on static guard in such a difficult area. People should encourage anyone over whom they have influence to reduce tension, withdraw from the current protest activities and ensure that matters can be dealt with in a more constructive way than the way that currently costs £1 million a month and could have cost three lives last night.

State Killings: Downing Street Discussions

T5. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the recent assessment by the Council of Europe Commissioner that failure to properly investigate state killings could leave the British Government in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, what discussions he has had with Downing Street to seek a commitment to properly investigate those killings. *(AQT 1755/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I can inform Mr Sheehan that, although I spoke to the commissioner during his visit, I have not spoken to the Prime Minister recently on such matters. On every occasion recently that I have met the Secretary of State, I have made it clear to her that I do not believe that the budget for the justice system today is capable of dealing with all those issues from the past, and I have made it absolutely clear that I believe, and as the commissioner said, that the British Government have a significant responsibility for funding whatever new institutions we might establish for dealing with the past as, indeed, I have made clear that I believe that the Irish Government also have a responsibility, though probably somewhat less quantitatively. So far, that has not achieved any result, but I hope that the inter-party talks will lead to something that will see new institutions being established, agreements being reached in a way that meet the needs of victims of the past and deal with all those outstanding legacy issues and is properly funded by the Government that were responsible at the time those issues happened.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree with me that he has a duty to the people here in the North not to allow the British Government to simply wash their hands of the issue but to put a proper financial package in place to investigate those killings?

Mr Ford: I am not sure that I can ensure that the British Government do anything. I will certainly use my influence to ensure that the British Government play their part in funding some proper institutions to look at the whole remit of all of those issues from the legacy of the past, which need to be dealt with to meet the needs of victims in every section of this society. However, I fear that Mr Sheehan gives me somewhat more ability to take decisions on behalf of the UK Cabinet than I currently have.

Legal Highs

T6. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Justice what proposals he or his Department have to deal effectively with the widespread use of legal highs, which are still causing a lot of trouble in our communities. *(AQT 1756/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Mr Byrne correctly highlights the concerns that have been raised about legal highs. I know that significant action has happened recently on that front. The very positive work that was done against legal highs by environmental health staff from Belfast City Council was a significant step forward in using the legislative issues that arise around the matter of consumer product safety legislation. I believe that similar suggestions have been shared with others, possibly including Omagh District Council.

The key issue now will be to look at the report that has come from the Home Office, which, of course, has responsibility for what is a non-devolved issue, and see what lessons can be learned. I noticed that there were some specific references to the approach that is being taken by the Irish authorities, which may well be the best way forward for the UK to follow. The DOJ will be working with the Home Office as it looks at its responsibilities. Then, if work needs to be done in conjunction with other Departments in Northern Ireland, I will certainly give an assurance that my Department will be part of that.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that urgency is now needed to address it in a comprehensive way and that legislation needs to be initiated? Can he advise us if he has had any formal discussions with his counterpart in the Republic in relation to the matter?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Byrne about the need for urgency. The problem is that urgency that requires Westminster legislation, whether it is an amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, may not be as urgent as he would wish in the context of a pending Westminster general election. I certainly think that we have highlighted the benefits of the law as it already exists. We need to ensure that people, such as environmental health officers in the various local councils, are made aware of that and use it where possible.

As for discussions with my counterpart in the Republic, the report was only out at the very end of October, but I will shortly meet Frances Fitzgerald, the Minister for Justice and Equality, and I will certainly take the opportunity of that meeting to discuss that and a range of other issues with cross-border concerns.

PSNI: Spending Reductions

T7. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Justice for his view on the understanding of the recent statement from the Chief Constable, George Hamilton, who said that spending reductions would fundamentally change how and where policing was delivered. *(AQT 1757/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Ms Fearon would perhaps be best advised to ask the Chief Constable what he meant by his statement if she does not understand it. It seems to me that, faced with the budget cuts that are being imposed on the justice system, there will be very significant changes to every aspect of justice. Given that the Police Service is the largest spending area of the justice system, it will inevitably bear its share of cuts as well. Exactly how the operational issues will carry through is an issue for the Chief Constable, not for me. He will have to make the decisions as to how to deploy the reduced resources he is likely to see this year and next year.

Ms Fearon: Just to make clear, I actually do understand. I was asking for your Department's understanding. Are you and the Chief Constable saying that it is not a question of whether the police will arrive on time or too late to a crime scene but whether they will arrive at all?

3.30 pm

Mr Ford: People need to recognise the reality of what cuts will possibly mean. Some cases that would have merited police attention in the past will not now necessarily merit a response in the immediate circumstances, although perhaps a follow-up will come from neighbourhood officers rather than response teams, depending on the precise circumstances of the case. If we look at what is happening in other jurisdictions on these islands, we will see that there is still probably a significantly higher rate of response and a speedier response from the PSNI than is the case elsewhere. We need to face the reality of that as we look at budget costs and the competing pressures that apply across the Department.

Mr McCausland: Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise for not being in my place for the first topical question.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has placed his apology on the record.

Executive Committee Business

Health Budget

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

> *That this Assembly rejects the maladministration of the preceding Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with regard to his departmental budget, which has led to recent announcements from health and social care trusts regarding reductions in front-line services; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure adequate equality impact assessments are established as a matter of priority before any final decisions are made. — [Ms Maeve McLaughlin.]*

Which amendment was:

> *Insert after "front-line services;":*
>
> *"believes that a contributory factor has been the failure of the Northern Ireland Executive to properly fund and implement the strategic plan Transforming Your Care and that the trusts' announcements are inconsistent with that plan;". — [Mr McKinney.]*

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Health Committee, I am against the motion and the amendment. I believe that, for some, the debate is somewhat timely, to deflect from failings in their own institutions.

Talk to anyone in our society and you will find that we are all impacted on when health cuts have to occur, that we all want waiting times reduced and that we all want the very best health outcomes. To achieve those desires and needs requires hard financial decisions to be taken, especially in periods of financial hardship, such as that which we have experienced over the past number of years. The financial difficulties faced by the Health Department and its arm's-length bodies in the past years are well documented. However, I cannot agree that those difficulties are as a result of any mismanagement by the previous Health Minister, who was not sacked, as Mrs Dobson suggested in a poor attempt earlier at headline-grabbing. Why let the truth get in the way of a good headline?

I, however, much prefer to look at the facts. We can note that the Health Department and its arm's-length bodies delivered significant savings from 2011-12 to 2013-14, amounting to £490 million. The Minister has confirmed that, in 2014-15, there will be additional savings of £170 million across every aspect of its activity. While those savings are there to see, the previous Minister was correct in continuing to spend on vital areas such as elective care to provide timely treatment for those living daily in immense pain. Therefore, I am sad to note that, throughout the debate, the previous Health Minister has been lambasted for his use of private-care providers, as opposed to the situation now faced by many who will endure lengthy waits to alleviate their pain and suffering.

It should be noted that, although some Departments reported underspend in their budgets, that money was not available to other Departments that had overspend. No Department in our Executive can work in isolation. Any underspend in a Department in any financial year should be returned to DFP to be reallocated to other Departments that have more pressures on their budget.

I want to address what was said earlier about the Health Department handing back money. As we know, the money handed back was for capital spend. As all of us in the Assembly are aware, it is the Westminster Government, not this Government, that legislate for what we can spend that money on, and it cannot be brought back for resource spending. I find it remarkable that, while the Department of Health, which is so vital to our society, is struggling to achieve everything that it needs to deliver, other Departments are content to sit with spare money and refuse to release it.

We have those who come to the Assembly lambasting the Minister when trusts have to make cuts to front-line services. Members of this party are absolutely right: the proposed cuts to Dalriada, Bangor and in my area of Whiteabbey are hard to stomach. I worked in Whiteabbey Hospital during the previous mandate and remember very well the closure of two general medical wards and the coronary care unit, the downgrading of the surgical ward and, of course, the closure of our emergency department in favour of a minor injuries unit. It is right that we as local representatives make representations to the Minister of Health on behalf of our constituents to find a more palatable solution.

Transforming Your Care will, I believe, continue to follow what was a five-year plan, albeit at a bit of a slower pace due to the financial pressures being felt by the Health Department. In my role on the Health Committee, I will continue to advocate that this important work continues in order that we can deliver the right care at the right time in the right place for every service user.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. Will she explain to me why, for example, cuts in services at Whiteabbey are taking place? Is that as a result of incompetence, mismanagement or budgetary pressures? That budget was one that she, as an individual member of the DUP, supported.

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

Ms P Bradley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Member for his intervention, and I do believe that trusts have made mistakes in their budgeting. That is absolutely true, and we have found ourselves in a position in which we have to face some very tough decisions. They are not palatable decisions, but for those in Whiteabbey, it may be slightly easier because the Mater, the Royal and Antrim Area hospitals are on the doorstep. However, that does not help those 40 people who go in and out of Whiteabbey minor injuries unit every day.

We have, as a party, gone to the Minister and asked whether that can be looked at again. That has happened, and I see nothing wrong with it. We have been lambasted for it, including on the radio this morning, when we were asked why we are even bothering to go to see our Minister, but we have every right to do so. All parties in this Assembly can go to any Minister and put their point across. We have every right to do that.

The health service should not be used for political point-scoring, as it is at this time. As I said earlier, that may be for various reasons, one of them being to deflect from failings of other parties. Rather, we, as an Assembly, should be putting our country's health and well-being at the top of our list of priorities and taking the decisions

that will enable us to maximise our Budget and not hand money back to the Treasury because we are unable to make tough decisions on welfare reform. I look forward to hearing other parties' solutions for dealing with these hard financial times.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and will dedicate most of my speech to Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle in my constituency of North Antrim.

A lot of the decisions that have been made, particularly in the Northern Trust area, have been based on false economy. I want to go over some statistics that have been uncovered in the past couple of weeks. There are 20 intermediate beds in Ballycastle, each of which costs £850 a week. In comparison, an acute bed, according to Northern Trust's figures, costs between £2,100 and £2,800 a week, which is about 3·3 times the cost of an intermediate bed. Between December and August 2014, the average occupancy for those beds in Dalriada was 92%, which is extremely high. It would have been higher if it was not for the loss of days due to transport delays in the Northern Trust. That would add another 6% to that figure, which means that we are talking about a real figure of 98%. As many in the health profession will tell you, anything over 90% represents a hospital that is effectively full in terms of intermediate care.

The question that I and people in Ballycastle and elsewhere have is this: if you were to remove those 20 intermediate care beds, where would the patients go?

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Let me answer the question first.

We already know where they will go. They are sitting at the moment in acute beds in the Causeway Hospital, because Dalriada admissions have been postponed. We know, through local knowledge, that those who would have been in those intermediate care beds in Dalriada that cost £850 a week are sitting in Causeway Hospital in acute beds that cost over £2,000 a week. That is the false economy being adopted by the Northern Trust.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Can he explain to the House how he can reconcile standing with the protesters outside Stormont today while backing the Budget that has led to the cuts?

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

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I wish that he would follow the example of his party colleague Donal Cunningham in Moyle District Council and all the other party representatives in that area who are standing united with one voice and do not want to see any division about Ballycastle introduced to this debate.

This is an attack on the rural community. The decision has been made without any equality proofing, and it is effectively economic lunacy.

Another thing is that Rathlin Island is in our constituency of North Antrim. It is at a huge disadvantage already. We talk about rural proofing and the fact that the decision has not been rural proofed. It has not been Rathlin proofed. The islanders have to travel by boat to get to Ballycastle and Dalriada in the first instance, and this decision would make things considerably worse for them. I think that we should learn from this that any decisions on health in the Ballycastle and Moyle area need to take into account that we have the only island in the Six Counties and that those islanders' needs should also be considered.

The trust has insinuated that MS provision in Dalriada Hospital is not ideal, that it is not a good service and that it needs to be modernised. What the trust has not done is listen to the patients. We have listened to Philomena McKay on television screens over the past number of weeks. She has outlined the point quite acutely that this is their lifeline. The trust is proposing that that lifeline be taken away. I have heard all the figures that say that there are no referrals and that nobody wants to go there, but nobody knows about the facility in Dalriada because the Northern Trust and others have decided to run it down. I know of a number of cases where patients wanted to go to Dalriada but have been blocked from doing so. The Northern Trust is bandying false figures about, and the Minister needs to get wise to that.

I am sure that party colleagues and other Members are wise to the Northern Trust's tactics. Recently, it started to confiscate petitions on this issue in the Causeway Hospital. It has separated staff to try to pressurise them. It is determined to close Dalriada, regardless of what the Health Minister says. Other people and me want to make sure today that —

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Member for giving way. He raised a valid point. Those petitions opposing the closure of Dalriada were removed in error and forwarded to the trade union office in the Causeway Hospital. I can tell him that the trust has now provided an area inside the main hospital entrance where people can sign the petitions if they wish. We have no intention of gagging people on this issue. If they want to sign them, they are free to do so from now on.

Mr McKay: I thank the Minister for his intervention. The fact is that the trust is running down the Dal. The Minister must not be complicit in that. He referred to the fact that he has not met the council yet and that that is why he has not come to a final decision. I have spoken to representatives from the council, and they are still waiting on word back from his Department. I do not want to see the Minister sitting on the fence any longer because, for the past two weeks, whilst he has not made a decision, the Northern Trust has been in the background getting everybody shipped out. The Minister needs to give a commitment today that he will make a decision on the future of Dalriada in the next number of days.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McKay: He must make sure that the future of Dalriada is that of a hospital that remains open.

Mr Poots: I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate and a very important debate it is. Mr McKay is just after talking about a false economy. That would be rich if he had any credibility in this issue. I believe that around £600,000 is needed to ensure that Dalriada Hospital can remain open through to March next year, yet, as a result of the intransigence of Sinn Féin and the SDLP, we are giving back to the Westminster coffers £87 million of our money that could be spent on health, education, policing and justice and regional development. Let us be very clear that Sinn Féin is saying, "Welfare first. Everything else

can go to the dogs for all we care. We are not concerned about the health of the people of Northern Ireland or about education or justice because welfare has to come first every time." Its members should hang their heads in shame about that.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I will give way in one moment.

Last year, the health budget was over budget by the same amount that we handed back to Westminster. I trust that Sinn Féin is proud that that money, which would have been available to health, ended up in London.

3.45 pm

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he care to reflect on the extent to which money is being spent on policing as a result of Twaddell? Will he take the same approach to that?

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

Mr Poots: I am not getting engaged in "whataboutery". I could find 101 examples of where money is being squandered. We have not introduced the National Crime Agency, for example, as a result of Sinn Féin and the SDLP. Money that could be taken from criminals and invested in services in Northern Ireland is being lost to Northern Ireland. The Member does not have a very good record on that issue.

I approached the First Minister and the deputy First Minister last March with John Compton, who had just retired and who came back from a trip to Cork, and the Chief Medical Officer to identify the issues and pressures that existed in health — pressures amounting to £160 million. We had a June monitoring round, which Sinn Féin held back until the end of July and then gave us a paltry £20 million. The current Minister is in a difficult position because trusts and everybody else were held to ransom by Sinn Féin on that occasion. It offered a paltry £20 million, even though Martin McGuinness had set out to him in the clearest possible terms by the most senior officials in the Health Department the crying need to deal with the issue. He ignored the views of the Chief Medical Officer because welfare is more important to Sinn Féin than health. Let us not beat about the bush: that is the truth of the situation. The consequences were explained fully. In truth, when Sinn Féin stands with the people in Dalriada, it is not really standing with them; it is not standing with the people in Northern Ireland who will face further cuts. Let us be clear about it: there will be further cuts as a result of the actions not of Jim Wells but of Sinn Féin and, to a lesser extent because we could go without them, of the SDLP. As a result of their actions, the cuts will impact on the Department.

When I had the opportunity of being in health, 131,000 people were on the outpatient waiting list in 2011. We managed to reduce that to fewer than 100,000; we took over 30,000 people off the waiting list by using the private sector, which many people will condemn. However, it provided a lower-cost option. We treated people who needed opthalmic surgery, hip replacements, knee replacements and lots of those everyday things; it was not life-saving care, but it was care that was badly needed for people to have a quality of life. Many people, as a consequence of the decision that we had to take to stop using the private sector and to cut elective surgery, will now have to wait an inordinate time. When people come to the offices of Sinn Féin, I hope that Sinn Féin will say, "You know what? We actually thought it was worthwhile that you had to wait for 26 weeks or 52 weeks or whatever period of time it was because, actually, we don't like the private sector doing anything, and, in any event, we consider welfare to be more important than health. We're very sorry about that, but that's the situation here." That is the reality.

There were many opportunities to reduce waiting times for drugs, reduce waiting lists in our hospitals and reduce waiting times in our emergency departments across the board. There were opportunities to make health better, and it happened. As a result of the retraction in funding that Mr Wells faces, those opportunities —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Poots: — will be reversed. That is to the detriment of the people of Northern Ireland, but it is not the fault of Jim Wells or the DUP; it is the fault of those who are starving our Executive of the money that they need to provide healthcare.

Dr McDonnell: I was going to say that it was an honour to follow Mr Poots, but, after that outburst, I hesitate in case I am perceived as endorsing him.

The SDLP is attempting to amend this motion to highlight our grave concerns about the impact that the draft Budget will have on front-line health services. We have been very clear that the draft Budget is flawed. The SDLP has in the past, and indeed in the past few minutes, been unfairly accused of being uncooperative in relation to the Budget process. In reality, we have cooperated in every discussion and at every opportunity that we were allowed to. Cooperation, though, does not equate to subservience. I, therefore, make no apology for our stance in opposition to the Budget so far and our intention to scrutinise this Budget and other Budgets going forward. We do so because we believe that a Budget must serve the public's interest, particularly in relation to the health service.

Much as I would like to, I will not go into the Dalriada situation. I feel very strongly about that. I feel, as others have said, that it provides very good value for money in step-down beds, MS care and all the rest. The point has been made. If any of us were in any doubt, it was well made by the protestors outside today, some of whom are in the Gallery with us now.

That is not to say that there are not opportunities to make savings in the health service. We published a paper, 'Partnership and Economic Recovery', some time prior to the last Budget. We proposed options for savings that included three main areas.

There are significant benefits to be gained from an all-island approach to health. I will compliment the previous Minister — oh God, he has disappeared; oh no, he is down on the front Bench now — on his efforts around paediatric congenital cardiac surgery, but that is only one example of space. There are many other opportunities for cooperation and cost savings, particularly in Altnagelvin and the north-west around Derry and Donegal. There are major opportunities in health on a North/South basis that could provide substantial savings, including procurement, health promotion, acute care and general service provision

in the border areas. As I have said, we welcome the move on congenital cardiac care. Mr Poots's efforts there were followed through by Minister Wells, and I hope that we can continue to pursue that agenda.

The second point that I want to acknowledge is that the cost of health-care provision has risen so that the cost of associated management and administration —

Mr McGimpsey: I thank Dr McDonnell for giving way. Would Alasdair McDonnell agree with me that, whilst we can get into the specifics of Dalriada and so on — very important as they are, and we will have a debate on that next week — the crux of this is the fact that the health service was not properly funded through the 2011 Budget; that that Budget was supported by the DUP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party; that his party and my party voted against it; and that we are now seeing the chickens coming home to roost as a result of a health service running out of money at the end of four years?

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

Dr McDonnell: Yes, I would broadly agree. We had serious concerns, which I referred to earlier, about that Budget at that time. The difficulty is that, if you have a badly constructed Budget and you add bits to it or subtract bits from it, you still have a badly constructed Budget. There was tremendous opportunity in the health service when, some time ago, there were new GP contracts and a lot of changes around primary care. This was just before Transforming Your Care came in. Suddenly, the plug was pulled on all the innovation and transformation that was happening at primary care level, and it was all scrapped. One of the best opportunities is to shift health care back to primary care. As was indicated earlier, it is cheaper to go into Dalriada Hospital than it is to go into the Causeway Hospital. Equally, it is cheaper if people's problems and difficulties can be dealt with at community level or primary care level.

I want to go on with the points that I was making earlier. There is an increased cost in administration, and there needs to be a greater focus on bringing the resources to bear on the clinical need at the front end.

There has to be a better performance in dealing with the administrative burden, because the administration has to help and support the clinical end to deliver. There may be room for efficiency savings among the senior management, but it is essential that front-line services are not affected by efficiency savings. There are areas of non-front-line service delivery where administrative savings could be found.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Dr McDonnell: One is the health quangos, and, whilst I acknowledge that those organisations play a valuable role, it is imperative that they are required to keep administrative and management costs to a minimum.

Mr Wells: I have listened carefully to the contributions of Members throughout the debate. I do not accept that there was maladministration by the previous Minister. If Members are waiting to hear me in any way criticise the performance of the previous Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, they will have a very, very long wait. I watched the Minister for three years and four months. I was Deputy Chair of the Committee, attended many events with him and had many briefings from him. Would I have done anything differently had I been Minister of Health? Absolutely not. Mrs Dobson suggested that the previous Minister was asked to move. That is interesting because, as you know, my party leader made a commitment to share the ministership equally in this dispensation: half for Edwin and half for me. Such was the confidence that the First Minister rightly had in Mr Poots that he extended his career as Minister substantially so that the split became two thirds to one third. One could hardly call that a demotion or a sacking.

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

Dr McDonnell: Does that imply that he does not have as much confidence in the current Minister?

Mr Wells: It is entirely for the First Minister to make that assessment. There was no question of anybody being removed or sacked. It was simply the fact that he was going extremely well and had many important issues to deliver on, so, quite rightly, the decision was taken to allow him to continue.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I could not resist the temptation. The former Minister told the Assembly and the country at large that he would not implement the cuts that were coming down the line if he was not given the £180 million during the monitoring round. The Minister did not get that funding, and, as a result, he did what he said he would do: step back. You, unfortunately, have become the hatchet man who will implement these drastic cuts, which will affect everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells: The Member over-eggs and exaggerates things somewhat. The cuts do not affect front-line A&E services, they do not affect GPs and they do not affect clinics and other areas. They do not affect everyone, but I accept that, for the communities concerned, it is a very painful experience. Also, throughout his period —

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: You are the last one.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for giving way. He said that they will affect people. Will he reiterate some of what he said outside about keeping Dalriada open to those who came the whole way from Ballycastle? Will he also reflect on the answer that he gave me at Question Time, when he said that, of 4,000 MS sufferers, only 69 used the Dalriada and those are the statistics that are making him and the trust look at closing it?

Mr Wells: I have to be honest, as I was honest with the MS Society: if there are 4,000 MS suffers — I do not underestimate how difficult a condition that is — I would expect more than 69 individuals to be using the service and the bed occupancy rate to be higher than 32%. Those facts have to be taken into account. Equally, I have been lobbied intensely by many of those 69 on the impact that closing Dalriada would have on their life. I am looking at both sides of the argument.

My Department has a strong track record, under the control of Mr Poots, of managing budgets within exceptionally small tolerances, all against a backdrop of rising service pressures and demand. As Ms Bradley said, never let the facts get in the way of a good story: it was

not mentioned that underspends in the first three years were between 0·1% and 0·3%, from 2011 to 2012-13. We carefully landed that large spaceship called Health and Social Care on the postage stamp of an economic balance, but did anybody get any support for that? Not a bit of it. In 2013-14, we were overspent by £13·7 million, which is 0·3% of the budget and is a tiny amount, given the £5 billion allocation.

4.00 pm

It is important to note that, in 2014, the pressures facing health and social care were significant and unprecedented. They included a wide range of service areas: domiciliary care, acute services, safety and quality, ED, unscheduled care and children's services. In addition, the Department has had to manage substantial pressure in relation to clinical negligence settlements, which, again, few people have taken into consideration. Those cases were before the courts, and there was a backlog of complex cases. Many of them were settled in that year, and they led to large-scale payouts that could not have been predicted and put a significant burden on the health service budget.

Let me make it clear that the Department did not sit on its hands and do nothing in 2013-14. The extent of the pressures became known from the summer of 2013, and the Chair of the Committee admitted that to be true. Since that date, the Department has explored and implemented all available opportunities to curtail and control expenditure, in line with my predecessor's priorities. That has included extensive engagement with all the key stakeholders, including the trusts, the board, the PHA, DFP, the Health Committee and policy leads in the Department. Substantial bids were submitted in the 2013-14 monitoring rounds as the Department sought to address those pressures. No stone was left unturned.

There is one fact that no one in the Assembly can contradict: all the stats show that demand for health service provision is rising at about 6% per annum and that the resources allocated by the Assembly for health care and social services is 2%, so there is a shortfall of four percentage points. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the stress began to show in year 3. In autumn 2013, all the trusts told me that things were getting really tough indeed. We all came to the same conclusion, and we all know the stats. It is hardly surprising that the pressure began to show, but it is also important to highlight that the Department has reported significant savings over the Budget period: £490 million from 2011-12 to 2013-14 and a further commitment of £170 million in the current year, which is a total of £660 million. That sum is bigger than the combined sum for four of our smallest Departments, which indicates the significance of the savings that we expect the trusts to achieve — more, for instance, than the entire budgets for DCAL, DOE, OFMDFM and Finance.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. I know that he has given way a lot. Is he saying that, when the Finance Minister described the position as "poor budget management", the Finance Minister got it wrong?

Mr Wells: The Finance Minister was speaking as the Finance Minister. That is his role, and he has many difficult conversations with all the spending Departments. I understand his role, but I also think that anyone who can land a £5 billion budget within 0·3% must have been doing a lot of things right. The motivation for that slight overspend, of course, was to continue with the elective care of individuals who needed hips, knees and elbows treated as a matter of urgency.

In managing a particularly challenging financial position over this period, the House should be aware that the investments made by my predecessor played a crucial role in improving the health and well-being of patients and clients. Members opposite will not want to hear the statistics that I am about to cite because they do not want the facts to get in the way of a good story. There was, for instance, a 22·8% reduction in the number waiting over 13 weeks for inpatient appointments and a 65% reduction in the number of patients waiting for specialist drugs for conditions such as arthritis. The waiting times for anti-TNFs, for instance, were dramatically reduced. The number of patients waiting longer than 12 hours in A&E was more than halved. As was said, the number of clients receiving domiciliary care has increased by 5%, and the number of hours provided is now 250,000 hours per annum. Outcomes for patients and clients have improved, with life expectancy continuing to rise for males and females.

There is more bad news for the detractors opposite: despite the predictions of a reduction in staff by 4,000 from 2011 onwards, including compulsory redundancies, let us hear the facts. Between March 2011 and March 2014, the number of qualified nurses and midwives increased by 800. That is an increase of 5·7%. The number of medical and dental consultants increased by almost 200, which is 15%. The message is very clear: the previous Minister made a very stressed budget go an awful lot further than any previous Health Minister in Northern Ireland's history. What is he getting? He is getting condemned.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Allister: I suspect that my constituents would be more impressed to hear whether this Minister will honour the written assurance given by his predecessor about the future of Dalriada. You agreed at Question Time today that such an assurance was given this year. Will the Minister stand over the assurance to retain Dalriada? That would be far more impressive to my constituents than hearing a litany of things claimed to have been done well. Will you keep the pledge that was made? That is the question.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member for North Antrim will take it from me that that letter is a consideration in any decision. I accept that. I had not seen that letter until today, and I am certainly taking it into consideration as part of the overall decision-making process. The Member cannot deny the progress made under the ministership of Mr Poots, and no one in the Chamber has stood up to deny that any of the facts that I have stated this afternoon are indeed true.

I very much regret the measures that are necessary and facing my Department to obtain the £70 million that is required under the contingencies. I regret that, in the monitoring round, we did not get all of what we asked for. Again, it was interesting that, in the monitoring round discussions, no one suggested for one moment that we did not need £140 million; that was never the issue. The issue was this: did we have the cash to come up with enough money to make the trusts continue their good work to the end of the financial year? All the trusts have been asked to develop and implement a range of contingency plans

to secure break-even. It is a painful and difficult decision for all of them. Nobody, including me, wants to be in this position.

I faced the folk from Moyle earlier today on the steps of Stormont. It was, I must say, a very polite conversation, but it was also a difficult conversation. They have every right in a democracy to come up and make their views known. Hopefully, I have explained how I feel in the uncomfortable position of having to deliver these cutbacks, but I have no option about carrying a debt over into 2015-16. First, I cannot do it, and, secondly, it would be a cowardly way to deal with it because you are simply carrying that debt and storing up trouble for the next financial year.

Mr McKay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: This will be the final time.

Mr McKay: I thank the Minister for giving way. The Minister has said that he is considering what decision to make on Dalriada Hospital. The fact of the matter is that the Northern Trust today and for the past two weeks has been winding down that hospital. If he is serious about the option of keeping the Dalriada Hospital open, will he instruct the Northern Trust to stop all its actions until he makes a decision?

Mr Wells: I will certainly look at that situation on behalf of the MLAs in North Antrim. It is one that I was just made aware of today, and I think that it needs to be looked at. The Member knows that next week in the House there will be a major debate on the issue that he will take part in. That will give Members an opportunity to articulate the views of their community and enable me to report on the consultations that I will have between now and then. What he cannot say to me is that I have not been consulting every stakeholder in the community about the decision. It will be consulted on to the nth degree, I assure him.

TYC came up in the debate. My predecessor always made it clear that the speed of transformation would be dictated by the availability of transitional funding. The TYC report by John Compton estimated that £70 million was required for such transitional activities. When John Compton drew up his report, which I am still totally committed to, he could not have foreseen the financial difficulties that we, the Northern Ireland Executive, are in today. I have to say that we have not achieved all of the finances that we required to implement TYC, but, between April 2012 and August 2014, despite the difficult financial circumstances in which we find ourselves, the Department has been able to invest close to £30 million in the delivery of TYC and make significant progress on a number of fronts. For instance, we have 17 new integrated care partnerships, which have been up and running since June 2013, and they are making good progress on developing their action plans. In 2012-13, £11·4 million was shifted from hospital-based services to community-based services. The figure for 2013-14 was £13·6 million. Nonetheless, it is clear that more has to be done, and we are doing everything we can to meet these very challenging targets. I assure the House that the transformation process will continue to be a priority for my Department over the coming years.

Equality screening did not get much of a mention in the debate, even though it is a significant part of the motion. It is a statutory responsibility of the trusts to undertake equality impact screening of all policy proposals and to undertake assessments when indicated. My Department has been in contact with each of the trusts to seek an assurance that they are meeting all their equality scheme responsibilities in their contingency plans. Trusts have a clear statutory obligation and have to provide assurances to my Department that they are meeting their obligations as part of the governance framework. Should any of the temporary measures outlined in the trust contingency plans be proposed to be made permanent —

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

Mr Wells: — I will have been explicit in telling them that a full consultation exercise must be carried out.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. You were very generous with your time.

Mr A Maginness: This has been a very interesting debate, very interesting in the exposure of certain Members of the House, particularly those on the DUP and Sinn Féin Benches. There has been a lot of ducking and diving and a lot of avoidance and evasion. That is par for the course. Why? It is because they are scared of the impact of the decisions that they have made on budgeting. Not just the recent draft Budget but the 2011 Budget, which Mr McGimpsey referred to, and consequent Budgets that have starved the health service of adequate funding to deal with the situation on the ground. You cannot have it both ways: either you support a Budget or you do not. We did not support the Budget, the Ulster Unionists did not support the Budget, and you have to face up to the consequences of supporting sequential Budgets and the current Budget. The reality —

Mr Hazzard: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I will not. My time is very short, and you had plenty of opportunity to make comments throughout the debate.

Although, for example, Mr McKay and indeed Miss McLaughlin come to the House to criticise the previous Minister, they do not accept that they have made a contribution to the inadequacies of health delivery in Northern Ireland. It is a sort of hokey-cokey politics:

> *"You put your left arm in,*
> *your left arm out,*
> *in, out, in, out,*
> *you shake it all about.*
> *You do the Hokey Cokey and you turn around,*
> *That's what it's all about".*

Of course, the reality in this situation is that both major parties are responsible for the mess that we are in. Unless you realise this, the situation will get worse. There will be more Dalriadas. There will be more Whiteabbeys. There will be more cuts throughout the health service.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Well, yes.

Mr McCallister: I will be brief, and I suspect that the Member knows what I am going to ask him: would the logical outworking of the Member's view not be that his party would leave the Executive?

Mr A Maginness: No —

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

Mr A Maginness: — and I will tell you why. Staying in the Executive puts at least some constraints on the two parties that are causing the problems in the first place. Incidentally, we are entitled to remain, and we are entitled to criticise decisions that have been bad for the people of Northern Ireland. We will continue to do that, and I hope that the Ulster Unionists, along with the Alliance Party, will do the same thing. The people who suffer are the public, and we must defend the public interest. The DUP and Sinn Féin are incapable of defending the public interest and wish to pretend to the people outside that they have nothing to do with this mess, which is the fault of the trusts — trusts, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. What are trusts? Are they some sort of magical bodies? They are not.

They are under the aegis of, and subject to the directions of, the Department of Health and the budgeting of the Department of Health and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Trusts are not some sort of magic body that conspires against the public. They are the responsibility of the DUP and Sinn Féin. Do not run away from the consequences of your political actions, which have led to this desperate situation and which will increase. This is the first in a series of Budgets that will lead to enormous cuts throughout the public service, not just in the health service but in the public service at large, and that will reduce services to the people of Northern Ireland. That will cause people outside to think again critically about how you are giving leadership.

4.15 pm

You have an oligarchy. Two parties are running the system, and they exclude the Ulster Unionists, us and the Alliance Party from any meaningful input into the major policy decisions. You need to revise that particular political strategy. If you do not, the people will suffer further, and you will bear the consequences.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. At the outset, I want to pay tribute to front-line staff and patients who have worked so hard to bring these issues to the fore. When parties decide to play party politics with issues, that can very often be lost.

I want to deal with a number of fallacies that the SDLP put out today. For such an important issue for the SDLP, not once did its Minister, Mark Durkan, talk about health budget cuts during the Executive meeting — not once. If it is so important to the SDLP, why did he not do that? The Budget, of course, gives an additional £200 million to the Department of Health and ring-fences services. I would advise the SDLP to stop playing party politics with those vital community health issues and get behind community —

Mr Byrne: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: No, I will not. You were not too forthcoming about giving way before, so I will not give way now.

What we have heard is an impassioned plea from all sides of the House for the Minister to find a backbone, to protect the rights of ordinary people and to have the courage to stand up for rural communities and vulnerable groups in the face of the disastrous decisions that have been taken by health trust directors across the North. I was at a protest in Downpatrick on Saturday morning, at which an elderly lady asked what the point of local Ministers is if they are not on our side fighting our corner. That is true. At a time when the NHS and front-line health services face huge challenges on all fronts, we have had to endure successive DUP Health Ministers who have hidden behind layers of bureaucracy and shirked their duties.

Last year, Edwin Poots got on his soapbox and told us all in Down district that he was angry at the South Eastern Trust for cutting the A&E at Downe Hospital and that he would ensure that it developed a plan to restore services as soon as possible. Here we are, a year later, and there is no plan, and the A&E service is still cut. Temporary status is utilised simply to avoid legal obligations to consult with the public and to ensure that any changes are subject to the appropriate equality impact assessments.

In fact, the South Eastern Trust is beginning to celebrate the new status at Downe Hospital. Its 2014 annual report states:

> *"The development of a new integrated model of care for community and hospital services reflects the recommendations within 'Transforming Your Care' ... The focus is on placing the individual at the centre of the model with services becoming increasingly accessible in the local community".*

Unless, of course, you live in Down district, where hospital services will be removed from your local community and relocated to Belfast. The individual is no longer at the centre of any health-care model in Downpatrick.

The report continues:

> *"The co-location of the Emergency Department and GP Out of Hours service to form an urgent care model has been implemented by the Trust at the Downe Hospital, and this has been referenced to as an exemplar within 'Transforming Your Care'".*

Therefore, the collocation of the emergency department and the GP out-of-hours service is now actively promoted as best practice and celebrated. It is just as well for the trust that the shortage of emergency doctors occurred when it did.

Let us not continue to lie that the closure of the Downe Hospital A&E is merely to do with the shortage of emergency doctors. It is more to do with the shortage of support for the Downe Hospital from the South Eastern Trust and the shortage of scrutiny and control by successive Ministers to limit the destruction of that hospital so that Belfast's Ulster Hospital can be enhanced yet further.

In fact, reading through the 2014 annual report, I see the level of additional services and enhanced facilities at the Ulster. It is quite staggering, and it shows absolutely no sign of slowing down in the face of such hard economic constraints. You would certainly have to question why difficult financial decisions always have to be made with reference to the Downe, yet investment continues to pour into Dundonald.

One project is the ongoing £7 million plans for an extension to the maternity service at the Ulster. Surely the Downe's excellent maternity facility could help meet some of that pressure. Another project is the phase B redevelopment of the Ulster, with its 290 new en-suite bedrooms at a cost of more than £230 million. I certainly do not begrudge any hospital fit-for-purpose accommodation for those in need of world-class health care, but surely that can be achieve without having to spend £1 million a bedroom. However, when we see how lavish the trust is with its remuneration and pension

entitlements, we should not be too surprised that financial prudence appears to be in short supply.

In 2013-14, seven directors received substantial increases on their previous 2012-13 pay. Those increases total approximately £160,000. One director receives approximately £215,000; four directors receive between £130,000 and £160,000; and 10 trust employees receive more than the highest-paid director. That is 10 people receiving more than £215,000 a year. The ratio between median pay, which is £26,000, and the highest-paid director, is more than 6·8.

So, Minister, at a time of such economic constraint, how is it right that 80% of the directors in the South Eastern Trust receive significant pay increases totalling more than £160,000? I have not seen the figures, but I presume that such increases were not afforded to our front-line health staff. Moreover, is it morally just that a trust director can earn more than £200,000? That is substantially more than the US president or the British prime minister. How is it right that a trust director and 10 consultants are paid seven times the median figure? It is fair to suggest that health chiefs simply do not get it. There are cuts for the Downe and Dalriada, but the trust directors and the golden hospitals keep filling their pockets.

Just last week, the new HSC Board boss, Valerie Watts, announced that she would like to have a TV channel, as she thinks the media and politicians continually attack front-line staff. That is complete and utter nonsense. It is the millionaire club at the top of the pile that the public and the media are attacking: the health chiefs who spend so much money on jet-setting around the world that they cannot actually remember where they have been.

Our front-line staff are heroes. They work, daily, in impossible conditions while doing a world-class job. The public have the utmost respect and admiration for our front-line staff. Health chiefs need to get real; they need to find a new-found respect for the public and treat them as interested and capable participants in a social contract about our health service. It is totally unacceptable that they continue to drip-feed information behind the backs of public and staff representatives. The days of briefing media outlets hours before elected representatives are briefed must end.

Minister, you must also look seriously at how we appoint and appraise non-executive directors on trusts. We need to see a serious increase in their ability to scrutinise and partake in constructive debate at board meetings. Too often, trust board meetings are reduced to little more than choreographed conversations: a mixture of non-executive nodding heads and bizarre drivel regarding patient-client care experience. It is all spin, with little substance.

There is no doubt that the current situation at the Downe, and elsewhere, and the proposed changes, have characteristics of permanent reductions — hugely damaging reductions, at that. We know that, on a Monday morning, the A&E at the Downe, for example, is very busy. That suggests that a large number of people are sitting at home over the weekend, enduring injury, before the doors open again on a Monday morning, rather than travelling to Belfast. That is surely an abuse of human rights, if not a form of torture.

The head of the NHS in Britain, Simon Stevens, recently said that we need to see an enhancement of general local hospitals and less focus on centralising services to large specialist hospitals that are, all too often, led by specialist consultants. Rural areas, such as south Down, would be far better served by that type of vision for the future health care.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: Yes.

Mr Wells: He also said that, to balance the books, the health service in Great Britain requires £8 billion. The Barnett consequentials of that for us would be £240 million. If I had an extra £240 million, we would not be having this debate today. That would be more than enough to cover the pressures on my budget. If England, Scotland and Wales are facing exactly the same pressures, why are you blaming it on the previous Minister?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Minister for his intervention. I am also saying that there is money available in the system; it is the maladministration of that money. The health service just received an extra £200 million. It is the maladministration of that budget that is creating a lot of the pressures that are underneath.

The Minister should lead the way in rejecting the defunct idea of the golden hospital strategy. We need good local hospitals with generalist doctors who can serve the community. Instead, each winter, we have attack after attack on such hospitals as the Downe. When the trust has savings to make, it always seems to choose the peripheral and supposedly soft targets, such as the Downe. Those decisions are economically unjustified. We are told that the savings at the Downe Hospital are a minuscule £300,000, yet that represents a massive blow to our local community. The South Eastern Trust is a large organisation. Why target closures on the Downe? Why can we not look to make savings in the Ulster's service?

We should enhance the Downe to help to alleviate pressure on the Belfast hospitals. There is plenty of scope in urology to take the pressure off the Belfast hospitals. There is no reason why the MacDermott ward at the Ulster Hospital could not be relocated to the Downe and why CT scans, ultrasound and any radiography-led services could not be provided at the Downe.

Why can the Downe not be the leading site for mental health care in the North? The Downshire site has a historic reputation that should be built on, not dismantled. Staff at the Downe now face three weeks' redeployment instead of the usual three months. The trust and the Department have not considered the impact on such staff. The communication was woeful once again. The chief executive was nowhere to be seen, and the director of nursing did not even bother to come to the Downe to talk to the staff. It is an absolute disgrace that staff in Lagan Valley knew about the situation in the Downe before staff there were alerted. Staff in Lagan Valley then told the Downe staff.

Yet again we are facing Christmas, and up to 50 staff are unsure about what lies ahead. We are in the disgraceful situation where staff have to reapply for redeployment —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: I just want to finish this. What flexibilities have been built in to the redeployment process to protect those in need? What protection is there for single mums, carers, those who do not drive and those with young families? Those are the sort of people who would be protected with

the appropriate equality screening, but the trust and the Department always seem to dodge that responsibility.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 29; Noes 57.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGimpsey, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Ramsey, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 30; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Dickson, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Hazzard and Mr McKay.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr McCallister, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Main Question accordingly negatived.

Adjourned at 4.47 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 18 November 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr McKay: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Yesterday, the Health Minister deliberately deceived the House. He gave an assurance to Members that he would consider the case put forward by the Save the Dal group. At the same time, his officials moved in to start to shut down that hospital. He misled the House, and he should come to the House today and apologise for that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member will, of course, know that that is not a point of order. The Member will also know that the proper place to take that issue is to the Minister.

Executive Committee Business

Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I wish to inform the House that the Legal Aid and Coroners' Court Bill received Royal Assent on Monday 17 November 2014. It will be known as the Legal Aid and Coroners' Court Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Ministerial Statements

Youth Training: Interim Review Report

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Today, I am announcing my proposals for the future of youth training in Northern Ireland. I believe that these proposals have the potential to establish a new youth training system that will form a key part of our wider education and skills landscape. This marks the launch of the publication of the interim report on the review of youth training and the launch of a public consultation on its proposals.

Building and rebalancing our economy are key strategic priorities for the Executive. Investing directly in people and providing opportunities for personal development and fulfilment, and, consequently, delivering the skills required for the economy, are key overriding responsibilities for my Department and me. We have an important role in preparing our young people for the world of work and sustained employment through improving levels of skills. Complementary to that is the need to provide opportunities for education and training at all levels, and to ensure that both current and potential future employers have access to the skilled employees, particularly young people, that they require.

Last year, I launched major reviews of youth training and apprenticeships. I indicated then that I was committed to making these areas major priorities. The aim of the reviews was to ensure that both youth training and apprenticeships matched the needs of young people, employers and the wider economy.

In June, I published 'Securing our Success: the Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships'. The implementation of this strategy will establish apprenticeships as the key mechanism through which individuals can gain knowledge and skills while in work. Apprenticeships will commence at level 3, which is equivalent to A level, and will be available at all levels up to level 8, which is equivalent to a doctorate.

The proposed new system of youth training will primarily serve those young people who are leaving school at age 16 and will focus on professional and technical training at level 2.

In essence, this new system will fill the space that is currently occupied by a wide range of interventions and time-bound initiatives, providing consistency and certainty for young people, employers and providers. They include Skills for Work level 2 under Training for Success, the current legacy programme-led apprenticeships, current level 2 ApprenticeshipsNI opportunities and some mainstream level 2 further education provision.

The new system will ensure that young people can progress to the apprenticeships of the future, provide a progression route into higher-level professional and technical training that is available through further education and facilitate transition for young people into sustained employment. However, immediate progression is not the only aspiration that I have for the new system. I believe that the changes that I am proposing will provide young people with a foundation to support their lifelong learning and provide the stepping stone that is needed to allow them to adapt and progress in the modern workplace.

The focus at level 2 was also informed by supply and demand for skills in our economy. My Department's skills strategy 'Success through Skills — Transforming Futures', demonstrates clearly that our economy will rely increasingly on higher-level skills, with a decreasing demand for low-level skills at entry level and level 1. For example, by 2020, the proportion of our workforce with lower-level skills is set to halve from the level that was recorded in 2005.

In order to prepare young people for the demands of the labour market, achievement at level 2 is critical, but there are challenges on the supply side in ensuring that young people reach this level. Last year, approximately two out of five young people left school without five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. This measure of achievement at level 2 is, in many cases, the minimum requirement for prospective employers and is a common entry requirement for the progression routes that are available at level 3 through both apprenticeships and further education.

Over the past year, the youth training review team carried out extensive work which led to the findings that are presented in the interim report. We engaged with experts in the OECD to identify examples of best practice and completed study visits to the Netherlands, Denmark and Scotland, the findings of which have been incorporated in case studies throughout the report. My team also carried out an extensive literature review and tested each proposal through engagement events and meetings with employers, young people and other key stakeholders. A call for submissions and an employer survey were also conducted and the review has been aided greatly by the Committee for Employment and Learning and an expert panel.

Therefore, the development of the new system is based firmly on evidence of international best practice and the application and fit of this in the local context. It is a made-in-Northern Ireland solution that combines local innovation with world-class standards.

My team used the evidence that was gathered to critique and examine current youth training provision. One of the key challenges was the complexity of the current system, with a variety of different options available to young people seeking training at level 2. Greater clarity and indeed greater opportunities from progression routes was also a key concern that was highlighted by stakeholders.

A connected issue to progression was the curriculum offer at level 2. Employers expressed concerns about the rigour and relevancy of the professional and technical qualifications that are available at level 2 as well as the considerable number that are currently available. Some options at level 2 also require that literacy and numeracy skills be developed at level 1 only, which may inhibit a young person's access to higher-level training courses, lifelong learning and progression in the workplace.

The provision of work-based learning was also pinpointed as a current weakness, with local stakeholders highlighting that work-based learning needed to be integrated into the curriculum to better prepare young people for the world of work.

Finally, at an individual and system level, research indicated that young people required greater support to guide their choices through independent careers advice and guidance, supported by up-to-date labour market

information. The greater monitoring of outcomes and destinations of participants could also help to improve the system.

The interim report draws on that rigorous analysis and articulates a vision for a new youth training system. My aspiration is that our new system will be recognised locally and internationally by employers, further and higher education providers, young people, parents and guardians for its quality, flexibility and transferability. The system will be centred on the career aspirations and needs of young people, and it will be a conduit to support their ongoing career development. Young people in training will be sought after by prospective employers, and the system will be respected by young people, parents and guardians as an alternative progression route to the traditional academic pathway. By linking a new baccalaureate-style professional and technical award to the needs of employers and the wider economy, the youth training system will better match supply to demand and provide a seamless progression route for young people to a breadth of professional and technical occupations.

To achieve our vision, the report makes 26 proposals for the future of youth training in Northern Ireland. They can be grouped under four themes: the core components of the youth training system; supporting young people; delivery and employer engagement structures; and ensuring quality. The implementation of the proposals will provide a youth training system that incorporates structured work-based learning for all participants, including an employment-based pathway. It will provide a new professional and technical award at level 2, the curriculum content of which will be informed by employers in order better to match demand and supply. The system will provide flexible routes and support mechanisms to make training accessible to all young people, and it will facilitate progression into apprenticeships, further or higher education and directly or indirectly into sustained employment.

First, in a major departure from current provision, and for the first time in Northern Ireland, youth training will be available to all young people aged between 16 and 24 who require training at level 2, regardless of where they reside on their employment and learning journey. Importantly, that will include young people who have already entered the job market but do not have the comparable skills and training proposed under the new system. Therefore, youth training will be accessible to those starting a new job, those in existing roles and those not yet in employment. Through that approach, we will seek to ensure that the system is flexible enough for all young people to access training at level 2, regardless of their employment status. It will support young people regardless of where they reside in their training and employment journey. I want to ensure that all our young people are provided with the opportunity to compete in the workplace. No one should be left behind.

Secondly, the youth training system will provide a new baccalaureate-style professional and technical award at level 2, equating to a minimum of five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. By setting that standard for the curriculum at level 2, youth training will ensure that all those who achieve at that level can progress into higher level options and that the achievements of those progressing from training are recognised and valued by employers. Research has shown that this is the foundation level for progressing in the workplace and facilitating a platform for lifelong learning.

In addition to that breadth of learning, structured work-based learning, whether through employment or a work placement, will be a mandatory element of youth training. The employed route will be similar to the current apprenticeship pathway, with a young person employed by a business or organisation and benefiting from a mix of on- and off-the-job training. Under the non-employed route, a young person will benefit from an extended work placement. Work-based learning will be the primary method for developing skills, including employability. For those not yet in employment, the system will facilitate short project-based work tasters to help to inform their choice of occupational area. Beyond the core curriculum, youth training will also provide opportunities to study additional qualifications relevant to the interests of the individual young person and the requirements of employers.

Young people not yet ready to start youth training will be supported to attain a minimum of a full level 1, which is defined as being equivalent to four GCSEs at grades D to G, including English and mathematics at grades D to F. That support should be delivered through a range of targeted interventions, including further education courses at level 1 and specialised projects funded through the European social fund. The new baccalaureate-style award for youth training will be designed to take a maximum of two years to complete. However, the system will be flexible to allow those who can complete sooner to achieve and progress into employment or further training, and to allow those with additional needs to receive more time.

Collectively, the proposals constitute the core components of the youth training system in Northern Ireland.

10.45 am

The report's second theme focuses on support measures to help young people to successfully complete their training. To inform young people's choices and promote progression, independent careers advice and guidance that is informed by the skills barometer will be provided to young people before starting training and upon completion.

Pastoral support will also be provided to address the range of complex issues that young people face and will help them to succeed in their chosen occupational area. Indeed, flexibility and support will be the cornerstone of provision, ensuring that the new system reflects the needs of young people and the barriers that they face as they transition from school to the world of work. To support young people in the workplace, participating employers will provide workplace mentors to develop their employability skills and achieve their learning outcomes. Financial support will also be provided to young people, whether through a training wage or allowance.

Support will be targeted towards those with additional requirements, such as young people with a disability or caring commitments, or those leaving care. My Department's forthcoming disability employment and skills strategy will have a key focus on young people, including those in training. Youth training will make use of innovative online technologies to engage young people, prepare them for the workplace and facilitate opportunities for international exchange. Through those support measures, we will hope to ensure that young people engage in

training that is relevant to their interests and that they are supported to achieve and make a successful start to their careers.

While we can set standards for the curriculum and design support measures for young people, the youth training system will be effective only if employers are engaged in its design and delivery. Following the approach being implemented through the apprenticeships strategy, a strategic advisory forum will advise government on the youth training system. A common forum for apprenticeships and youth training can also help to ensure that the two systems are aligned. However, the forum's roles and responsibilities in youth training will be shaped around the particular needs of this system.

Sectoral partnerships will define the qualifications to be delivered, alongside the duration, structure and timing of work placements. Depending on the sector's skills needs, sectoral partnerships may be shared between apprenticeship or youth training provision, or they could be established to carry out this specific function for youth training. Along with those strategic and sector-led proposals, there will be a more targeted approach towards employer engagement to encourage work-based learning opportunities and to recruit young people for the youth training system. A central service will be created to facilitate the sourcing and advertising of work-based learning opportunities for the youth training system.

I am also proposing the creation of dedicated industry consultants to work directly with sectors and employers, and I will consider incentives that are targeted at small businesses and at microbusinesses and that are aligned to the priorities of the Northern Ireland economy. By having mechanisms in place that can take the pulse of the local job market, we will be able to assess the extent to which the system is providing young people with the skills to allow them to be absorbed directly into the workplace, and, where necessary, to take timely corrective action. My Department will also actively target and work with local councils and the wider public sector to provide work experience opportunities and promote the system at a local level.

A final key aspect of engagement is to support the youth training system through clear branding and marketing for employers, young people, parents and guardians. Effective branding will promote engagement and improve the image of professional and technical training overall.

The final theme of the report sets out a range of measures to ensure that the highest standards of quality for training are maintained. To ensure a quality work-based learning experience for young people, a registration and approval system is proposed for participating employers. Work-based learning will also be underpinned by a clear contractual agreement between the young person, the host employer and the training provider.

For workplace mentors and tutors delivering the non-work-based elements of training, new requirements will be set for their industry experience and pedagogical skills. At a system level, a new quality model will ensure that only those providers who achieve prescribed quality standards will be funded to deliver youth training. The system will also be underpinned by robust data collection analysis and evaluation, and it will provide mechanisms for young people to provide qualitative feedback on their experience of training. The proposals will help to ensure that the system can be monitored and improved over time to serve the needs of young people, employers and our economy. From today, the proposals will be the subject of public consultation over the next 12 weeks.

Particular efforts are being made to gather the views of young people on our approach, including their views on the future branding and marketing of the youth training system. Based on engagement with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, we will incorporate innovative best practice into our work with young people. This process will begin with a workshop involving young people to develop an animated version of the consultation, followed by focus groups with young people, which will start in December. We will also hold roadshow events to gather further the views of employers, training providers and other interested stakeholders.

In addition to the consultation, we will link the proposals to the ongoing implementation of the apprenticeship strategy to identify synergies between those two key mechanisms in our wider skills system.

Our proposals for youth training will deliver for young people and employers. For young people, they will provide a foundation of knowledge and expertise that will support their lifelong learning and provide a sustainable foothold in the world of work. The proposals will guarantee that the training the young people complete is right for them and sought after by employers, and they will support those who require additional help and guidance as they transition into and through the world of work. For employers, the new system will offer support to engage and reduce bureaucracy, and it will guarantee that the young people whom they support will be work ready and trained in skills that are relevant to their immediate and future needs.

The new system of youth training will deliver a foundation of knowledge and expertise, which will contribute to the skills required by the economy, improved social mobility and facilitate lifelong learning.

I commend the proposals to the Assembly.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister for his detailed statement, in which he referred to two points. The first was that, last year, approximately two out of five young people left school without five GCSEs at grades A to C, including English and maths. Secondly, through the programme, young people not yet ready to start youth training will be supported to attain a minimum of a full level 1 qualification, which is defined as the equivalent of four GCSEs at grades D to G. Does the Minister have to put this programme in place because of the failings of our education system? Does the Department for Employment and Learning have to provide that 14-to-16 education that our schools can no longer provide?

In meeting the needs of employers through the programme, will the Minister describe to the House the difference in attractiveness to an employer in taking a young person through this scheme as opposed to taking on a young apprentice? What will the Minister do to make parents respect and understand this major step change in education?

Dr Farry: I thank the Committee Chairperson for his welcome for the statement and his questions. I will take each of them in turn. First, with the interface with the education system, the Member rightly identified that approximately two out of five young people leave school

without a level 2 qualification. I would not say that we are addressing the failings of the education system. We must always have a joined-up interface between the training offer provided by the state and the education system. This is provided in many countries around the world.

The Education Minister has aspirations to increase the level of attainment; indeed, that aspiration is in the Programme for Government targets. We have to be very clear that the education system does not always work for young people. It may not meet their particular needs, interests or aspirations. In particular, they are more interested in a vocational pathway as opposed to an academic pathway, and a vocational pathway can sometimes offer a better prospect of finding and sustaining employment. It is in that context that we are seeking to provide this intervention.

That said, there will be greater scope on the back of this for us to look at a revised 14-to-19 strategy between my Department and the Department of Education. While we are offering this training to young people from the age of 16, work can take place in the school system that will help to join up with the new system that we are proposing today. Some of that delivery can be facilitated through proper area planning, the entitlement framework and proper use of the further education system. This is not about schools necessarily becoming providers of vocational education for 14 upwards; it has to be about a coordinated approach using the best of the resources, facilities, teaching and lecturing opportunities that we have. I see this as an opportunity for my Department and for the education system as a whole rather than as necessarily a competition between the two.

While we do have a concern about the number of young people who are achieving their level-2 qualification, most young people who go through the school system will achieve a level 1. However, there is a challenge for those who are not yet ready to avail of the programme that we are offering today. That can be addressed through a combination of further education and programmes that may be run under the European social fund. We will wish to take a very hands-on approach to ensure that they are meeting needs and facilitating progression into the system. Much as we talk about progression from the youth training system into employment or other opportunities, this is also about ensuring that we facilitate progression into the system.

The difference between this and what is offered in an apprenticeship is that part of this system will offer an employed route. For now, we can term that a traineeship, although we are open-minded about branding and the terminology used. We want to hear the views of employers and young people in that regard. The traineeship will be similar to an apprenticeship and, in some respects, will replace our current level-2 apprenticeship NI offer. The Member will be aware that our new strategy for apprenticeships has now moved that model for apprenticeships up the skills ladder, starting at level 3. Nonetheless, we believe that it is important that we have the employed route available for young people at level 2. The duration will be shorter — a maximum, rather than a minimum, of two years — in the apprenticeship strategy. Hopefully, that will facilitate young people into doing an apprenticeship as the next stage of their progression.

Employers will find this of huge benefit, as, increasingly, they are telling us about the need to provide more skills that are relevant to the workplace. We have a huge demand for a much greater commitment to be made to vocational training at all levels, from level 2 upwards. This is the new level-2 offer in that regard. We are seeking to ensure that the provision that we make is more relevant to the needs of the economy. At present, it is often shaped around the needs of training providers who will try to get employers to take young people for the type of training that they provide. We are trying to invert that process to ensure that employers, particularly through the sectoral partnerships, are driving what goes into the curriculum as well as shaping demand in the system.

Finally, we need to ensure that there is proper parity of esteem with other pathways in the system. This is not about creating a hierarchy; this is about creating choice. Alternative pathways will suit the different needs and aspirations of young people. It is important that parents and other influencers see it in that regard and support people making informed choices. Again, that will be a key aspect when we put in place the outcome of the current careers review.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement to the House. Minister, you talk about the high standard of training required, but how will you ensure that it is delivered? Have you any concerns about the recruitment of tutors with the up-to-date industry and occupational experience alongside the required teacher training?

Dr Farry: The Member is quite right to identify the issue of quality and of ensuring that those who provide training have the proper skills. That is why an entire section of the report, one of four, is devoted to quality. We will seek to develop that as best we can.

The other aspect of quality is the notion of how we support young people. That includes a mixture of pastoral care provided through the training providers and the mentoring that will be offered in the workplace. We fully recognise, and, indeed, concur, with the Member's comments about the importance of ensuring that quality is apparent at all levels. If we are not providing quality, we are short-changing employers, who will be depending on a good stream of young people, and also short-changing our young people to whom we have a duty of ensuring that we give the best foundation in life.

11.00 am

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the Minister's statement and commend the good work that has been done to identify international best practice. What is the Minister's assessment on whether that area of work is compatible with the issues and concerns that have been raised by the Post 19 Lobby Group on the special educational needs sector, which you have been lobbied on?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her comments and question. A piece of work is being conducted in the Executive subcommittee on the implementation of the Bamford review on mental health and learning disability. Indeed, a meeting of that group is due to take place on Thursday. We have been doing a scoping exercise to look at what is offered and to try to identify where gaps exist in provision.

The Member will also be aware that my Department is bringing forward a new disability employment strategy. That is due to be released for public consultation in January next year. There will be a very close synergy

between that strategy and the proposals for a youth training system.

We recognise that people with disabilities will be going through the system. Indeed, we are openly encouraging that. We want to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to play a role in life and develop to their full potential. The Member will be aware that, already, we offer additional support for people with disabilities who are going through our training programmes. That commitment will remain and will be strengthened as we look to go forward with the new system.

Mr Ramsey: I warmly welcome the Minister's statement — he always brings very detailed statements to the House — and his recent comments on disabled young people. I am keen to hear what form pre-level-2 provision will take, given, referring back to the Chair's initial comments, that the requirement for entry to level 2 will be five GCSEs. How are you going to do that when the most vulnerable, such as those who leave care or prison, may not have any academic qualifications?

Dr Farry: The Member is quite right to highlight that issue, and I have tried to focus my comments in a balanced way between progression out of the system and progression into the system and recognise that we need to provide support, where appropriate, in that regard.

It is fair to say that we probably have many fewer people leaving school without a level-1 qualification than we give ourselves credit for at times. The issue is often about the numbers who are securing a level-2 qualification, which is regarded as being the standard for progressing in the world of work, but nearly 90% of young people achieve a level-1 qualification. The Member is quite right that there is still a gap for those who do not have that qualification.

That is addressed through aspects of Training for Success and the Pathway to Success strategy for NEETs and programmes supported under the European social fund. We will be looking to see how we can make best use of the resources that are available. Through a combination of the further education system and the roll-out of the next phase of the European social fund, we will be looking to ensure that we resource projects in a holistic and strategic manner to ensure that we are facilitating the progression into the new programme. It is important that we capture every young person. This is intended to be open to all young people between the ages of 16 and 24. So, we have a duty to ensure we are capturing everyone.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the statement. The Employment and Learning Committee has done a lot of work on identifying the barriers to education, employment and training for our young people, and I am glad that the Minister has listened to that work and is addressing them by bringing forward proposals today for quality careers guidance, pastoral support and financial support in order to achieve parity of esteem for vocational education. How will the Department ensure that young people, their parents, schools and employers are fully aware of the youth training and apprenticeship pathways that are available to them?

Dr Farry: There are two particular interventions that we can highlight in that regard. One is the careers review itself, which, as the Member knows, was commissioned jointly with the Department of Education's review of careers, which built upon the inquiry that the Employment and Learning Committee conducted. That report, led by Brian Ambrose from Belfast City Airport, is now published. John O'Dowd and I are studying it and hope to set out the way forward over the coming weeks. Within that will be a very clear focus on ensuring that young people are given the full range of career options and on how we can best address key influencers to ensure a genuine parity of esteem between the different pathways.

We also have to be mindful that, often, people are not fully decided upon what is the most appropriate way forward at a young age, particularly those who leave school at 16. That is why we are putting such emphasis on the design of the programme for the technical baccalaureate-style award, which is designed very deliberately to have breadth and portability to allow young people the flexibility to progress in a whole range of pathways.

The second aspect that I will highlight is the proposal for a central service, which we have already announced in relation to the apprenticeship strategy. The central service will work for both apprenticeships and the youth training system and is designed to be a matching service for employers and young people — almost a bringing together or brokerage. That does not exist in the current Northern Ireland landscape, and, hopefully, it will make a major difference.

Mr Ross: One of the advantages of being a small country is that we can be flexible. Indeed, when it comes to youth training, we saw that investor companies were able to work with universities and colleges on specially tailored courses to meet their needs. Earlier, I listened to the Minister say that the needs of employers will be paramount in this process to ensure that young people are trained in the areas that employers want, which will increase their opportunity to get employment once they have finished. How exactly will he ensure that that happens? What formal structures will be in place to ensure that employers work directly with those who deliver the training courses to ensure that young people are trained in the areas that businesses want them to be trained in?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. There are two particular interventions to highlight, and these will also be held in common with the apprenticeship strategy. The first is a strategic advisory forum, which, at a high level, will bring together employers and employer organisations, colleges, universities and other key stakeholders to monitor and signpost the implementation of the apprenticeship strategy and the youth training system, when we finalise that in the coming months. That will be supported by a range of sectoral partnerships. Depending on the sector that we are talking about, you may find that a sectoral partnership operates purely in apprenticeships, if a sector needs only people from level 3 or upwards.

Equally, we may have some sectoral partnerships based in areas where the main skill demands are at level 2, or, if a particular sector requires a range of skill levels, there may well be a hybrid covering apprenticeships and youth training. The sectoral partnerships will involve any specialist representative bodies in the sector, a cross-section of employers and people who have a much more hands-on role in curriculum development, higher education and further education (FE) and, for the youth training system, training providers, who will also be a key delivery partner alongside the FE colleges.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I think

that, when the final document comes out, we will all have a duty and an obligation to put our shoulder behind the wheel to ensure that we have a world-beating training and employment system for young people. The statement mentions people progressing into employment for further training sooner rather than later, but it also mentions those with additional needs. There is a 12-week consultation. Many groups work with people who are furthest away from achieving an apprenticeship. Can the Minister assure us that those groups will not be left out during the consultation period, that they will be spoken to and that what they have to say will be taken on board in forming the final document?

Dr Farry: I am very happy to give the Member that assurance. Throughout the process, we have been very hands-on with the engagement with our stakeholders. That also extends to trying to derive lessons from international best practice. That will continue through the process.

In my statement, I referred to some innovative approaches to engaging young people that we will seek to take forward over the next number of weeks. The expert panel that was formed was a strong cross-representation of different aspects of the current system and those who will have future delivery roles. That was very helpful in shaping our conclusions.

The Member talked about the importance of this for young people and the need to ensure proper progression. One of the reasons why we are seeking to act is that our levels of progression are simply not good enough. People go through our different level-2 training offerings and, once they do, proper progression pathways are not available for them. We almost hope that they will find their way into sustained employment, but that is not always the case. If we look at our youth unemployment figures, we see that, while they are coming down, they are nonetheless a source of concern. The levels of youth unemployment for people who have gone through our training system and who have often essentially been recycled through programmes are much in excess of the overall figure for youth unemployment, as high as that is. That points to the need for a major revamp of our youth training interventions at level 2.

When we are referring to youth unemployment, it is worth making a comparison with what is happening in other parts of the world. We know that other European countries have much lower levels of youth unemployment than we do. That indicates a very strong correlation between those societies that invest the most in vocational education and the production of much better results in the alignment of skills with the needs of their economies. As a consequence, there are lower levels of youth unemployment.

Mr Allister: The Minister has given considerable detail about certain matters, but one area that I have heard no detail on is the costing for and funding of his proposals. Given the present financial climate, is it not important to know that? I am sure that matters have been costed. Will he advise the House on that? Given the educational dimension, does he expect some of the education budget to fund what he has in mind?

Dr Farry: The present level of funding for our level-2 offering approximates to just over £50 million. That includes about £25 million for Skills for Life at level 2 in Training for Success, about £8·5 million on level-2 apprenticeships and about £19 million on mainstream further education provision at level 2. We also have the ability to engage the European social fund. It goes without saying that the pressure on our budgets are enormous, but I have committed to making this a priority.

We are not in the business of salami-slicing across the Department's work programmes. Often at times of greatest pressure, you have to seek to innovate the most. We believe that we are seeking to innovate through this approach. As a consequence, I hope that financial, economic and societal benefits will arise from our interventions. We should see many more of our young people progressing into the world of work and sustaining employment. That will have a whole range of social benefits, as well as less money having to be spent on unemployment benefit and other welfare supports. We should see employers with a stronger ability to access the skills that they require. They should be able to grow better and, as a consequence, our economy will develop ever further. It is right that we continue to do this, notwithstanding issues on our budget.

I already mentioned the interface with the Department of Education. We want to see a revised 14-to-19 strategy to ensure that we can join things up as best we can. I am on record saying that I am concerned at the degree of protection that has been given to the Department of Education's budget relative to other aspects of our skills offering and at the potential for inequities in that regard. Some recognition was given to that in the draft Budget. At this stage, we are working through the implications of the Budget to ensure that we can fund the biggest strategic priorities for my Department and, consequently, our economy.

11.15 am

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his statement this morning. The Committee was keen that officials explore international best practice. Was that a useful exercise? What was gleaned from it?

Dr Farry: There is a plethora of examples of best practice around the world. So far, we have engaged in study visits to the Netherlands, Denmark and Scotland, as well as having discussions with officials and others in London. As I said to Mr McCann, we can, at a very high level, draw conclusions from the investment that societies make in their commitment to vocational education and training, and the levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, that pertain in those societies. The correlation is compelling, and you will see that in the report and the supporting evidence.

Beneath that, we had the opportunity to look at specific interventions that have been successful in other countries in how they structure their approach to youth training. Again, a number of case studies are set out in the interim report and consultation document. They involve areas such as employers' reports, pastoral care for young people, the design of curriculums and how employers can influence them. A lot of the report's content has been influenced by what is going on in other societies. We have not been looking to reinvent the wheel but simply to apply best practice to our local context.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister, particularly for his commitment for targeted support for young people leaving care. As a new Committee member, I recently met Include Youth and heard about the comparatively high drop-out rate of those young people from FE colleges. Will the Minister encourage the FE colleges to roll out the Buttle quality

mark approach for care leavers in Training for Success to monitor and track their outcome in FE colleges?

Dr Farry: We are seeking to ensure that we attain better achievement and retention rates in the system. Obviously, the Member refers to what happens in the current provision and the attention that is given, which is, at times, of a high standard. We get strong feedback from young people on the programmes. Equally, we are conscious that the progression levels through our current systems are not sufficiently strong and that people are not availing themselves of the opportunities, and employers are consequently not availing themselves of the local skills base in the manner that they should.

We are making a very strong commitment on pastoral care and the mentoring of young people, because we acknowledge that young people will be entering these schemes with a range of barriers and particular needs that will have to be addressed. That is why pastoral care from the training providers in FE colleges and the workplace mentors are so important. We are not simply providing the technical skills for young people but giving them much wider support. With reference to what Mr Hilditch said, one of the key lessons that we learned from our international study visits was the importance of that type of pastoral care. Some of the training facilities almost gave the impression of being a type of school, with a full provision of extracurricular activities. Young people could have the advantage of availing themselves of that, which is more associated with a traditional school setting than with a traditional training-type provision. People who are entering from a care background are a key group for whom that approach would be most beneficial.

Marshall Report: Independent Child Sexual Exploitation Inquiry

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Last year, my predecessor, on behalf of my Department and the Departments of Justice and Education, commissioned an independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. The inquiry was led by Kathleen Marshall and is now complete. It was charged with the following matters: establishing the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland; examining how effective cross-sectoral child safeguarding and protection arrangements are in preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation; and considering how well we are safeguarding and protecting looked-after children. The inquiry was asked to make recommendations on future actions.

All three Ministers have now received the inquiry report. On behalf of my ministerial colleagues, I thank Kathleen Marshall and those who assisted her for their efforts. Throughout my statement, I will refer to child sexual exploitation as CSE for ease of reference.

All forms of child abuse, including CSE, are totally unacceptable. I want Northern Ireland to be a safer place for children and young people and the most hostile of environments for those who abuse or exploit our children and young people. I want to take Members through what Kathleen Marshall has found, her recommendations and my initial response, and I want to emphasise that it is an initial response.

On the nature and extent of CSE in Northern Ireland, the inquiry concludes that it is not new and takes different forms in Northern Ireland, as it does throughout the United Kingdom, but there are particular Northern Ireland dimensions to it.

The forms that CSE takes here include: online exploitation; what is described as the party house scene; exploitation by older boyfriends; prostitution; trafficking, and forced marriage. The inquiry has not been able to establish actual numbers of young people being exploited, though it references official figures for prostitution, trafficking and forced marriage, all of which are in single figures.

The inquiry states that there is an increasing risk of peer-to-peer abuse, attributed by Kathleen Marshall to an increasing sexualised society, assisted by advances in technology and changing cultural norms in our society.

The inquiry concludes that while there is some level of organisation to CSE in Northern Ireland linked to groups who coalesce around young people, for instance, in party houses, it does not constitute organised crime as understood by the National Crime Agency.

Considerations about the organised nature of CSE took the inquiry to consider possible links with paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. The PSNI view is that organised paramilitary involvement in child sexual exploitation has not been established. However, the inquiry found the witness testimonies about potential paramilitary links with CSE to be powerful and persuasive. A number of individuals expressed an ardent plea that the inquiry should speak up about the paramilitary dimension to CSE.

Some described how CSE could be associated with organised drug dealing. More commonly, it was a case

of individuals believed to be members of, or linked to, paramilitary groups who used the authority and fear that it engendered to exploit children and young people. Those individuals have access to alcohol, drugs, guns and violence. They were described as people to whom you cannot say no. They regard themselves as beyond the law.

The inquiry was told very clearly that paramilitary influence may cause and facilitate CSE. In communities, it can build up loyalty and fear. Girls may feel that they can gain status through cooperating with those powerful individuals, and that may be tolerated by some families. Others fear threats to their families if they do not succumb to the abuse.

The inquiry also heard that some young men look to those powerful figures as role models and aspire to be like them. The inquiry was told of families that had endured generations of exploitation. The kind of power that such individuals exert means that they may be involved in all types of CSE. However, specific to them are the pubs and clubs operated in some areas where there may be lock-ins involving young girls who get the tap on the shoulder to stay behind. The report states that it was not possible for the inquiry team to identify the prevalence of paramilitary links, but perhaps that is not surprising, given that some stated that they feared for their lives if it became known that they had spoken to the inquiry.

The inquiry identifies a number of groups of young people who are potentially more at risk of CSE than others. The risk and vulnerability factors identified include: neglect, deprivation, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, peer pressure, advances in technology, an increasingly sexualised society, cultural attitudes to women and going missing overnight. The inquiry concludes that available data can only provide a rough idea of the extent of CSE and it is likely to be a significant underestimate. The report states that the first step in tackling CSE is to recognise that it exists and suggests that more cases will be identified as awareness increases, and there is a recommendation linked to public awareness-raising.

A shared understanding about CSE and improved information collection and analysis are considered by the inquiry to be prerequisites to better identification, reporting and a more accurate assessment of the prevalence and nature of CSE. However, it is important to bear in mind that we already know that all forms of child abuse have a hidden dimension and are significantly under-reported and, as a result, there will always be a gap between actual prevalence and what is known to social services.

While we do not know the full extent of CSE in Northern Ireland, we can say that there are no findings in the inquiry that point to the type of organised exploitation seen in Rotherham or Rochdale; nor does it have the same ethnic-minority dimension. There is no evidence in the report to suggest cover-up, corruption or a lack of commitment on the part of agencies or individuals. Indeed, the report states that, in Northern Ireland, senior managers expressed a commitment to taking CSE seriously. While that may be the case, there is no room for complacency, and the inquiry report counsels vigilance in the face of changes in social attitudes and in the cultural make up of Northern Ireland society.

I turn now to what the report says about preventing, tackling and supporting recovery from CSE. Statutory agencies — social services, the police, health, education and youth services — cannot tackle CSE on their own. They need the support of children, parents, communities and third-sector organisations. It is reassuring that all those who provided evidence to the inquiry indicated their willingness to take part. It is particularly reassuring that young people want to be empowered to resist CSE, and they can only do so by knowing more about the risks. Parents, who are the first line of defence against the exploitation of their children, want to be treated with respect and supported by agencies in their efforts to do so.

Concerns were raised in the report that there is too much emphasis on the behaviour of victims and calls to restrict their liberty rather than punishing and locking up perpetrators. Perpetrators must be held to account. The report highlights long-standing concerns about the low rates of securing prosecutions and convictions of those who prey upon children and young people for sexual purposes. Not enough is known about people who sexually exploit children and young people. This is a serious gap that has been identified in other reports. While there have been some specific groups of men identified in some reports regarding CSE, the National Crime Agency suggests that perpetrators are mostly solitary offenders and could be from any part of the community. Understanding offenders' profiles and predispositions, their motivation, mindset and how they operate are key to helping us better protect children and young people. Holding offenders to account is primarily the responsibility of the Justice Department, and I pledge to support Minister Ford in whatever actions he may decide to take forward in this regard.

The inquiry notes the importance of cooperation amongst agencies and the sharing of information. It states that, while there have been improvements, more can be done. It also states that it heard a view that there are too many partnership arrangements involving the same people and leading to duplication of efforts. Those are matters that, I accept, need further consideration.

11.30 am

On victim support, a range of general and bespoke services to support the recovery of victims is identified in the report. The inquiry identifies the need for services to support victims of CSE who come forward in adulthood, as well, of course, as younger victims.

The inquiry was asked to look specifically at safeguarding looked-after children, given the concerns about those who go missing from care, sometimes repeatedly, and the associated risks of CSE. The inquiry acknowledges that not all children who go missing experience child sexual abuse and that some who experience CSE may not have gone missing or stayed out late without permission. The inquiry also acknowledges that the debate about missing children and their vulnerability to CSE can be skewed by the fact that there is available data about children in the care system, whose activities are closely monitored and recorded.

The inquiry obtained figures from the police on reports of missing children over two 24-hour periods, one at the weekend and one midweek. The figures show that, over the weekend, more than twice as many people were reported to police as missing from family settings as from looked-after settings such as foster care. Going missing and the risk of CSE is not just a problem with looked-after children.

The inquiry acknowledges that many young people have good experience of residential care. It also heard that many looked-after children felt stigmatised by the media coverage of CSE in September 2013, and we should be mindful of that as we discuss the report and its findings. It is important that the messages about the threat of CSE to all our children and young people are not masked by an undue emphasis on those in residential care. In Northern Ireland, 7% of all looked-after children, which is about 200 in total, are in residential care. It is the explicit policy of my Department that as many looked-after children as possible should experience and benefit from a stable family placement with kinship or foster carers. The welfare of all looked-after children is a priority, but there is undoubtedly an issue with the care and control of young people who go missing repeatedly despite the best efforts of staff and foster carers.

On the use of physical restraint and secure care, the inquiry is firmly of the view that those must not be regarded as everyday responses to manage risk in children's homes, although there will be some situations in which their use is justified.

The inquiry sums up the challenge in finding a solution to young people going missing from care as follows:

> *"The challenge for society is to provide the kind of structure, safety and quality of care that these facilities provide without depriving people of their liberty and of the opportunity to develop into individuals who can cope with freedom. Children need a safe space, and it may be possible, with their help, to identify a model that feels safe without restricting their liberty."*

That is already being considered by the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts.

Importantly, the inquiry challenges the view that children have an unqualified right to autonomy, which some have suggested disempowers staff to act with appropriate authority or to set clear standards and expectations for behaviour. The inquiry suggests that a holistic view on the spectrum of children's rights, including their right to direction and guidance, can assist in identifying ways that balance the care and control required to keep young people safe while respecting their rights and evolving capacities and independence.

The inquiry helpfully explores how the issues of CSE can be addressed within the human rights framework and challenges the misconception that children's rights are a barrier to taking action to help them. The inquiry asserts the obligation on Government to do their utmost to protect all children and young people up to the age of 18. As children become older and are able to exercise more practical autonomy, the task becomes more difficult. However, the duty to care for and protect remains, alongside the child's right to be cared for and protected. It is incumbent on all of us with responsibilities for the care and protection of young people to prioritise their right to be protected.

That includes parents, social services, police and the legal profession.

I will now turn to the inquiry report's recommendations. The report makes 17 recommendations, of which seven are for my Department, and two of those recommend actions to be progressed jointly with the Departments of Justice and Education. Two key recommendations are made for the Health and Social Care Board. There are other recommendations in the report for the Departments of Justice and Education and their agents, including schools, and for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). There are also recommendations for the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). Ministers Ford and O'Dowd will consider the recommendations that are relevant to their Departments and how they wish to respond. While there is a need for cross-sectoral collaboration in progressing any accepted recommendations, my ministerial colleagues and I will agree how that can be done.

The Minister of Justice asked me to advise Members that he notes that the agencies of the justice system participated in the review. The inquiry acknowledges that there have been improvements to the police and criminal justice system in recent years, but, again, more needs to be done. The Minister also acknowledges that it is the Department of Justice's role to ensure that, when children are sexually exploited, agencies work together to protect and support victims and bring the perpetrators to justice. He assures us that work has been and continues to be progressed, including through the victim and witness strategy that he published in 2013. Relevant work will also progress under the forthcoming stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy. I welcome Minister Ford's commitment to work supportively with me and other Ministers to protect children.

The Minister of Education has indicated that he welcomes that child protection arrangements appear to be well embedded in schools in Northern Ireland, and he accepts that schools are well placed to support the primary role of parents in teaching children and young people about healthy relationships and delivering keeping-safe messages. He therefore welcomes the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) assessment, which is referenced in the report, that many schools are doing so effectively.

Minister O'Dowd also recognises that we can always do better and that there is further work to be done to raise awareness in schools and communities of the risk factors and signs of child sexual exploitation. He also accepts that further guidance and information is required not only for schools but for parents and carers. The Department of Education has already engaged with schools to share information and advice on child sexual exploitation. Like the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Education has pledged to continue to work with my Department and other agencies to ensure that children and young people are all educated about the dangers of child sexual exploitation and how best to keep themselves safe.

To ensure a coordinated Health and Social Care (HSC) response to the Marshall report, I plan to establish an HSC CSE response team. That team will be required to consider all Kathleen Marshall's recommendations that are relevant to the health and social care sector, consider responses to them and advise me of those by the end of January 2015. I hope that indicates just how seriously we are taking it, as that is a very tight schedule indeed for the report to come back to me. The team will also consider where the HSC needs to work collaboratively with other Departments and agencies and will make recommendations to me on how that should be done.

The team will then be responsible for the implementation of the recommendations that have been accepted. An implementation plan, which will include timescales for the completion of each recommendation, will be agreed and published by March 2015. Again, Members should note the urgency with which my Department is treating the issue. That is only five months away. Thereafter, the response team will provide me with six-monthly updates until all activity associated with all the accepted recommendations is complete.

I am pleased to be able to say that a number of recommendations are already being progressed. Those include the development of a new children's safeguarding policy; the revision of a departmental circular that will provide guidance to front-line practitioners on the sharing of information about adults considered to pose a risk to children; and the introduction of a new definition of the term "adult at risk" in the context of a new adult safeguarding policy, which we are consulting on. We will progress the review of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, which we are already making plans for.

Subject to the support of other Ministers, I propose to ask the SBNI to build on the work that it has commenced on a public information campaign on CSE to target messages at children and young people, parents, carers, front-line staff, volunteers, and individuals and businesses in the wider community — all those identified in the Marshall report. It would also target those considered to be most vulnerable to the risk of CSE, as identified in the report. Taking account of Kathleen Marshall's recommendation for a public health campaign in response to CSE to be led by the Public Health Agency (PHA), the PHA will, as a member agency of the SBNI, play a lead role in the work.

That brings me to the next action, which is under way. Kathleen Marshall very clearly identified advances in technology as increasing the dangers and risks to young children. Helping children and young people to keep safe in an electronic world, and equipping their parents and those who work with them to keep them safe, is a major challenge for all of us and is a shared responsibility. I have written to my ministerial colleagues to seek their agreement to commission and fund the SBNI to develop an e-safety strategy and action plan for Northern Ireland.

The welfare and safety of all looked-after children is a priority for me, particularly the safety of those young people who go missing frequently from placements and who are at increased risk as a result. The Health and Social Care Board has been asked to consider proposals for alternative arrangements to secure the safety of those young people in community settings. I will now put a time frame on that work to ensure that arrangements are put in place as a matter of urgency. The intention is to create the safe places referred to by Kathleen Marshall in her report.

Whilst there is no specific recommendation for the HSC in connection with data collection, it is clear to me that our data collection systems for missing children could be further improved. As a result, I have directed the Health and Social Care Board to review the HSC data collection systems as they relate to children missing from care and identify how they can be improved. That work should build on the good work that has been taken forward by the police and social services through Operation Owl and the joint protocol in responding to children who go missing from care.

Staff capacity in responding to CSE is critical. I have made CSE a commissioning training priority for the HSC, and a CSE training strategy for all relevant staff has been drafted. Once agreed, that will be rolled out across HSC trusts with immediate effect.

We will continue to work closely with officials in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland in connection with child protection generally and child sexual exploitation specifically to ensure that we continue to learn from each other. That will include using the existing arrangements to cooperate on matters relating to child protection under the North/South Ministerial Council arrangements.

Members should note that one recommendation was made to the Northern Ireland Assembly, which is unusual. It seeks the commitment of the House to strategic, long-term and sustained funding of services for prevention and early interventions. Members are aware that the Executive have signed up to the programme of early intervention for children and families through to 2017-18. The prevention of child abuse and exploitation will be greatly assisted by us acting and intervening earlier. Members will want to keep Kathleen Marshall's recommendation in mind when voting on future Budget Bills.

I want to leave you with some reflections, taken from Kathleen Marshall's concluding remarks in her report. First — I need to emphasise this — she counsels a balanced response to the reality of CSE in Northern Ireland. In her words, we need to:

> *"avoid a panic that leads to an unhealthy repression of and limitations on young people's lives and expectations of human relationships."*

11.45 am

Those are wise words, and they should be heeded by us all. I also agree wholeheartedly with her when she says that we need greater awareness of CSE, that we need to tackle the issues that make children and young people vulnerable to it, and that we need to promote the confidence of children and young people, their parents and carers, and those who work with them in the wider community to enable each and all of us to respond effectively to CSE and the risk of it.

I am encouraged to note that Kathleen Marshall recognises that Northern Ireland has some strong staff tackling the challenges presented by CSE: our social workers, police, health workers, youth and community workers and those who provide services in the community. Let us commend them for the sterling work they do and have done, and help them through the challenges ahead.

This is a step on a journey. We know more today about CSE than we did yesterday. Next year and in years to come, we will know more than we do today. It is a journey that we will continue for many years and one that we need to make together.

Finally, if Members want to have full sight of the report, it can be downloaded from my Department's website. It can also be accessed on the DE and DOJ websites.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I reflect and wish that

we were not dealing with this particular serious issue. Let me preface my comments by saying that, in everything that we say in the House and beyond it, we should be mindful that we are dealing with extremely vulnerable children and young people. We should be mindful of that context.

However, the Minister's statement was very detailed. In my view, it was also very weak in terms of accountability. I reflect that the inquiry was charged, as page 1 of the Minister's statement states, with:

> *"establishing the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation"*

and

> *"examining how effective cross-sectoral child safeguarding and protection arrangements are in preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation".*

Just what, in this report, does any of that? What in the report tackles the issue of accountability or failings in the system?

I reflect on page 2 of the statement, and I will ask a direct question about it. Page 2 of the Minister's statement concludes:

> *"The Inquiry concludes that available data can only give a 'rough idea'".*

We were told that, in 2011, through a Barnardo's report. In fact, recommendation 3 in the Barnardo's report requested that the Health and Social Care Board develop:

> *"a targeted and fully resourced action plan",*

with consideration of data collection. Almost four years on, it has been flagged up today that we need to look at issues like data collection.

I suggest to you, Minister, that what was required, and what the Chairperson and Sinn Féin advocated at that stage, was a fully independent, resourced inquiry with full statutory powers. I ask the Minister to reflect on whether that should and could be the most appropriate way forward. Does this report, Minister, in its weakness in terms of accountability —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Chairperson, you have had well over two minutes.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: — run the risk of failing the very children and young people that we set out to protect?

Mr Wells: First, if the honourable Member's party signed up to the National Crime Agency (NCA), that would do an awful lot to assist in preventing the cross-border movements of those who would abuse our children. That is one of the big prices that we, as a society, will pay if we do not get this area sorted out. We need that expertise and, at the moment, we cannot have it because of the intransigence of yourselves and the SDLP.

Secondly, there will be an opportunity tomorrow at the meeting of the Health Committee for a more detailed probing of the points she has raised. I accept that it is not reasonable to expect any Member to have read, understood and asked searching questions about a report of this depth. We could have gone for the model that she requested, but there is a matter of urgency regarding this and I hope that she understands, from the comments that I have made, that I am setting extremely tight deadlines for the Department to make certain that we get answers to those questions and that we are on a stronger basis.

She has quite rightly raised an issue about data. I do not believe that any form of inquiry would have taken this much further, because, by its very nature, you will not get many people coming forward and admitting that they have been involved in CSE. Many victims do not come forward until much later in life to tell the police or social services that they have been involved in this totally reprehensible situation. However, I believe that Kathleen Marshall's report sets out a series of steps which, if taken urgently, will help the situation.

The Member is aware that a second review is ongoing. There is a review dealing with the cases of 22 young people in care, many of whom are very vulnerable. That report should provide us with further information on the situation. Do we know how much of this is going on? No, we do not. All I can tell you is that it is not going on on the scale of that in northern England. What is going on is being treated extremely seriously; evidence of paramilitary involvement has been given to the inquiry; and we are going to do absolutely everything that we can to reduce the vulnerability of our children, particularly those in care, to this awful activity.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister and welcome his statement to the House today along with his plan to establish a health and social care child sexual exploitation response team. When I think of child sexual exploitation today, the first name that comes into my head is Máiría Cahill. If we are talking about accountability and transparency, we all have to have a collective responsibility. Will the Minister explain what members of the public told the inquiry about paramilitary involvement in child sexual exploitation?

Mr Wells: The report was based on a large number of interviews with individuals who had direct experience. Their testimony was, and they were ardent in their view that this should be revealed publicly in the report, that this was going on and that they wanted it to be exposed. They painted a worrying picture of what is happening in communities, particularly those where there was not support for the forces of law and order; where support for the PSNI, or the RUC as it was then, was weak. That view has been confirmed through discussions with some of our trusts.

It is important to say that some of those who spoke to Kathleen Marshall's team were very explicit about what they believe to have happened to them, and they feared for their lives because, had it become known that they had spoken to the inquiry, they felt that their lives would be at risk. I cannot see why anyone would deliberately make up that information. I believe that there is a fair degree of credence to those testimonies, and I suspect that we are still only touching the surface, as it were, because, for very good reasons, many may not be coming forward. The Barnardo's report in 2011 also referred to the involvement of organised groups and links to paramilitarism, so this is not particularly new. As the inquiry continued, the paramilitary dimension became a very serious one.

I know that the media will inevitably concentrate on this particular issue, but I think that it is important that the wider findings of the Marshall report are also adequately reported — what has happened and what is being done

to avoid it occurring in the future. I do not want this report to be seen to be homing in on the one issue when there are so many others that have to be dealt with. We need public support at every level to ensure that we reduce dramatically the levels of CSE in Northern Ireland.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister and must say at the outset that I am flabbergasted, to be honest, that Ms McLaughlin simulated outrage at these issues, given her party's approach to Máiría Cahill.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McKinney: I remind the party opposite that the SDLP is in good-faith negotiations on the NCA, and we are making good progress. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member will please resume his seat. My patience is exhausted with people shouting from a sedentary position. This is a serious statement. I remind Members that we are taking questions to the Minister and nothing more. I will observe from now on those who are abusing this Chamber.

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I lean on the words of the Minister's statement? He said:

> *"The inquiry has not been able to establish actual numbers of young people being exploited"*

and

> *"The report states it was not possible for the inquiry team to identify the prevalence of paramilitary links".*

He went on to say:

> *"we do not know the full extent of CSE in Northern Ireland";*

> *"Not enough is known about people who sexually exploit children and young people",*

and

> *"perpetrators are mostly solitary offenders and could be from any part of the community."*

It is vague and points to huge gaps in information. In that context, are the report and its recommendations not, ultimately, weakened?

Mr Wells: First, I am not sure that it is in the interests of Sinn Féin Members to be so defensive about the report of an independent inquiry by an internationally renowned expert. The words that I quoted are those of the inquiry report; they are not mine. The recent Máiría Cahill issue indicates to me that brave people like her have been coming forward and giving information on what was going on, particularly in the paramilitary field. I think that we all note with concern the reaction of Members opposite to her testimony. I applaud her bravery and the articulate way in which she has raised this issue. It confirms much of what the Marshall report says.

I accept what Mr McKinney is saying about the fact that we do not have the cold, hard statistics that he and we all want. I hope that I have explained to some extent why it is difficult to obtain them. I also hope that he understands that one of the recommendations that I will implement is to attempt to improve that situation.

The fact that we do not have cold, hard statistics does not disprove the fact that this is going on in Northern Ireland. It is out there. It is out there on a worrying scale, though not on the scale evident in northern England. It is not happening in the same systematic way in which gangs are involved in organising it, as was the case amongst some ethnic groups in Rochdale and Rotherham. We are not clear on what the actual statistics are, but that does not mean that my Department and the other two Departments concerned should not do absolutely everything that we can to ensure that this awful scourge is removed from our society.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note poignantly one of the last paragraphs. He said:

> *"This is a step on a journey ... It is a journey that will continue for years to come and one that we need to make together"*

I very much welcome that commitment.

The Minister's statement refers to the pubs and clubs culture and, very frighteningly, the tap on the shoulder received by some young girls and, indeed, boys. Can he assure the House that, if, during the inquiry, any specific case or evidence was uncovered, full information was provided to the PSNI and appropriate authorities to enable an investigation?

Mr Wells: There was a worrying reference to what is called the "party house scene", and I will explain what that means. It was frequently referred to by witnesses as a method to draw young people into CSE. Attendance at party houses was often initiated by the young person's boyfriend or girlfriend. Children were frequently enticed to attend party houses, where they were provided with drugs and alcohol and, subsequently, exploited sexually.

The party houses may be known to young people or parties may be arranged via social media. Some were organised by groups of men who had no attachment to loyalist or republican paramilitaries. Others were organised in areas where those organisations were dominant. What tended to happen was that there were one or two "Mr Bigs", as I will call them — people known in the community as having direct links, formerly or currently, with paramilitary organisations — who were people to be scared of. People knew that the consequences of disobeying them could be very serious. The tap on the shoulder tended to be from one of those individuals who had a predisposition to sexual abuse. They tapped the shoulder of a young girl or boy, and it had terrible consequences.

12.00 noon

The difficulty is that young people were scared because of the fact that they would be exposed by giving evidence to the inquiry. When you have that situation, it is very difficult for them to give evidence to the police and social services against the perpetrators. Those men, and, to a lesser extent, women, are known to society. They are known in their communities. They are perhaps even known by their local MLAs. It is absolutely vital that, if we hear even the slightest rumour of that happening, we go to the police and make that evidence known to them and that we encourage the community to rise up, as Máiría Cahill did, and give that information. Only when that happens will we get ourselves to the situation where there will be no hiding place for Mr Big, who is a predator on young girls, and he

will be fearful that the tap on the shoulder will be not him on a girl but the PSNI on his shoulder.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party welcomes this very important statement this morning. I thank the Minister for delivering it. There are two issues of great concern for me about how to empower children to avoid all such abuse. The Minister said in his statement:

> *"Girls may feel that they can gain status through cooperating with those powerful individuals".*

He also stated:

> *"young people want to be empowered to resist CSE and can only do so by knowing more about the risks."*

Will the Minister outline how he thinks such advice and empowerment can be passed on to young people, especially how it can be done other than through the school system?

Mr Wells: As I said in the statement, I hope that we will empower not only teachers but parents and youth organisations to take this more seriously. I appreciate the support that has already been given to these recommendations by the Department of Justice and the Department of Education. We need to get the message out there to all our young people that, if they have the slightest concern, they can come forward and that we will treat it seriously and with respect and that we will be able to identify those involved in that dreadful activity.

Tomorrow, at the Health Committee, of which he is a member, we will have an opportunity to explore more carefully what is being suggested. I accept that he would not have had time to see the recommendations in the report on this issue. After he gets a chance to study them overnight and to question me and officials tomorrow, he will understand that we are taking the matter seriously.

I would also like the media to play their role in reporting this report and future developments to let society know that there should be no hiding place for individuals involved in this, particularly given the fact that Northern Ireland is supposed to have moved on and that, now, all the communities are supporting the legal authorities. They must feel safe and secure to come forward and give the information.

We have an awareness-raising campaign that we are discussing in our Department and with ministerial colleagues. I hope to be able to give further information on that. I hope that the Member accepts that the deadlines I have set in the recommendations are all very urgent; they are all within two, three or four months. This is not going to be put on the long finger. In answer to Ms McLaughlin's comment, had we gone for the type of inquiry that she demanded, it could have been years before we were in the position to implement the changes. My predecessor set the trend of having swift, quick targeted inquiries as a much better way of doing things. One inquiry has been going for nine years. That is going to do nothing to protect our children. This is an urgent situation in which technology is moving very quickly and it is difficult to keep up with it.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. What does the report say about communities who do not report horrendous child exploitation abuse, which we have all been made very aware of in recent days?

Mr Wells: I watched the Máiría Cahill interviews twice to make sure that I heard them right. She very bravely uncovered a totally different type of society from what I am used to. In that society, the reaction to child sexual abuse was not, "Let's get this out into the open and report it to the police"; it was, "No, let's cover it up, and let's try to discourage those who are the victims rather than exposing those who are the perpetrators".

I am told that, since 2005, all of Northern Ireland is signed up to policing and justice. We are serving on the Policing Board, we are serving on district policing partnerships (DPPs) in our local communities and we are serving on the Justice Committee. Therefore, there can be no excuse whatsoever for any community in Northern Ireland not coming forward with evidence if they know about it. I am certain that MLAs throughout the House have very close contacts with their grassroots communities. They are in them every day and have advice centres. I would not like to think that, in four or five years' time, we will look back and see that there was still a reluctance among public representatives to come forward and expose those people who were preying on their societies.

I remember the Donagh case. I know Donagh quite well, strangely enough, for other reasons. Donagh has a chapel, a pub, a school, and about 50 houses. Certain individuals were openly preying on children in that community, yet, because of a reluctance to come forward to the RUC at that time, nobody was prepared to come forward and report it to the authorities. They were not being asked to report it to the police. They could have reported it to the social services, but they did not do so. That is totally unacceptable in modern day Northern Ireland. I hope that every Member in the House signs up to complete openness when it comes to this issue, though I am not hearing it from some sides of the Chamber.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement, although I agree that there is a lot of vagueness throughout it and that it lacks substance. The statement says that senior managers and agencies are fully committed to dealing with this and that there was no corruption, cover up or lack of commitment. If there is no lack of commitment, why are there repeated cases of young people going missing? Why is there duplication of effort, where you have agencies and partnership arrangements dealing with the same people. It seems to me that there is a misuse of resources and certainly a lack of commitment. How can the Minister ensure that resources are going to be used most effectively to deal with this very serious issue?

Mr Wells: As the honourable lady knows, in Rotherham, there was a series of reports brought forward alleging systematic abuse of children in that community. The reports were largely ignored, and there was no evidence of any firm action being taken. What this inquiry found, as far as Northern Ireland is concerned, is that, following the Barnardo's report, which was funded by my Department, steps were taken to try to deal with this very important issue. Indeed, the Department has poured quite a bit of funding into this particular field. The basic tenet of the report is that quite a lot has been done but that there is much more that needs to be done. The report cites excellent recent examples of collaborative work amongst

agencies in Northern Ireland, including the Child Support Agency (CSA).

There is dedication and commitment on the part of the staff across social services, police, health and education. The report also states that Northern Ireland has very strong staff resources for dealing with this issue. That is very different to the rest of the United Kingdom. The report is saying that there are some solid grounds on which to build future policy. The report has exposed no lack of willingness among the staff involved. I find that very reassuring. There has been no attempt at foot-dragging, cover up or downplaying the situation.

What the report has done is to indicate ways in which we can improve. That is the benefit of having someone from outside to look at the situation. As individuals, we tend to find it difficult to see the wood for the trees. Bringing someone in gives it a fresh focus, and she has outlined real and positive changes that will be made. I am committed to those changes. I am committed to delivering them as quickly as possible. I am also looking for the Member's community to commit to helping me in that by outing those involved in child sexual exploitation in her community who have not been exposed to date. That is a role that she, in particular, can play in her constituency to make certain that there is no hiding place for the evil men exploiting children in west Belfast.

Mr Givan: Sinn Féin Members talking about corruption and cover-up by senior management figures in the health service will leave people incredulous when they consider what has gone on in the republican movement when it comes to the exploitation of vulnerable children and young people. They are utterly bankrupt when it comes to talking about these issues, and they do a disservice to the statement by saying what they are saying in the Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Can we have a question, please?

Mr Givan: The report talks about the likelihood that the evidence about the abuse that has taken place has been significantly underestimated. Given the powerful and persuasive witness statements about paramilitary involvement, surely more needs to be done to get the truth from paramilitary organisations, past and present, about the prevalence of the abuse that has taken place. Will the Minister encourage those Members with influence to ensure that that happens?

Mr Wells: I think I have covered some of those issues. Although the Máiría Cahill story has come quite late in the process, the information that she provided has lifted the lid on the extent of the problem in some communities. I accept that, unless more Máiría Cahills come forward, it will be very difficult to put an exact figure on what has been going on. When we interview people as adults and ask how many of them have had the trauma of child sexual abuse, we find that the percentage is worryingly high. That indicates that we are missing a lot in communities.

The landscape has changed, and I am still waiting for a public commitment from all Members of the House that they will, on every occasion that it is reported to them, bring information to the authorities that shows that this is going on, be it the social services, the police or the Department of Education. I detect reluctance to do so, and unless we, as a society and as its public representatives, set an example to our community, is it any wonder that others remain scared to come forward to give that evidence? Act as a conduit. Act as a springboard. Act as a tunnel to bring information from your community to the authorities and then we will start to get a grasp of what is going on.

The lower number of prosecutions was referred to. The Justice Minister is committed to the report, and I am sure that he will consider that issue along with other elements of the report. Not only do we need all communities to come forward, report the issue and facilitate the authorities but we need to give victims and witnesses the confidence to go to court to give the evidence that will put these people behind bars for as long as possible. That requires everyone — we are all in this together — to work together to ensure that we can wipe out the scourge of the exploitation of our most vulnerable children.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will start with a positive note and welcome the Minister's statement about the paediatric unit at Daisy Hill. There has been an announcement about a unit. I take it that you know about it, Minister. Maybe it came as a surprise to you as well.

This is a serious and complex subject and, unfortunately, the debate has degenerated into the usual SDLP scoring of cheap political points. Unfortunately, the Minister's comments have degenerated in that way, too. It is a subject that we should all be looking to eliminate in our constituencies. As he usually does, Mr Givan did his impression of Mr Angry without really adding anything to the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I really need a question from the Member, please.

Mr Brady: The Minister talked about the effectiveness of the report. Does he not think that an independent inquiry, with powers and teeth, that could compel witnesses to give evidence could ensure that the scourge is properly eliminated? The Minister talked at length about the timescale and all the rest, but surely an inquiry could be achieved within a reasonable timescale.

Mr Wells: First, I welcome the £15 million investment in Daisy Hill. I was very much aware of it. I just did not see how it was linked to this report, hence why I raised my eyebrows. As representatives for the area, we are both very happy with that decision by the Southern Trust this morning.

I wonder why Members opposite wanted this to be pushed off into the long grass. I wonder why they wanted that for a very long, difficult and torturous report that could have taken eight or nine years to come to fruition. I wonder why they were not happy about the previous Minister's decision to make it short, sharp and as quick as possible.

12.15 pm

What the Member is asking for would not actually have produced the extra information that he is looking for, because if it is difficult to get the victims of these terrible crimes to give evidence in a darkened room confidentially to the team led by Kathleen Marshall, how on earth would we get them to come forward and give evidence at a full-blown public inquiry? How much would that have cost, and what would it have achieved? He knows that there is a second thematic inquiry taking place, where there will be further opportunities to look at this terrible scourge on our society.

I am happy and content that the former Minister did the right thing, as he did with pseudomonas, when he made

it quick and to the point. He solved that pseudomonas problem very quickly, but did he get any credit for it? No, he did not, but it was a good move, and that has to be the way forward.

For the Member to indicate that he feels that there is a deficit in the report is to impugn the integrity of Kathleen Marshall and all of her expertise and experience in the field. She is to be applauded for lifting the lid on this issue and encouraging and cajoling us to do better. Our job, jointly, is to ensure that her recommendations are implemented quickly — and the thematic report as well — to make certain that there is no hiding place for people who are lurking in his community and in my community and are involved in this awful activity.

Mr McGimpsey: I welcome the report. It is an important piece of work and points the way forward. We will get an opportunity at tomorrow's Committee meeting to examine the report and its implications further. I have questions about membership, time frame, budget and so on.

This is a very important challenge. First, it is about protecting children and ensuring that abusers are identified and brought to justice. There are two key elements in that. The Minister of Justice has given his full support, and it appears that the Minister of Education has done similarly. This is something that the Health Department cannot do on its own: you need the support of other Ministers and other Departments. Have you considered forming a ministerial task force, along the lines of the ones we formed to combat suicide and protect life, to ensure that the Departments that are relevant — Education and Justice — are fully committed and are fully supportive and do not simply allow the Health Department to carry the can?

Mr Wells: First, I agree that we need to explore the report in depth at the Committee tomorrow. Frankly, even I have not had time to digest all of it, because it is so significant. Therefore, we need to give consideration to his suggestions.

My Department is forming a team to deliver on those recommendations that specifically refer to DHSSPS. Similarly, we may need to sit down with the other Departments to consider the best way forward. I assure him that both Ministers — Justice and Education — got prior sight of the report to give them an opportunity to assess it. We are still considering whether some of the recommendations are practical and what the best way is to take them forward, so we have not come to a fully considered decision on the report in its entirety. However, the Member made a very valid comment, and it would be very useful for him to explore it more fully tomorrow, because not only do we have me and departmental officials before the Committee, we also have the chair of the Safeguarding Board coming along.

I must mention the fact that, in the middle of this process, we produced the legislation that led to the foundation of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, which has a very important role in all of this. That gives an indication that the Assembly as a whole is committed to dealing with the issue and has a team of experts scrutinising it on a regular basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Members, I need your cooperation. We still have five Members left to speak. I am sure that all of you would wish to have this finished before we break for the Business Committee meeting. I ask Members, and the Minister, to be brief.

Mr Frew: I will be brief. There is no doubt, Minister, that the iron grip of fear that has been placed upon our communities by terrorist organisations and their political apologists has been a massive barrier in information going forward to authorities. Is there any evidence in the report to suggest that people were not only shipped out to places like County Louth and County Cavan in the Republic of Ireland, but also placed out of Belfast into places in my constituency, like Dunloy, Rasharkin or Ballycastle?

Mr Wells: In her report, Kathleen Marshall did not specifically name any paramilitary organisation or identify particular areas, although we know that it is often a problem in urban areas. That is not for one minute to suggest that it does not happen in rural areas. I have certainly come across it in my constituency, which, of course, is mostly rural.

Many people believe that it is less of a problem in rural areas, but, as I said about the Donagh situation, it does occur in villages and hamlets that are controlled by powerful families with paramilitary links. It was not possible for the inquiry team to accurately identify the prevalence of the paramilitary influence. Some told that it was endemic and widespread, but it seems clear that there are many communities where it does not exist. However, for those who have experienced it, it is an oppressive shadow over lives.

Again, we have heard the evidence of Máiría Cahill about the shipping out of perpetrators to other areas, which has a remarkable similarity to Catholic Church and clerical sex abuse, where the priest or the clergyman was simply moved down to the next parish. It almost seemed that paramilitary groups were doing exactly the same. If someone was causing embarrassment to the leader or local brigade commander or whatever, he was simply shifted down to another county or across the border. There can never be justification for that, but, certainly, in a situation where everyone in this Chamber is signed up to policing and justice, it would be appalling if we were to discover that that was still going on. We need names, we need information and we need historical information to be brought forward to the authorities now. If anybody in this Chamber has information, they owe it to children to bring it forward immediately.

Lord Morrow: I want to ask the Minister about what he said in page 4, paragraph 4 of his statement. Is there any danger, Minister, that this report will err on the side of the children's liberty to the detriment of staff who wish to act in the child's best interests at all times?

Mr Wells: The report does deal with this issue at length. There is a very fine balance to be struck between the need to protect the child and the need to give the child a sense of being a citizen and to take part in all of the normal social and recreational activities that anyone would want to participate in. You cannot have a situation where children and young people are locked in permanently at nights and weekends simply because of a general perceived risk of CSE.

Equally, the report is quite novel in saying that we cannot always assume that the child's best interest is to have total liberty. Therefore, it is a very interesting suggestion that we look at this to see what is in the best interests of the child.

I have heard, through my constituency work, some horrendous examples of children being called out of residential care and being sent to parties dominated by middle-aged men, where all sorts of activities that are

totally unacceptable are going on. We have to give priority to the right to protect the child. That is primary, but part of this report is sending out a signal that we need to examine this issue. It is not in the interests of the human rights of a child to give him or her the right to be sexually abused. That is not a right at all. Therefore, it is a fine balance that is being looked at, and I hope that we can come up with a definition that can be usable and which will protect children more generally.

Mr Lyttle: I had the duty to accompany a participant in the inquiry, and I have seen the evils of online sexual exploitation at first hand. I pay tribute to that participant and, indeed, to the work of the independent inquiry.

The Marshall report identifies online exploitation as a serious danger and risk to young people in our community. In February 2013, the Assembly called on OFMDFM to bring forward a cross-departmental internet safety strategy and action plan, and the Minister has said that he has written to his ministerial colleagues to seek their agreement to commission and fund the development of an e-safety strategy and action plan for Northern Ireland.

When did the Minister write to his ministerial colleagues, what is the delay in the implementation of that strategy and what is his deadline for that recommendation?

Mr Wells: First, may I say that I could not agree more with the Member on the issue. How did I protect my children from all sorts of undesirable activities online? I simply ensured that the computer was kept somewhere where there could be some form of supervision. That is utterly meaningless today, when children from five onwards have access to the most horrific content online through their mobile phones and tablets. The days of parental control are over, and it is getting more and more difficult.

The safety strategy has been prepared in the last few weeks, and we are dealing with that as a matter of great urgency. I emphasise to the Member and others that the Department of Health cannot deal with the issue alone: it is a problem that affects Northern Ireland's society in general and has to be dealt with by the entire Northern Ireland Executive.

We give our children all the freedom of the fox in the chicken run. We expose them to things that were absolutely unimaginable to most people during their childhood. Fortunately, my children have escaped the worst of it, but I shudder to think what my grandchildren will be exposed to. Over 60% of boys under 13 have been exposed to hard-core pornography. What impact is that having on future relationships? What impact is that having on their relationships with girls and, hopefully eventually, their wife or partner? What is going on is truly dreadful. Internet access by teenagers as a percentage is way into the high 90s, and they can be exposed to the most dreadful, sadistic, horrible pornographic material. I see this as an absolute priority, and I want buy-in from the whole Assembly on it.

There is a difficulty with the issue. We saw the 'Spotlight' programme the other night. Where was the website based that was exploiting children in Northern Ireland? Israel. That is part of the problem. Much of it is being marketed outside Northern Ireland. We really need to get a grip on what is a terribly difficult situation.

Mr Poots: Child sexual abuse and exploitation is always wrong, whether it is by a state, a Church or paramilitaries. The women in Sinn Féin should be ashamed of how they are seeking to cover up for those who have engaged in child sexual exploitation and abuse. They are failing and have failed young republican children very badly.

There was a large focus on children's care homes. However, the reality is that child sexual exploitation takes place in far greater numbers outside that scenario. Can we have some thoughts about how we can ensure that we better protect young vulnerable people who are in a home environment, as opposed to a children's home, from child sexual exploitation and make them more aware of the risks and dangers they might face?

Mr Wells: The specific remit of the Marshall report was looked-after children, which includes children in foster care, children in residential care and children in homes and placements. There is also the thematic report, which will identify a specific number of cases — we think that it is 22. We hope that the more general education and awareness programme that we are initiating will help parents, who are obviously the first line of defence against this awful activity, to provide protection for their children. However, sadly, in many cases, the abuse has been carried out by a parent. I find that particularly horrific, given that I am a parent and a grandparent: I just cannot fathom how people could do that. However, it is widespread. We are trying to put as much effort as we can into the public awareness campaign.

The Executive and the Assembly as a whole must take the issue seriously. We cannot do it alone and nor can DOJ or the Department of Education. The report takes the novel step of making a recommendation for the Assembly rather than individual Departments and calls on the Assembly to take the issue extremely seriously and provide, through the Budget, the money required to invest in the future safeguarding of our children. If we do not do that, we will build up a backlog of the most horrendously difficult situations that we will have to deal with when those young people become adults. As a result of sexual exploitation, they could end up in care and could themselves end up as exploiters, as is often the case. Therefore, we must try to deal with this case immediately.

Finally, let me say that many Members opposite have been given the opportunity to pledge their total support for openness on this issue, and not one of them has taken it. I find it very worrying that that opportunity has been missed, time after time after time. Are they committed to dealing with this scourge on society, or will they look after their paramilitary friends in towns and cities throughout Northern Ireland?

12.30 pm

Mr Allister: May I express disappointment that we have only the Health Minister here today? In so far as I have been able to read the report, it is clear that some of the most significant recommendations lie with the Department of Justice. I wonder whether the Justice Minister will ever come to the House on the issue. I assume that Minister Wells cannot answer for the Education Minister or the Justice Minister, but, in answering for himself, can he tell us precisely the recommendations in the report that touch on his area of responsibility that he is not accepting?

Mr Wells: I need to make it clear that the protocols of the House set out that one Minister has to take the lead in any statement. Therefore, it would not have been possible

for two other Ministers to have given their input on the report. However, I can assure him that, prior to this, I have received strong support from both Ministers.

It is not a question of rejecting any recommendations; we have to sit down and talk to the other Ministers because there is some overlap. As a Department, we have to examine carefully all the recommendations, some of which we have publicly committed ourselves to today and some of which require further consideration. I guarantee him that, when we come to that conclusion, the House will be made aware, probably through a written statement, of what exactly we are doing. This issue is far too important for anyone to have doubts about my commitment or that of any of the three Departments. We owe it to thousands of our children and young people to make certain that we as an Assembly do everything we can to eliminate this scourge. If devolution is to mean anything in Northern Ireland, it must lead to better protection for our children. If we cannot do that, we should not be here. It is essential, and I am totally committed to doing this, as he will well know.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That concludes questions on the statement. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2·00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Infrastructure Investment Projects

1. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Regional Development, in the context of the Northern Ireland investment fund, to outline any infrastructure investment projects that his Department has identified as qualifying for European Investment Bank funds. *(AQO 7057/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Northern Ireland investment fund is targeted at areas where significant infrastructure investment is usually taken forward by the private sector but where government has a particular interest since the investment helps to deliver on specific Executive objectives. Those areas include: social and affordable housing; energy production; energy and renewable energy; telecommunications; and urban regeneration. As such, my Department's functions and related projects do not fall within the scope of the fund.

With regard to the specific use of European Investment Bank (EIB) funds, Her Majesty's Treasury's public expenditure guidelines restrict the ability of Northern Ireland Departments and their non-departmental public bodies to borrow from external sources. In that respect, even government loans to public corporations will score against departmental capital budgets. Therefore, the scope to directly involve the European Investment Bank in funding projects across my Department is more limited. I met representatives from the European Investment Bank earlier this year to discuss its potential involvement in a number of projects, in particular, the funding of the A6. European Investment Bank funding being provided through councils was considered, and we met the councils to consider the proposal. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to reach a successful outcome on the proposal. I will, however, continue to explore all feasible options for the funding of capital projects by my Department.

My Department has been very successful to date, as the Member will know, in accessing European funding for a number of roads and transport projects, and I will continue to explore opportunities for further EU funding.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am sure that he will agree that, until UKIP liberates us all from the cost of £54 million a day just to be Europeans, we should retrieve our own money from the EIB. Can the Minister categorically say whether he has put forward any schemes, other than those he referred to, that would qualify? I take exception to him saying that his Department does not qualify. I believe that there are areas where he should find out more about that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can the Member finish his question, please?

Mr McNarry: Well, I was in the middle of it. To conclude my question, Deputy Speaker: what are the lending terms for EIB money? Are they attractive enough to ease the

savagery that he says was imposed on him by the Finance Minister?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Some further clarification about and understanding of the European Investment Bank and how it operates is required. I tried to outline that. Her Majesty's Treasury's public expenditure guidelines restrict very much the ability of Northern Ireland Departments and their non-departmental public bodies to borrow from external sources. Therefore, it is for private initiatives or something that we would carry forward, as we attempted to do even through using councils as a potential avenue of funding. That has not been possible, but we will continue to try to do that.

If I was very mischievous, I would welcome the interest from a member of UKIP in accessing European funds. I hope that you have told Nigel, because Rochester is this Thursday.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. An dtig liom fiafraí den Aire ar chomhlíonaigh an Roinn s'aige an riachtanas ó Oifig an Chéad-Aire agus an LeasChéad-Aire maoiniú Eorpach de fiche faoin gcéad a bhaint amach? Has the Minister's Department achieved the OFMDFM requirement of 20% European funding?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for her question. Indeed, I am very happy to confirm that, of the Executive Departments, DRD is easily the best and has had the most success in drawing down EU money, and I have established a dedicated funding team to ensure that we remain top of that particular league. Therefore, we will continue to draw down as much European funding as we can. I can tell you that, for the Budget 2011-15, and for the period to date, £57,174,839 has been drawn down as a result of our efforts through the European sustainable competitiveness programme, INTERREG IVa, INTERREG IVb and TEN-T. Therefore, we are very much on top of this game and looking at all opportunities whereby we can benefit from EU funding.

Mr Ramsey: Does the Minister agree that the lack of transport infrastructure across Northern Ireland is the key element in the levels of social and economic deprivation that we have and that it is imperative that we have funding from external sources to deal with this matter urgently?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Indeed, I accept the point he is making, which, presumably, is that better connectivity throughout Northern Ireland is surely a key benefit to economic progress. That is what I have sought to do, not only around the Executive table, as I bid for necessary funds from conventional sources, but in utilising the opportunities before us from Europe. We have had some success with that. The Member will know that, under TEN-T, we had success in the Coleraine to Londonderry track relay phase 1; the dualling of the A8 Coleman's Corner to Ballyrickard roundabout; and the installation of rapid charge points for electric vehicles and supporting IT systems. We have put forward other schemes such as the Belfast intermodal transport hub and York Street interchange and at some stage, I also hope, the new Waterside station in Londonderry.

Belfast to Derry/Londonderry Railway

2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his rationale for not informing the Committee for Regional Development or the Assembly of the reasons why the current tendering process relating to the upgrade of the Belfast to Derry/Londonderry railway line can no longer proceed. *(AQO 7058/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I would say at the outset that I do not accept the premise of the question. I made myself available to the Assembly on 3 November when I made my statement, and I went before the Regional Development Committee on 12 November to speak about the matter in detail. I also sought to speak with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee in advance of my statement, but circumstances did not permit me to speak to the Chair. However, I did speak to the Deputy Chair and Committee Clerk.

As I made clear in my statement to the Assembly on 3 November, I can advise that the current tendering process relating to the signalling element of the upgrade of the Belfast to Londonderry railway line will proceed, subject to the necessary approvals being obtained and an updated economic appraisal.

The Member was in attendance at the Regional Development Committee meeting last Wednesday when I explained the current situation on the project in detail. I remain fully committed to the completion of the work and to the improvement of the rail service between Northern Ireland's two largest cities.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Minister knows fine well that, for months, the elected representatives were treated like mushrooms and kept in the dark about the postponement of the contract. Will he give us some good news today? I take it that he is giving us a promise that the contract will go ahead at the third attempt. Does he have any other good news about the north-west that he might tell the Assembly?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I do not consider him, or anybody else in the Chamber, to be a mushroom. I have treated everyone with the utmost respect, and I am sure that the Member will concede that.

All of those issues have been explored in some detail, not only following the questions to my statement in the House on 3 November but at the Regional Development Committee. I say again today that I am committed fully to the completion of that work. We are working though the various stages. We await the outcome of the economic appraisal with DFP but will continue to make progress as speedily as we possibly can.

The Member asked whether I have any other good news for the north-west. I indicated in my earlier reply to his colleague Mr Ramsey the potential for EU funding at Londonderry's Waterside rail station. I am very hopeful that we can move forward on that. My officials have engaged extensively with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and officials in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland to explore the potential for the project to be funded through INTERREG Va. That cooperational programme document is being formalised by the Commission, and the first call for suitable applications is planned to be in spring 2015. We will pursue that as well.

Mr G Robinson: What contact has the Minister had with landowners affected by the delay in the phase 2 signal programme, particularly down at Bellarena?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He has a continuing interest in the Bellarena part of the project and is aware of the land issue involved there. We are seeking to resolve that, and, of course, I expect that Translink will continue to consult landowners and all interested parties in the area.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answers to date. I accept that the Minister came to brief me initially and to the Committee last week, but what was the timeline of learning of the procurement difficulties?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. I outlined in some detail the timeline of how things evolved last week. We were alerted to the situation at the end of June. That was confirmed to us in late July by the Translink board, and, in early August, I commissioned the special report, the progress assessment review (PAR), which was undertaken with considerable speed in September. Its recommendations were made available to me by the end of September, and I had to conclude on those and chart a way forward with Translink. That took us to the end of October, and we were then in a position to inform the House, which I did in my statement of 3 November.

Mr Cree: Has the Minister had any indications that the Department of Finance and Personnel will process the revised business case without further delay — in fact, expeditiously?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary. We have not yet had final confirmation from DFP, but I believe that this is an important Programme for Government project. With passenger journeys on the Londonderry to Belfast line increasing by over one third in the last two years — up to 1·6 million following phase 1 — I very much that hope that DFP will recognise the value of the project despite the increase in phase 2 costs. We can, of course, re-look at the business case to ensure that all relevant social and economic benefits have been set out in sufficient detail and that the established growth in passenger numbers has been clearly taken into account.

2.15 pm

Mr I McCrea: Question 4. Sorry, question 3.

Street Lights: Repairs

3. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of how many street lights will not be repaired by the end of this financial year. *(AQO 7059/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am happy to go straight to question 4, but the Member's interest seems to be in question 3.

My Department is facing significant resource budget constraints, so I have had to take a number of difficult decisions, including the suspension of works orders to external contractors that were responsible for the repair of approximately three quarters of the street lights that go out. To deal with the health and safety implications, I have set priorities for dealing with street lighting faults. Priority will be given to those faults that present an electrical hazard to members of the public, and contractors will still be employed to deal with such faults.

My Department's operations and maintenance staff, who can provide around 25% of the overall resource required to fix street lighting faults, will endeavour to repair as many lights as possible, prioritising large groups of lights that are out and then individual lights that have failed.

At this stage, it is very difficult to predict how many street lights will not be repaired by the end of this financial year. As of 14 November 2014, almost 15,000 of our total of 280,000 street lights were out across Northern Ireland. In the period since 8 August 2014, when I had to suspend the use of external contractors for routine street lighting repairs, my operations and maintenance staff have fixed over 5,000 faulty street lights across Northern Ireland.

I must point out that street lighting repairs have not ceased. All fault reports are being recorded and will be dealt with as soon as resources permit. That is not the level of service that my Department would like to provide, but I have had to take some difficult decisions following the outcomes of the June and October monitoring rounds. I simply cannot spend money that I do not have.

Mr I McCrea: In a sense, I understand the difficulties that the Minister faces, but he will be aware that street lighting is an emotional issue, and it is certainly so for the elderly and most vulnerable people in our society, especially around their property. Has the Minister given any consideration to looking at other aspects of his overall budget to see whether he can lessen the burden of that work? I am not necessarily saying that he should cut other areas, but if it were more balanced, it would certainly be easier to deal with and more acceptable to communities.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. This has not been an easy decision for me, or one that has been lightly taken. We have forensically scrutinised all aspects of our budget for this year, and, unfortunately, such are the impacts that that was one of the realistic measures available to me for external contractors. I draw a parallel with the Member's colleague in charge of health, who at this stage appears to have cancelled external works, operations and the like provided by external carers and companies for health operations. I think that there are parallels. These are not easy decisions to take, and we will continue to work through them as quickly and efficiently as we possibly can.

Mr Maskey: Like the Member who spoke previously, I entirely understand the difficult decisions that had to be made by the Minister. To what extent will public safety determine the nature of the street lighting programme and where repairs might be carried out?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for at least having sympathy for me. *[Laughter.]* Obviously, there are statutory duties involved here, under article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order, to maintain roads etc. My Department has received legal advice on the issue. We will continue to inspect roads, footways and street lighting columns, and defects will be recorded as normal.

It is clear that defects may not be repaired as quickly as normal, and all repairs will be prioritised on the basis of safety. My Department will continue to actively investigate

and defend public liability claims, with every case turning on its own facts. Ultimately, it will be for the courts to decide whether the reduced standards comply with my Department's statutory duty.

Mr Byrne: The Minister will be aware that there is some concern that, sometimes, DRD people take bulbs from lights that are working to areas where they are not working. It is almost a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. He will be further aware that a parish priest in Drumquin, Father Mullan, was very concerned that six lights were out for over two weeks. He felt that, given security and public safety issues, they should have been repaired quicker.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am not aware of DRD officials swapping lights, either working or not working, particularly outside places of worship, where "lighten my darkness, we beseech thee" would be a common enough prayer. On a serious note, the issue he refers to at that church property has been resolved through maintenance work. If the Member has specific issues or cases that he wants to draw to my attention, I will certainly investigate those.

A6: Update

4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the separate sections of the A6 project. *(AQO 7060/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: There are currently proposals to dual two sections of the A6: Randalstown to Castledawson and Londonderry to Dungiven. Funding has been provided to advance the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dual carriageway project to a shovel-ready position in 2014-15 so that it would be ready to commence construction at short notice should the necessary funding become available.

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. Those include a request to consider an alternative route in the vicinity of Dungiven. That work is continuing, and, when I am satisfied that all issues have been appropriately reviewed, a number of which are complex, I will issue a departmental statement.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. It seems that there is some light at the end of the tunnel in relation to the Dungiven bypass. It has been delayed for many, many years, and people are reaching the end of the patience that they have exercised. Will the Minister give even a guesstimate of a date for the bypass?

Mr Kennedy: The Member will understand that I am not a fan of guesstimates. There is widespread political support for the A6. Obviously that is one reason why we have, in part, allowed sections to be built to move forward as finance becomes available. We will look at that. Of course, we find ourselves in challenging financial times, and that is another reason why I am loath to begin to put a date on it. I assure the Member and the House that there is no reluctance on my part to carry forward the scheme at the earliest available opportunity.

Mr Clarke: I accept the Minister's answer on the A6. However, there are safety problems in relation to the Moneynick section, and, maybe because money has not been available, we are not at an advanced stage. Have you or your Department any plans to do any other work to cut down the number of accidents on that stretch of the road?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Safety remains the priority for the Department in the planning of all schemes, but, more importantly, in all situations where they are not yet in place. That remains of paramount interest and concern to us. We have been looking steadily at the improvements to the A6 through this major scheme. It can separated into sections and, again, if money becomes available, we will certainly consider that in a positive way. In the meantime, we continue to maintain the route to the best of our ability.

Mr Kinahan: May I follow that question? I am sure that the Minister is expecting me to show interest in Randalstown and Castledawson. Will he confirm the latest cost estimates of the scheme if it is delivered in phases?

Mr Kennedy: The planning of the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway allows it to be constructed in up to three parts: the Dungiven bypass itself, which is the Derrychrier Road to the Crebarkey Road; the Caw roundabout to the Maydown roundabout; and the Maydown roundabout to the Derrychrier Road. The A6 Randalstown to Castledawson stretch will cost, we estimate, somewhere between £120 million and £140 million for the 14 kilometre dual carriageway. The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven scheme cost estimates for the three sections are as follows: for the Dungiven bypass, between £55 million and £65 million; between the Caw roundabout and the Maydown roundabout, between £45 million and £50 million; and the 25-kilometre section between the Maydown roundabout and the Derrychrier Road, between £290 million and £305 million.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the A5 western transport corridor. *(AQO 7061/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: Following on from the successful legal challenge in 2013 to the A5 western transport corridor, four draft reports have been developed to assess impacts on the integrity of all potentially affected European-designated environmentally sensitive sites — nine in total — in the vicinity of the A5 western transport corridor scheme. A public consultation exercise on three of those reports commenced on 30 April and concluded on 13 June 2014. The subject of the fourth report, the Tully Bog special area of conservation, is impacted by air-quality aspects and, therefore, required further updated traffic survey information before publication. The consultation period on that draft report commenced on 15 October and will conclude on 28 November 2014.

It is important that my Department does not in any way pre-empt the outcomes of the consultation exercise; hence the way forward with the scheme thereafter can be determined only after careful consideration of all the responses received.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. Without pre-empting the findings of the consultation, does the Minister believe that his Department will be in a position to issue the orders by the end of this year?

Mr Kennedy: As I have indicated to the Member, it is important that we work through the processes involved.

The next step in progressing the scheme would be the publication of the new environmental statement, the draft vesting order and the draft direction order for the scheme. Development work on those is now at an advanced stage, but a firm date for publication cannot be given until after consideration of any submissions to the ongoing public consultation exercise into the impacts on the Tully Bog special area of conservation.

Publication of those documents would be followed by a further consultation period, a minimum of six weeks, when formal representations and/or objections to the scheme can be made. That consultation is likely to lead to the need for a further public inquiry, but a decision on that can only be made following careful consideration of the representations and level of objections raised in response to the consultation exercise. If deemed necessary, a public inquiry is likely to be held later in 2015.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

2.30 pm

Concessionary Fares Scheme

T1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to review the free travel scheme for people aged 60 and over, given that, like all Ministers, he refers constantly to the need to make savings within his budget. *(AQT 1761/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am not going to ask him to declare any special interest in the scheme. I am a very firm supporter, as is my party, of the concessionary fares scheme. It brings considerable benefits to the travelling public, not least people who may be regarded as senior citizens. It gives them the opportunity to enjoy a day out in the company of friends and, perhaps, family or to go and visit family. It gives them the opportunity to engage socially, and, importantly for our town centres and cities, to shop, spend money and help the local economy. I am not interested in cutbacks to the concessionary fares scheme, and I have argued that consistently around the Executive table. I believe that the Executive should fund it centrally, and I believe and hope very much that I have won that argument around the Executive table. I want to see people benefiting from the concessionary fares scheme as it is presently constituted.

Mr Lunn: The Minister has prompted me to declare an interest of a sort, although not in the particular age range that I am going to refer to. I understand that around 27% of journeys undertaken under the scheme are by people in the age range of 60 to 65, some of whom are probably still working. Without advocating the termination of the scheme, is the Minister prepared to even consider a possible adjustment to the minimum age, perhaps to 65? I understand that that might save between £7 million and £10 million.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I concede that there are anomalies in the system, but I do not believe that it is worth addressing them. I am not sure about and will want to check his assertion that the savings could amount to £7 million. We will look at that, but, irrespective of that, the concessionary fares scheme provides an opportunity for people to go out and socially engage and to spend money. Even the few who perhaps use it to travel to work at least have other opportunities to use it at weekends, when they can benefit local economies. It strikes me as strange electoral policy to be in favour of water charges and cutting the concessionary fares scheme. I will be interested to read the Alliance manifesto when it is published.

Coleraine to Londonderry Rail Track: Escalating Costs

T2. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Regional Development who was at fault in cocking up the costs of the rail track between Coleraine and Londonderry, which have escalated from £22 million to £40 million, given that, regrettably, relations between his departmental officials and Translink executives have descended into a blame game over who was responsible. *(AQT 1762/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. We had the opportunity, as he will know and remember well, to have an exchange at the Regional Development Committee last Wednesday. I set out clearly my view of and my displeasure at the failures involved in the project. He will also know that I have initiated a lessons learned exercise in Translink and in my Department, and I expect those reports to be on my desk before the end of this year.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer, but I remind him that, after he left, the Committee, having heard from him and his officials, also heard from Translink. That was why I asked the question.

Has the Minister any doubt that £40 million will be the final cost of the project? If it is not and if it spirals again, what percentage increase will he tolerate? Will he hold to the £40 million as a fixed sum? Can he tell us just how he intends to get this £40 million?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I can confirm that I believe the current estimate to be accurate, but, to give belt and braces to that, I will insist that we test the validity of that projection before we go out to procurement and award the contract. I do not want to second-guess that process at all, but I believe that the project is very worthwhile. It remains an Executive priority; it has been a huge success for rail travel, as I outlined; and I believe strongly that, for public transport reasons and for the public good, we should continue to pursue the project.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Alasdair McDonnell is not in his place. I call Tom Elliott.

Park-and-ride Scheme: Tamnamore

T4. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on progress on the proposed park-and-ride scheme at Tamnamore outside Dungannon, about which he has made representations. *(AQT 1764/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. All politics is local, it was once famously said, and park-and-ride is very important locally and in general. I place great importance on the provision of park-and-ride facilities, not only at Tamnamore but all over Northern Ireland. We are making progress on that, thereby making it easier for people to use public transport or share transport with others.

Construction of the park-and-ride facility at Tamnamore is expected to be complete in January 2015. It will provide

280 spaces. The original intention was to remove hard shoulders to encourage better use of the new facility.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer. Because so many vehicles are being parked just off the Stangmore roundabout between it and Dungannon town are there any measures to ensure that those vehicles use the Tamnamore park-and-ride?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will know, obviously, because we have had representations from him and from his office in relation to this, that the hard shoulders are used by traders who have applied for and been given licences by Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council. Following representations from sources including the council and Mr Elliott, the hard shoulders will remain in place and traders will continue to be able to use their licence.

Belfast to Londonderry Rail Track: DRD Engagement

T5. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, given the debacle about the Belfast to Londonderry rail track, he believes that his Department is sufficiently engaged in the overall project and the project board. *(AQT 1765/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Again, we spent much time exploring the issues in some detail in the Regional Development Committee last Wednesday. He will know that I have set in place the lessons learned, and those will be undertaken by the chief executive of Translink and will look at not only the performance of the executive of Translink but the role of the board and all issues. The issue of how my Department and officials have performed is also being scrutinised. I expect to have both reports by the end of this year.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am sure that he was as surprised as we were when, after he left the Committee last week, Translink came to the table to tell us that the observers were more than observers and had full access to the papers. Minister, when your departmental officials describe themselves as observers but Translink come on board and say that they are not just observers but have full access to papers and can speak and actually sit at the same table as the project board, what are you going to do with your officials?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I understand that the Committee for Regional Development is conducting its own inquiry into the issue. I have not yet had an opportunity to study the terms of reference, but I have no doubt that the evidence that he and the Committee produce will better inform the whole situation.

The role of the official at the relevant subcommittee of the Translink board reviewing these things is simply to observe. As the Member will know, all projects are carried forward by Translink executives, but I will, of course, be interested in any work that the Committee wishes to provide.

Gully Cleaning: Flooding

T6. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to revisit or adjust in any way the policy on gully cleaning in light of last week's flooding problems. *(AQT 1766/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. He will know that last week's exceptional rainfall in areas of Northern Ireland was absolutely astonishing in many ways. I sympathise with all householders and business owners affected by the recent flooding. I will put it in context: the average November rainfall is around three and a half inches, and the total rainfall to date — it is only 18 November — is over five inches, which is 140% of the average for the entire month. Counties Down and Armagh were worst hit, and areas such as Newry, Portadown and Lurgan were badly affected. In some parts of south Down and south Armagh, up to four inches of rain fell — more than the average for the entire month — in the three days from Tuesday.

I underscore continually that my Department has never stopped cleaning gullies. Yes, we have had to restrict the work of external contractors, which accounts for about 25% of the normal work, but we continue to maintain gullies, particularly in areas with known wet spots.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his reply. Minister, in light of the war of words that ensued between your Department and DARD, which has responsibility for river maintenance — I think that a lot of the problems arose there — can you outline what steps are being taken to ensure better cooperation between the two Departments?

Mr Kennedy: I regret that I found it necessary to defend myself and the role of my Department when it would have been better to concentrate on improving things for the people who were at the very sharp end and having their homes and businesses impacted by flooding. However, I will say with particular regard to Bridge Street in Newry that it was very clear that that occurred because one of the local rivers had burst its banks on at least two occasions. Given the high volume of rainfall that had occurred in the period running up to that, no system could have coped.

I refer the Member to the PEDU report following the June 2012 flooding incident, about which I also reminded some ministerial colleagues. It recommended that one Department and a single Minister take account of and be responsible for emergencies of this nature. I support those recommendations, but it is rather a pity that some of the people who complained most loudly around the Executive table have not done so. However, I look forward to seeing whether there will be a change of attitude.

2.45 pm

Social Development

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Questions 2, 5 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Stephen Brimstone: Fact-finding Investigation

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the findings of his Department's fact-finding investigation into the actions of Mr Stephen Brimstone. *(AQO 7071/11-15)*

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): It would not be appropriate for me to outline the findings of the fact-finding investigation, as the report relates to a

personnel matter. It is an established principle that such information be treated as confidential.

Mrs Dobson: I was going to thank the Minister for his answer, but it was really a non-answer. Perhaps we can explore it a bit more deeply. Despite a direct request from the head of the Civil Service and the report being conducted by DFP, that Minister is still feebly trying to claim that the issue had nothing to do with him. He is either avoiding his duties or is wrongly trying to protect a party colleague.

Nevertheless —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can the Member come to a question, please?

Mrs Dobson: Nevertheless, can this Minister tell us what legal advice his Department and the former Minister got previously, where it came from and whether he will be able to let the Assembly see it?

Mr Storey: It is quite clear that the Member is not aware of how legal advice is retained in the House. Equally, I remind the Member that the issue was dealt with by my predecessor. There is where it rests.

Mrs D Kelly: Did the Minister actually familiarise himself with the report's findings? Can he share the conclusions that he has reached on it?

Mr Storey: It is quite clear that there are others who are more interested in this issue than they are in matters that relate to the Department. Since I came into office, my focus and attention has been on ensuring that I get to grips with the responsibilities that I have as Minister. When we look across the piece at the many issues that the Member and others in the House have, that should be the priority and focus. I repeat that it was an issue for my predecessor. I believe that that particular matter rests there. He made the decisions that he made. As far as I am concerned, that is where the issue remains.

Mr Allister: This was a fact-finding investigation that was initiated by the permanent secretary not by the Minister. Doubtless it made findings of fact about the special adviser's role as a civil servant. What are the facts that the Minister is so anxious to hide? Why is he ducking and diving to hold from the public domain the finding of facts?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has asked his question.

Mr Allister: Does that not speak greatly about the attitude of the Department to this particular matter?

Mr Storey: It is a personnel issue. As I would not release information on any individual in my Department, I would not do so on this issue. For those of slow hearing or learning, I repeat that this is a matter for my predecessor. That is where the issue remains.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Robin Swann is not in his place.

Stock Transfer Programme

4. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the stock transfer programme. *(AQO 7074/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. A review of the stock transfer scheme was commissioned in February 2014. The review group concluded that the current model will not deliver the announced programme, and therefore a different approach has been proposed. It focuses on a smaller number of schemes, with each scheme comprising larger bundles of properties. That has been endorsed by the Housing Executive board. I have also approved the proposals.

I have written to the chairman of the Housing Executive asking him to develop a revised programme of stock transfer schemes as one element of a wider initiative to improve and invest in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties. Once a revised programme is agreed, the Housing Executive will write to all the affected tenants to clarify whether they are to remain in the programme and, if so, the timescales that will be involved.

Additionally, given the delays in the programme to date, I have agreed that stalled planned maintenance schemes for the properties that had been included in the original stock transfer programme can now proceed. The Housing Executive will also continue to undertake normal response maintenance works where necessary.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he expand on which areas of south Antrim have a proposal to do transfers? What protections are going to be there for current Housing Executive tenants?

Mr Storey: The stock condition survey that is under way will provide a firm basis to enable a strategic decision to be taken regarding what properties are to be included in the revised programme. It is not possible to predict the results of the survey or to comment on the possible outcome of any specific areas at this stage. However, once a revised programme is agreed, the Housing Executive will write to all the affected tenants to clarify whether they are to remain in the programme and, if so, the timescales involved. I am quite happy to give the Member an assurance that this will be done with the agreement and consent of the residents. That is a vital issue. I am well aware of the concerns that have been expressed to me by him and others in regards to concerns that tenants have about elements of the process. I am quite happy to give the assurance that it will not be done in a way that in any way ignores the concerns raised by tenants.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. Are he and his Department committed to ensuring that social housing largely remains in the public sector?

Mr Storey: Yes, I think I am. Since coming to office, I have discussed this with officials and a number of Members. We will have to have a discussion. While a number of reviews are going on, and the Department, in conjunction with the Housing Executive, has set out a policy direction, I think that there are issues that we need to address about how we deliver for specific areas and needs. I am quite happy to have those discussions with Members, the Committee and the organisations. It is my intention to keep social housing provision in the public sector, but we have to make progress on how the Housing Executive, in particular, delivers.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister will be aware of the large number of derelict and abandoned buildings that are blights on our landscape. Is he envious of the regime that applies in England, where councils can acquire those properties through compulsory possession orders? Will he give consideration to such a scheme here where you cannot establish the ownership of derelict properties?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. When you look at any jurisdiction, you will see variances in how they apply policy. When you come to the area of housing, you have a variety of approaches. The Member will be aware that there was a proposal to have a regeneration and housing Bill. In that proposal, reference was made to powers that would be given to local councils. Unfortunately, other Members felt that those provisions were a step too far. When I came into office, I expended considerable time trying to address those concerns. As a result of that, we now have a different Bill, which primarily focuses on the regeneration element and does not primarily give consideration to the housing elements. One of those elements would have been around houses in multiple occupancy. That could have led us to a position where we would have looked at particular locations where dereliction is the case.

I am quite happy to consider what the Member said, in light of the ongoing review of the future of housing provision in Northern Ireland. I share the concern that the Member raised: there are locations where you have dereliction and it becomes very difficult to find out who the owner is and who, ultimately, is responsible for addressing that need.

Coownership Housing: West Tyrone

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in West Tyrone have benefited from the continued investment in coownership housing since May 2011. *(AQO 7076/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. Between May 2011 and 31 October 2014, the last date for which data is available, the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association received 163 applications and has supported the purchase of 77 affordable homes in the West Tyrone constituency area at a total value of £8 million at the time of purchase. A further 17 properties are in the process of being purchased in the area at a total value of almost £2 million. It is important to remember that the shared equity housing that coownership provides is demand-led and that potential homebuyers approach the association with a property already selected.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Minister for his answer. Of course, coownership will suit some, but there are towns and villages in West Tyrone that have not seen social houses built for years, indeed decades. Can I ask the Minister whether he is aware of the waiting list for social housing in the Omagh and Strabane districts and to explain how his Department plans to address this objective need?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member. Obviously, this is an issue. It is not that long ago — in fact, it was just when I took up office — that I made a comment, which I stand by, about the important role that coownership plays in the provision of housing. We have ensured that the financial model that we use has to be revised because I do not believe that we have all the financial tools in place to give us the outcome that we have. It is also important to remember that coownership housing is necessarily demand-led and that potential housebuyers approach the association.

So, while the Member talks about other specific areas, it is important to ensure that, in those areas, those who see the need are raising the concern because the system operates on a demand-led basis and because of the potential of those homebuyers to approach the association with a property already selected. If the Member wants further detail on Strabane, or any other part of his constituency, I am quite happy to furnish him with further information.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. We all, as community representatives, are aware of the need not only for social housing in our areas but for affordable housing. Could the Minister go into a bit more detail on what role coownership and affordable housing have in addressing our high housing demands?

Mr Storey: It plays a very important role. Coownership homes that are offered on a shared equity basis provide an alternative to social housing for people who want to purchase their own homes but who cannot afford to do so without some help or intervention. There has been a high and sustained public demand for the scheme, mostly from first-time buyers who want to grasp the opportunity to take the first step onto the property ladder but at a lower cost. It also provides an alternative housing solution to those who would otherwise join the social housing waiting list or become part of the private rental market. It is something that I want to continue to encourage. It is something that I think we need to look at as a very good financial model, and it is something that I believe gives first-time buyers, but not exclusively first-time buyers, the opportunity to be in possession of their own home.

Mr Kinahan: The budget for the coownership scheme has previously been given major additional allocations because of the previous Minister's underspending on the social housing development programme. Does the current Minister accept that, as positive and successful as coownership is, it should not be used to provide political cover for managerial failures?

Mr Storey: I do not accept the premise of the question. It is just a typical assault by a party that wants to have the privilege of being in government but not take responsibility for any of the decisions that happen to flow from a five-party mandatory coalition. I know that the Member has difficulty understanding that that is the case, but here is the situation.

Let us remember when the change of policy came. Let us remember that it was not when my colleague was in post that the focus changed in terms of how we deliver housing; it was when Margaret Ritchie and the SDLP were in possession of the Department for Social Development that we saw a change in focus and emphasis.

In terms of the affordability of any of the schemes, they all are under financial pressure. The reason for that is that the envelope or the money that we have to spend to deliver any element in my Department will solely be dependent on how I can ensure that the money that I have to save is found and on the impact that that will have on a variety of schemes. That will be an extremely difficult and challenging place for me to be in, and there is no doubt that it will generate criticism and concerns from many. However, I give this assurance: the importance that I place on the provision of affordable as well as social homes means that it is on my priority list.

3.00 pm

Housing Crisis: North Belfast

7. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Social Development how he intends to address the housing crisis in North Belfast. *(AQO 7077/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. I recognise that there is a high demand for social housing across all communities in North Belfast, but I do not consider it to be a housing crisis. In terms of provision of new social homes, my Department and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive have invested heavily in social housing in the area. In fact, over the past five years, almost 1,000 new social homes have been delivered in the North Belfast parliamentary constituency at a cost of £140 million. A further 260 new social homes are under construction, and the social housing development programme contains plans to deliver more than 370 additional homes over the next three years. Through new builds and relets, much has been done to address housing need in the area, and we will continue to do all that we can within the constraints of the serious financial challenges that we face. The Member will appreciate the comments that I made to the Member who asked the previous question: it will be a challenge for us. However, on the basis of what we have done to date, it is clear that a commitment has been given and that delivery has been provided for in relation to the constituency that the Member represents.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the Minister's looking at North Belfast afresh. That is important, and I know that the Minister will do that very seriously. In relation to his comments about there not being a crisis, the demand in North Belfast —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can we have a question, please?

Mr A Maginness: — suggests that there is, in fact, a crisis. I ask the Minister to look afresh at the figures and look in particular at the demand —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member ask the question, please?

Mr A Maginness: — from single men for housing in North Belfast. That is definitely very, very critical.

Mr Storey: Let us take a moment or two to put the situation in North Belfast in some context. Since coming to office, I have endeavoured to ensure that, irrespective of the location — in this case, it is North Belfast, but it could be any part of Northern Ireland — we do not accept the failure of the Housing Executive or any other agency to deliver services to the community. That is a challenge for us. It is a challenge for me, as a Minister, and it is something that I take seriously. Let us look at the figures. You cannot look at the figures for North Belfast in isolation, because, if you did, it might suggest that there has been a drop in the number of houses completed in North Belfast. Let us look at the completions over the last number of years. In 2011-12, there were 179 units. In 2012-13, there were 182 units. In 2013-14, there were 124 units. However, in 2014-15 to date, 198 units have been completed in the first eight and a half months, with a further 63 due for completion shortly. This will make a total of 261 completions during this financial year, the largest to date.

There are factors that influence when dwellings are completed, including the size and length of construction, the contract and the time of the year that the construction commenced. Over the last five years, North Belfast has experienced the highest number of completions of any parliamentary constituency. It is also fair to say that there remains a robust social housing building programme in North Belfast, with 229 starts in 2012-13 and 182 in 2013-14. That gives us a sense of it.

The specific needs of individuals are an issue that I am happy to raise with the Housing Executive, and I am happy to raise the category of individuals to which the Member referred.

Mr McCausland: I welcome the fact that the Minister referred to the parliamentary constituency and the Assembly constituency of North Belfast and his commitment to look at the whole constituency. Will he do all he can to ensure that the Housing Executive delivers in all areas of the constituency to meet the need that is there?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member. I thought that I was going to escape from addressing issues in the North Belfast constituency, but I will not ignore the needs of the people in North Belfast or those in East Belfast, South Belfast or West Belfast. We had better not forget the four component parts of the city.

I have to say that it is an issue, and, across the North Belfast constituency, there is a high demand for social housing from all communities. I will give the latest figures that the Housing Executive has made available to me, but I have to say to Members that I find it somewhat difficult to give these figures. I will give you the figures and then say why I find it difficult. The latest figures that the Housing Executive has provided to me show that there are 1,485 Protestants and 1,587 Roman Catholics on the waiting list in North Belfast. Those figures clearly demonstrate the need for social housing for both communities in North Belfast. We have to move away, if we can, from the arbitrary distribution of homes solely on the basis of a person's religion. However, that is the reality of where we are, and I have to deal with that reality. To ensure that we meet the need across the community, I am committed to that, and that is a message that I have conveyed to the Housing Executive.

Mr Dickson: I have one further question on north Belfast. It is in relation to the type of housing that is regularly allocated, and I have particular concerns, having received representations from those who are housed in inappropriate flats where families are expected to be housed in flats with little or no outdoor play or other facilities. What action will the Minister take to move that issue on as well?

Mr Storey: The Member raises the valid point that it is not just the type of provision that you make but the location that is important. The difficulty is ensuring that we meet demand. It is interesting that I have just made enquiries about the number of times when people who have made an application have refused an application. A large percentage of people have refused the second and third offer, and that makes it difficult to deal on an ongoing basis with the demand and with meeting that need. Space and available recreation provision is always a challenge. That needs to be looked at, not only in conjunction with the council and the Housing Executive but with other providers to ensure that we are not only building the appropriate type of dwelling but giving communities the space that they need. That is a key component of a good and stable community and environment.

Make the Call: Update

8. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the success of the Make the Call campaign. *(AQO 7078/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. Since the introduction of the Make the Call advertising campaign in 2011-12, over 36,000 people have been helped with their benefit entitlement, resulting in the generation of £10·8 million of additional income. The 2013-14 campaign led to nearly 12,000 people receiving assistance, which led to over £4·6million in additional income being generated, a 63% increase on the 2012-13 figure. The 2014-15 campaign, consisting of television, press and outdoor advertising, is being completed over two stages. The first set of adverts was broadcast during June 2014, and the second set commenced in October 2014 and will run until February 2015. The results will be published later.

Make the Call is one of the success stories. I do not believe in premonitions, but I was pleased that, when the Department for Social Development launched the campaign in 2013, my constituency of North Antrim was selected, and I had the opportunity to launch it in Ballymoney. However, had I known then what would happen to me, I might have been a bit more reluctant to use North Antrim as the launch pad for the scheme.

I encourage all Members to ensure that the campaign is highlighted in their constituency offices. In the work that we are doing with food banks, we include in the food that goes out a leaflet that informs people of the importance of the Make the Call campaign and the access that they have to it.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline whether he would support Make the Call campaign roadshows revisiting areas of high deprivation to ensure that the maximum benefit is gained by the most in need?

Mr Storey: Yes. We will continue to do that. Obviously, when we come to the end of this programme, we will have to look at how we continue to roll it out. Given its success and the very positive feedback, I believe that it is of value and worth. I have no difficulty with government offices or Departments being criticised for a lack of ingenuity or forward thinking, but this campaign has brought real benefit to individuals, families and communities. Remember that people are entitled to this money, and we need to continue to encourage that. We will give serious consideration to further roadshows.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Trevor Lunn is not in his place.

Coal Fires: South Down

11. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in social housing in South Down still heat their homes with glass-fronted coal fires. *(AQO 7081/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. The Housing Executive has advised that 50 of its properties in South Down still have room heaters: 24 in the area covered by the Banbridge office; 18 in the area covered by the Downpatrick office; and eight in the area covered by the Newry office. The Housing Executive confirms that all those tenants were offered the option of changing their heating system as part of the heating replacement programme but chose to retain their original system. The Housing Executive will continue to offer those tenants an upgrade. Housing associations advise that they do not have any properties in South Down that are heated with glass-fronted coal fires.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Child Maintenance Service

T1. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many children in Northern Ireland have benefited from the work of the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) in the past year. *(AQT 1771/11-15)*

Mr Storey: This is another example of success. It came about as a result of reorganisation within the Child Maintenance Service. Although we would prefer that we did not need to have such a provision, it is obviously vital for families.

During 2013-14, the Child Maintenance Service collected or rearranged £27·2 million, which supported 22,123 children across Northern Ireland. That was a record amount of money collected, from which a record number of children benefited. We did that by reducing the number of non-paying cases. In March of this year, almost 91% of cases with a current liability were contributing. That was another record high. To give Members some context, the number of cases contributing in the United Kingdom in March stood at 85%. That means that we significantly outperform GB, getting more of our cases paying on time. That is something that we should be considerably pleased about. Last year, we achieved 98% accuracy levels across the work. Again, that outperformed GB, which achieved only 95%. Therefore, CMS increased the quantity and quality of what it does, which has meant more money for more children across Northern Ireland.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his response and congratulate him and his predecessor, who happens to be sitting beside me, on the work of the Department in achieving those results. Further to his answer, can he explain what impact that has had on reducing the outstanding debt balance?

Mr Storey: Reducing the non-paying cases and getting more money flowing has contributed to reducing the amount of child maintenance that is outstanding. Our recently published accounts show that the amount of outstanding child maintenance debt during 2013-14 had fallen by £2·69 million. During the same period, we reduced our non-paying cases by almost 1,000. Therefore, there is a clear link between arrears and the complaint cases.

There is no doubt that today's Child Maintenance Service is a totally different organisation from that which was established some 20 years ago. These results are the culmination of some very hard work by the staff in the service. I pay tribute to them, because it is an exceptionally difficult field of work. It is very challenging for my staff and for those who are involved in the Child Maintenance Service, and I believe that this is something that has been of benefit. However, I sound a note of caution because there can be no complacency. There are undoubtedly many challenges facing communities and families, and we want to be there to ensure that the organisation is there to

help and to make a positive contribution to families who are in particular need.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Bungalows: New-build Programmes

T3. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development, on a subject on which he probed the previous Minister, whether he is in a position to review the regulation or influence that the Housing Executive can bring to bear in ensuring that disabled and older people are not discriminated against across Northern Ireland by the lack of new-build bungalows from housing associations, particularly given the example of a young family with a child who is a wheelchair user who have been waiting eight and a half years since their application for a new build, albeit, at present, only one new-build home in every 100 is a bungalow. *(AQT 1773/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question and for the work that he has done on the issue. He is one of the Members who continues to bring to his work a commitment and focus that reflect his personal priorities. He is to be commended for that.

On 31 March 2014, there was a total of 21,781 bungalows in the social housing sector. That equates to almost one fifth of the social housing stock, which means that the majority of need can be met through the current bungalow stock. However, I understand that the Housing Executive is reviewing the bungalow provision in the housing development programme. Even though a restriction has been applied in my Department's housing association guide to ensure that land is maximised to its full potential, it does not mean that bungalows are prohibited. In fact, in Charlemont, just a few weeks ago, I cut the first sod on a new social housing scheme, and one of the homes will be a bespoke wheelchair bungalow. So, needs are beginning to be met. However, I still think that there is further work that we need to do in relation to the issue that the Member raises.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. In the social mix of new-build programmes, there is not much point in the allocation of 100 homes in my constituency to single parents and the social issues that are created by that. There needs to be a change of focus. Will the Minister be prepared to meet me and others representing disabled and older people to have a discussion around how we can improve those circumstances?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will be more than happy to meet the Member. As the House knows, I have endeavoured to ensure that where those requests have come, I have accepted them, much to the annoyance of my diary secretary and, maybe more importantly, the Minister of home affairs, who is my wife. My diary has been completely chock-a-block over the last few weeks and will continue to be so. However, it is a priority for me to ensure that where a Member raises particular concerns, I am quite happy to meet the Member and those whom he wants to identify. I will also ensure that, before that, we have more information for the Member, particularly around the issue of allocations in his constituency.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Question 4 has been withdrawn.

DSD: Senior Staff Numbers and Cost

T5. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Social Development how many senior staff at grade 5 and above there are in his Department and how much they cost annually. *(AQT 1775/11-15)*

Mr McNarry: This is my first opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment, and I do so willingly and trust that he will endeavour to look after my Strangford constituency.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his words of congratulation. I can give him the assurance, as I have given all Members, that I will endeavour to have a listening ear to the issues that were raised by him, whether it is in Strangford or any other part of Northern Ireland.

I do not have the specific figures for the number of staff at grade 5 in my Department, and you would not expect me to have them. However, because of the Budget process, we now have a situation in which, over the next number of weeks, I will have to look seriously at the issue of staff, not only in the programmes that the Department delivers but the complement of staff. The Department for Social Development covers a range of organisations, including the Social Security Agency, the Child Maintenance Service, voluntary and community and the Housing Executive. I think that it equates to almost 26% of the Northern Ireland Civil Service complement. So it is an issue. I will come back to the Member with the specific numbers of staff at grade 5.

Mr McNarry: The Minister may have the answer to my supplementary question, but I am sure that he will come back to me if he does not. What opportunities for sharing non-specialist administrative staff has the Minister sought out with other Departments and agencies?

Mr Storey: The Member raises a point that, just this week, I have asked for a discussion with the Minister for Employment and Learning about. As you will know, when we come to the implementation of welfare reform, I have particular concerns in relation to jobs and benefits offices, where you have Social Security Agency and DEL staff. We have asked the permanent secretaries to meet on this issue, and Minister Farry and I have had a brief discussion about it and intend to meet. That is one example, but there may be others. I am quite happy to look, and will undoubtedly be put in a position over the next number of weeks where we will have to look, at inventive ways of ensuring that we stay within our budget but, equally, that we continue to deliver the service that the public expects us to deliver.

Housing Associations: Performance

T6. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister for Social Development whether there has been any improvement in housing association performance. *(AQT 1776/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her question. If she had asked me whether there had been any improvement in the performance of the Housing Executive, I might have taken longer to answer, because it is no secret that, since coming to office, I have had concerns about the capacity of the Housing Executive. However, we have had a number of meetings, and we will continue with those over the next number of weeks.

I am pleased to report that, over the past five years, there has been a significant improvement in the performance of housing associations. For example, only four housing associations have failed the inspection, as opposed to 10 in 2010. I can also advise that, in 2010, 42% of the social housing stock was being managed by associations that had failed the maintenance element of inspections, and that is now down to 3%. That indicates that progress has been made. However, I still believe, as I indicated when I spoke at the housing associations' annual conference, that there is a journey that we have now embarked on and there is still some progress that we need to make.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his answer. I recognise the progress that is being made and welcome it. Will the Minister outline what efforts his Department is making to ease the regulatory burden on housing associations?

Mr Storey: Yes, the regulatory impact and the difficulties that regulation brings have been raised across a number of organisations. Obviously, that falls within the remit of the social housing reform programme, which is a vast programme covering a variety of elements in organisations, tenants and all the component parts. Given the improved performance of housing associations over the past few years, I am keen to consider what changes we can implement to the inspection regime and how we can make that process less intrusive and onerous while still achieving an appropriate level of assurance. That was the assurance that we gave at the conference, and I am working through how we will deliver the promise that we made that would make it less arduous for housing associations to deliver on their programmes.

Homelessness: Social Housing

T7. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister for Social Development how he will get the appropriate resources to address the grave and urgent need for social housing, given that, although he avoided using the word "crisis" earlier, it remains the case that just over 4,600 presented as homeless during the last quarter from April to June, which was a slight increase. *(AQT 1777/11-15)*

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. This is my first time not only addressing him but addressing Question Time. It is also appropriate to convey the thanks of the NI Federation of Housing Associations for his emphasis on social housing and homelessness when I addressed them after he addressed them last month.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member and welcome him to the Chamber to ask questions today. I said some weeks ago that there were two things that we needed to address in homelessness and housing provision generally. The first is to change the language that we use; the second is to change the financial structure. In the Housing Executive, a definition is given to homeless, and I have repeatedly asked the Housing Executive to tell us how many people are really homeless — how many people in Northern Ireland tonight will not have a home. It is very hard for it to give us a definite figure. I have seen figures of 22 or 23. However, housing need is a completely different issue. I have had discussions with the Simon Community. In fact, last week, I met representatives from the Simon Community to discuss a number of those issues, including how they make an application, how they are assessed, what really is their need and, of course, the vexed question of location.

We sometimes come to dealing with very difficult situations that families face, and a lot of the figures are based on break ups of a family and the family unit, and particular domestic situations. We need to ensure that the appropriate location is being offered to people who present themselves as homeless and that we are not allowing the system to be abused in such a way that people get into the system because they have been inventive. I am committed to ensuring that we address the need, but it will take a collective approach —

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Minister's time is up.

Mr Storey: — between the Executive, my Department and the community and voluntary organisations to ensure that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Minister's time is up.

Mr Storey: — we are adequately addressing the needs of the constituency that he refers to.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The first question on the list has been withdrawn.

Questions for Written Answer: Irish

2. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on whether it intends to revisit its decision to prevent members of the Commission answering tabled written questions to the Commission in both Irish and English. *(AQO 7087/11-15)*

Mr Weir: I am suitably relieved that the questioner is not following on with the supplementary on homelessness given that he did not have his opportunity for a supplementary in the last section.

I appreciate that the Member is relatively new to the Assembly, so I will give some background. The current policy was adopted on 7 May 2013. It was not adopted unanimously; there are different views. Prior and subsequent to that, the issue has been raised on a number of occasions in correspondence and directly at the Commission meeting. An equality screening exercise on the policy is being conducted, and it is anticipated that that will hopefully be completed for the next Commission meeting, which is due at the end of November. It is likely to be discussed at that.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Commission for that response. Tá súil agam go dtagann sé chuig freagra gasta ar an cheist seo. I hope that it reaches a speedy conclusion. I am considering sending a nice Irish language Christmas card so that we get a nice answer in Irish. It certainly seems to me, if I may ask —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can we have a question, please?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As part of the screening, what has been the result of the equality impact assessment?

Mr Weir: The screening is due to come back to us within the next week. So, I am not in a position to prejudge that. I am sure that everyone will want to see speedy conclusions. Whether that is necessarily the decision that I or others would welcome is something that we will have to simply wait and see. I am sure that the Member will be very busy with Christmas cards in the days to come.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar an téama chéanna, tá sé tamall de bhlianta ó shin anois ó bhí comhairliúchán ag an Choimisiún maidir le polasaí Gaeilge ginearálta don Tionól. Is cuimhin liom gur chuir mé aighneacht isteach ar an chomhairliúchán, ach níor tháinig polasaí ar bith as sin ó shin i leith. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí de bhall an Choimisiúin cá huair a thig linn a bheith ag brath le polasaí cuimsitheach Gaeilge don Tionól. It is some years since the Commission conducted a survey on the Irish language policy for the Assembly in general. I remember making a submission to that exercise. As of this point —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can the Member please come to his question?

Mr D Bradley: — nothing has come out of that, and that is almost five years ago. When can we expect to see a comprehensive policy for Irish in the Assembly?

Mr Weir: I cannot really answer from five years ago because I was not in post at that stage. I think that the Assembly Commission held a meeting in 2013 where a draft language policy was under consideration. There is no agreement at the Commission on an agreed Irish language policy. It is an area where there is a difference of opinion in the Commission and, as such, I am not in a position to give the Member a particular date by which there could be any level of agreement on that. I can simply indicate to the Member that there is no agreement in the Commission on a policy at the moment.

Roof Project: Update

3. **Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the cost and timescale of the Parliament Buildings roof project. *(AQO 7088/11-15)*

7. **Mr Lynch** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the Parliament Buildings roof project. *(AQO 7092/11-15)*

Mr Ramsey: I propose to take questions 3 and 7 together. I thank both Members for their questions.

The Assembly Commission appointed Tracey Brothers to undertake the roof project in April, and work on site started in late May, with a projected contract period of 52 weeks. Although the contractor has fallen slightly behind on some areas of the work, he is still reporting that the works remain on target for completion by the end of May 2015. The estimated construction cost, taking account of the working restrictions placed on the contractor — they are clearly obvious for Members on Mondays and Tuesdays in particular — was £5·4 million, and the approved contract sum was £5 million.

The project team has been issuing regular postmasters to report on progress in an effort to keep all building users, members of staff and political parties up to date on progress. The primary objective of the project is to provide a waterproof solution to ongoing problems, but the works also include the refurbishment and replacement of all roof-mounted building services installations and incorporates environmental improvements, including the installation of photovoltaic panels.

Work to date has included the removal of the majority of redundant roofing materials, and the roof has been re-covered with the proprietary waterproofing product. There have been some unfortunate incidents whereby inadequate temporary waterproofing measures led to further water ingress during the recent heavy rainfall. With work of this nature, some of that was inevitable. While the restrictions placed on the contractor have limited the impact on Assembly business, the Commission is very conscious of the noise and disruption that building users have had to tolerate and endure, and is very grateful to all members of staff and MLAs for their patience and tolerance. A number of staff had to be temporarily decanted, and we also thank them for their cooperation.

Mr Allister: Should I understand the member's answer to indicate that, whereas the original contract price was £5 million, it already appears to be almost 10% over budget? What assurance is there that there will not be a further drift in that direction? In respect of the waterproofing —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I think that the Member has asked a question.

Mr Allister: Is it a fact that, when part of the roof was supposedly finished —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has asked a question.

Mr Allister: — it was still leaking?

Mr Ramsey: On the latter point, which I do not mind responding to, there were some issues during the work, and there was further rain penetration. Given the nature of the job, one would expect that during a major construction. We have identified the issues and are dealing with them, and we hope that they will not occur again.

The overall estimated cost for the project was £5·4 million, and the tender document was for £5 million, so we are under target at this stage and hope to keep that going, depending, obviously, on circumstances as we progress with the contract. If there is any unforeseen work, the Assembly Commission will have to look at that, but, at the minute, we are under the estimated price of the tender by almost £500,000.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the member for answering the questions. He has answered one part of a question that I was going to ask about the budget. I know that the work is progressing, because I know most of the contractors on the roof. Is the project coming in on time, or will it be delayed?

Mr Ramsey: There was a delay for a number of reasons, but we expect the roof project to be on schedule and concluded by May next year. It takes a lot of effort to do that, given that you are trying to manage parliamentary business here. You are trying to manage a series of Committee meetings and to relocate and decant quite a high volume of staff during the period. We can only be grateful for their cooperation, support and help.

Mr Clarke: Following on from one of the first questions, how many companies tendered for the original contract?

Mr Ramsey: I do not have that information with me, but I think that there were quite a few. A contractor was approved under the procurement process, and that is the contractor who we have in place. I will provide the Member with further information on the number of people who put in a tender for the roof project.

Mr Kinahan: As one of those who enjoyed the clink, clink of water into buckets in my office on Monday and Tuesday, I want to know whether we have got to a point where that is the end of the damage that is going to be done or whether it is likely to continue if we have further bad weather.

Mr Ramsey: I certainly apologise to the Member. I know that a number of Members have been inconvenienced and disrupted as a result of the roof project. That is something that the contractor, along with our staff, is very keen to minimise. However, I am not going to dare suggest that it will not happen again. Every effort is being made to minimise any disruption, including any further rain penetration to offices in the Building.

Mr Eastwood: The Member spoke about environmental improvements. What impact will they have on the Building's carbon footprint?

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his question. In preparation for the work, we examined a number of areas at an officer and Commission level. The combination of works undertaken will improve our carbon footprint by almost 30%, which is significant. That is a good exercise, given the extent of the project and the restrictions placed on the contractor to try to improve things. I think that we have had a good, safe landing with that 30% reduction in our carbon footprint.

Parliament Buildings: PSNI Costs

4. **Ms Boyle** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the cost of the PSNI presence in Parliament Buildings. *(AQO 7089/11-15)*

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for her question. A service-level agreement exists between the Assembly Commission and the PSNI on the provision of policing in Parliament Buildings. The PSNI provides a small team of police officers, known as the Northern Ireland Assembly police unit, and the PSNI applies charges on a monthly basis at national rates. Those charges are met from within the budget of the Assembly's facilities directorate.

Following recent discussions between the Assembly and senior PSNI officers, the latter provided a number of options for minimising the cost to the Assembly Commission. One agreed option came forward. The change, which took effect on Monday 3 November, should result in a significant reduction in overall policing charges from around £523,000 to £364,000 per year.

To date, policing arrangements at Parliament Buildings have worked very well, and it is envisaged that the change can be brought about without any loss in the overall service provided by the police, either in its efficiency or effectiveness. The management team and the Commission remain confident that the Assembly's policing needs will continue to be fully met.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. Can the Assembly Commission detail the cost of the police presence in the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly?

Mr Ramsey: Those questions came up at the Assembly Commission. I do not have the exact pricing, but in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, the costs are based on national pricing, which I referred to in answer to the original question. Those are proportionate to the level of policing here. The level of policing in Westminster is considerably higher than it is here, and it is also considerably higher in Wales and Scotland. However, at the same time, we are confident that we can meet the challenges, considering where we have come from. In late 2006, there was an incident here with Michael Stone that forced us to change course to ensure that those using the Building, whether that be members of staff or MLAs, were protected. So, we made that investment.

3.45 pm

The cost of policing in the Oireachtas is not met by the Commission there, but in the Assemblies of Wales and Scotland, and the Parliament of Westminster, the cost is paid by the appropriate Commission for each House.

Mr Spratt: I thank Mr Ramsey for his answer and I congratulate the PSNI on the good job it does in protecting the Assembly. Will the Commission look at this issue very soon? The cost is over £500,000 per year and is really a double dunt on the public purse. The Justice Department already provides the money for the officers to the Chief Constable through the public purse, and here it is being charged again. Effectively, what is that money being used for in the Police Service? That is a very important question, because I do not think that the public purse should be hit twice with those charges.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his comments and I agree with him about the excellent service that the police officers give us all in ensuring that we are protected. We constantly keep all policing here under review, depending on circumstances. At the present, we are reasonably content. However, I can assure the Member that the recent review, which was completed within the last few weeks, has made significant savings of £160,000 for the Assembly Commission. That is no mean task, given that we are receiving the same level of staffing in Parliament Buildings.

It is also a matter that Member could raise, as he is a member of the Policing Board, and there may be other members of the Policing Board present.

However, I take his point on board and, as a result of the matter being tabled, I will check whether there is double pricing or double charging that I am unaware of. I presume that the price that the Assembly Commission is paying, over £360,000, is the total cost of having the police here.

Assembly Secretariat: Gender Equality

5. **Ms McCorley** asked the Assembly Commission to outline its plans in relation to gender equality within the secretariat. *(AQO 7090/11-15)*

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for her question. In June 2013, at the request of the chief executive, a group of senior staff — comprising both genders — met to discuss how the secretariat might examine the existence of any

barriers, whether perceived or real, to gender in the Northern Ireland Assembly secretariat and consider what actions might be necessary. Following that meeting, the directors were asked to nominate senior members of staff to form a gender action plan steering group.

In late 2013, the steering group developed a questionnaire, in consultation with the Equality Commission and the Assembly's internal communications group. The questionnaire was circulated to secretariat staff in February 2014 and 192 responses were received. The steering group examined the questionnaire's themes and comments against current policies, along with the organisation's decision-making structures. Details of the questionnaire, along with recommendations and relevant research and data, have now been included in the group's final report. That report will be made available after the Assembly Commission has considered it at its next meeting on 26 November.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a fhreagraí. I thank the Member for that answer. An dtig liom fiafraí den Chomhalta an mbeidh an plean gnímh bunaithe ar spriocanna agus cá huair a bheidh an plean curtha i gcrích? Will the action plan be target-based, and when will it be completed?

Mr Weir: The report makes a considerable number of recommendations. For instance, it details, at a quick count, 10 separate and wide-ranging areas for action. Some of those will have differential impacts as part of that. The report recommends that a working group be established to take forward the actions identified in a range of areas such as: affecting the decision-making structures, dignity at work, staff-Member protocols, childcare schemes and caring responsibilities, just to name a few. Once the actions have been identified, the working group will develop and consult on a gender action plan.

It is anticipated that the working group will have developed a gender action plan by April and will then consult staff in May/June 2015, with a final report to be tabled at the Assembly Commission in September 2015.

Assembly Commission: Savings and Assembly Budget 2015-16

6. **Mr Elliott** asked the Assembly Commission if it plans to deliver additional savings in 2015/16. *(AQO 7091/11-15)*

11. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Assembly Commission for its assessment of the proposed outcome for the impact of the draft Budget 2015-16 on the Assembly's budget. *(AQO 7096/11-15)*

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom ceisteanna 6 agus 11 a fhreagairt le chéile. Gabhaim buíochas le Comhaltaí as a gceisteanna.

Choinnigh Coimisiún an Tionóil leis ag soláthar réimse iomlán seirbhísí don Tionól agus dá Chomhaltaí, ainneoin laghdú ina bhuiséad airgid de 8·9%; sin é £4·32 milliún thar na ceithre bliana in athbhreithniú caiteachais 2010. Chruthaigh an gearradh seo dúshláin mhóra, ach d'éirigh leis an gCoimisiún brúnna boilscitheacha a iompar, agus d'éirigh leis freisin riar ar éileamh ó Chomhaltaí ar sheirbhísí, éileamh atá ag síor-fás, ainneoin gur laghdaíodh an buiséad.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I propose to answer questions 6 and 11 together, and I thank the Members for their questions.

The Assembly Commission has continued to deliver a complete range of services to the Assembly and its Members despite a reduction in its cash budget of 8·9%, equating to £4·32 million over the four years of the 2010-14 spending review period. The cut has already presented major challenges. However, the Commission has managed to absorb inflationary pressures and meet an increasing demand for services from Members within this reduced budget allocation. I am sure that all the Members here will applaud the Assembly's workers for the amount of work that they do.

The draft Budget for 2015-16 proposes that the departmental expenditure limit resource allocation for the Assembly Commission remain unchanged from its 2014-15 level. While this allocation is flatlined in cash terms, it represents a cut in real terms of almost £800,000 for next year. That means that, in the five years from 2010-11, there has been a 19% real-terms cut. I am sure that the Member will agree with me that that is a significant amount of money.

The Commission will continue to meet its statutory requirements to provide the Assembly with the property, staff and services that it requires. Members will know that some £15·9 million of the Commission's budget relates to costs that are established by the Independent Financial Review Panel and cannot be amended, upwards or downwards, by the Commission.

The Commission will seek to meet upward inflationary pressures for 2015-16. This is —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Commission member's time is up.

Mr Elliott: The Member said that there is no financial reduction in the budget for 2015-16 but that there is one in real terms. Where will the Commission find that reduction? Can she point to any specific areas?

Ms Ruane: I absolutely agree with the Member that there has been no cash reduction but a significant reduction in real terms. Compared with Departments, the Assembly Commission is relatively small, and it is hit by any cut in money. How will the priority services be identified? The Assembly Commission will continue to work closely with Members and parties to ensure that its corporate priorities are aligned, first, to its statutory provisions, and that will be done in the context of budget constraints. The Commission will carry out a full review of the range of services currently provided and their associated costs, and it will ensure that the resources are allocated to functions and activities essential to the running of an institution such as the Assembly.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank the Member for her answer. I am aware that the Commission previously engaged in a business efficiency programme that looked at each area across the secretariat and identified a series of measures to help to meet budgetary obligations. Will she outline in more detail the measures adopted?

Ms Ruane: We are still discussing some of the outcomes of the business efficiency review. The Commission is a corporate body, and I will happily send the detailed information required as appropriate.

Mr Clarke: I welcome the Member's answer, as I do the answers to both supplementary questions, about the

Commission's desire to drive down costs. However, is there not a conflict, given the answer to the first question, about translating some of this into Irish, which will be an additional cost to the Commission and, as such, is a waste of money?

Ms Ruane: Gabhaim buíochas leis an gComhalta as an gceist sin. I thank the Member for that question. He will know that I was one of the people who believed that they were being discriminated against regarding questions for written answer. I look forward to the equality screening and the results of that. I do not believe that Budget allocations, or lack thereof, should be used in a manner that can potentially discriminate.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Education Service provide a good and value-for-money outreach service?

Ms Ruane: Arís gabhaim buíochas leis an gComhalta as an gceist sin, nó ceist is an-tábhachtach í. I thank the Member for that question. It is a very important one. I think that I speak for all Assembly Commission members when I say that I support the Information and Outreach Directorate's Education Service. I believe that it does a tremendous job, especially as this institution is relatively new, and it is important that members of the public, whether schoolchildren, active citizens or international visitors, wherever they come from, see that we have a good, strong programme here. I put on record my commendation to the staff who work on that programme, because I think that we all agree that they do a very good job.

Speaker: Impact of Vacancy

8. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Assembly Commission whether not having a Speaker in place is impacting on its duties and responsibilities. *(AQO 7093/11-15)*

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Member for his question. I am sure that he will appreciate that not having a Speaker in place has been a matter of concern for the Commission. The vacancy has led to some disconnect between the Speaker's procedural, corporate and representational roles. Providing guidance and support to officials between Commission meetings is more difficult than when there was a permanent Chair of the Commission. However, just as the Deputy Speakers have agreed arrangements to ensure that disruption to the business of the House is minimised, the Commission, too, has put measures in place to maintain the operation of the corporate body in those circumstances.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his answer. Does he agree that the House not having a Speaker impacts negatively on the Commission's ability to carry out its work?

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Member for asking the question. To ensure continuity during this period, the Commission agreed on the 17 September 2014 that meetings that occur in the absence of a Speaker would be chaired by a temporary Chairperson from within the Commission membership on a rotational basis, as far as is reasonably practical, in the order of party strength. The temporary Chair for each meeting will be involved in the preparations and follow-up actions from the meeting that he or she is chairing. It was also agreed that the Clerk/Chief Executive would keep all Members briefed on any significant emerging issues and seek informal advice via email or by convening short, additional briefings of the Commission.

The Commission will continue to keep the matter under close review and looks forward to the appointment of a new Speaker.

Mr A Maginness: Could a Deputy Speaker assume the role of Chairperson of the Commission in the absence of an elected Speaker?

Mr Gardiner: That has not been the case. At the moment, as there is no Speaker a member of the Commission will preside.

Private Members' Bills: Resources

9. **Mr Milne** asked the Assembly Commission what consideration it has given to providing additional resources to allow Members to bring forward private Members' Bills. *(AQO 7094/11-15)*

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Member for his question. The Assembly Commission has not given specific consideration to providing additional resources to allow Members to bring forward private Members' Bills. Additional temporary resource has been allocated to provide support for the development of the Committee Bill being promoted by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to reform and update the role and powers of the Assembly Ombudsman.

However, the Assembly Commission seeks to ensure that adequate resources are available to support the work of the Assembly, including Members' Bills. The Commission's commitment is evidenced by the significant resources currently devoted to supporting the development of increasing numbers of Members' Bills proposals and providing professional drafting services by way of an external contract. The Member will appreciate the difficulty of obtaining any further resources for private Member's Bills in the current financial climate.

4.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That ends Question Time for today.

Mr Swann: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was not in my place to ask my question during questions to the Minister for Social Development. I apologise to the House and to the Minister. I am glad that he is back in the Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I thank the Member for his comments.

I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments as we change the staff at the Table.

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

Executive Committee Business

Pensions Bill: Second Stage

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Pensions Bill [NIA Bill 42/11-16] be agreed.

The Bill follows on from the Pensions Act 2014, recently enacted by the Westminster Parliament. The Bill introduces a new state pension system from April 2016, as well as a number of changes to private pension provision and bereavement benefits. The aim of the Bill is to put in place a pension system that not only reflects the reality of our society now but ensures the sustainability of state pension provision for years to come. To help the House understand what the Bill aims to achieve, I will endeavour to outline its main provisions.

The initial provisions in the Bill relate to the introduction of a new state pension for future pensioners. Considerable complexity has built up in the state pension system over time. At the core of the Bill, therefore, is the provision for a new state pension that will simplify the system and provide a firm foundation for pension saving. The current two-tiered system of the basic state pension and the additional state pension will be replaced with a simpler, single-tier state pension for all those who reach state pension age on or after 6 April 2016.

The full rate of the new state pension will be set above the pension credit minimum guarantee level, currently £148·35, which means that fewer people will have to rely on means-tested benefits for their needs. The full-rate new state pension will therefore be no less than £148·40 a week. However, the actual amount will be set in autumn 2015. There will be a minimum qualifying period for entitlement to the new state pension. This will be set out in regulations and will be not more than 10 years.

Integral to the reforms is the closure of the additional state pension for people reaching state pension age on or after 6 April 2016. Contracting out of the additional state pension will therefore come to an end in April 2016, and all employees will pay the same rate of National Insurance and become entitled to the state pension in the same way.

Transitional arrangements will be put in place to ensure that the contributions that people have made in the current system will be recognised in the state provision. If someone has earned a higher pension, the excess will be payable over and above the new state pension.

As part of the simplification of the system, entitlement will be based on an individual's own National Insurance record. The current provisions that allow a spouse or civil partner to boost their state pension on the basis of the record of their spouse or civil partner or ex-spouse or ex-civil partner will end. Those provisions, introduced in the 1940s, no longer reflect today's society, in which the vast majority of men and women receive a full basic state pension in their own right.

Furthermore, the introduction of the new state pension will reduce the inequalities faced by low earners, in particular women and carers who are unable to accrue large sums of additional state pension under the current system. It will also benefit the self-employed, who will be treated in the same way as employees for pension purposes.

Part 2 makes provision for increasing additional state pension under the current scheme. The Pensions Act 2014 introduced a new class of voluntary National Insurance contributions, class 3A. The relevant provisions in the Act extend to Northern Ireland, as National Insurance contributions are an excepted matter. The state pension top-up scheme would allow people who reach or are due to reach state pension age before 6 April 2016 to boost their retirement income by gaining extra additional state pension by making class 3A contributions. As the state pension is a devolved matter, the Bill contains provision for the additional state pension entitlement that will arise as a result of paying class 3A contributions. The Government have advised that the facility to pay class 3A contributions will be available from October 2015 until April 2017. In reality, people in Northern Ireland will not be able to avail themselves of the scheme until the Bill has been enacted by the Assembly. It is important that we move ahead with the Bill to ensure that people here can take advantage of the scheme if they wish to do so.

Part 3 provides for accelerating the increase in state pension age to 67. Despite previous increases in the state pension age and a programme for further increases, the Government are concerned that life expectancy is increasing faster than projected. Under the current law, state pension age is due to increase to 67 between 2034 and 2036 and to 68 between 2044 and 2046. However, the existing timetable for increasing the state pension age to 67 was determined using 2004-based projections by the Office for National Statistics. The 2010-based projections have since revised the cohort life expectancy for those reaching the age of 66 in 2027 upwards by 1·5 years for men and 1·6 years for women. The Pensions Bill implements a revised timetable for bringing forward the increase to 67 by eight years to between 2026 and 2028. No one will experience a rise in state pension age of more than one year compared with the original timetable that was set by the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

I turn now to Part 4, which provides for the abolition of the assessed income period in pension credit. The assessed income period was introduced as part of pension credit in 2003. It was a new approach to case maintenance for claimants aged 65 and over. That was based on the assumption that pensioners were more likely to have relatively stable incomes with fewer changes in their circumstances, and so a lighter-touch maintenance and review regime was deemed to be appropriate. However, it has proved more complex than originally anticipated. It has allowed inaccuracies to build up in the system. As claimants with an assessed income period do not need to inform the Department if they experience changes in their capital or the make-up of their retirement income, an increase can legitimately be ignored until the end of the period. In future, any change in circumstances should be reported when it occurs, and a review of the benefit award will be conducted at that point. That will ensure that people get the benefit they need when they need it. Older claimants will be protected through the continuation of the existing indefinite assessed income period for those aged over 75.

I will move on from state pensions. The Bill contains measures to replace the current bereavement benefits with a new bereavement support payment. Bereavement benefits form an important part of the state safety net. However, the current system is based on a complicated system of payments and contributions to determine eligibility. A single bereavement payment with a simplified contribution condition should reduce complexity in the system. The new benefit will focus support on the period immediately after bereavement and will consist of a lump sum with instalments over 12 months. Whilst the precise amount will be determined nearer to introduction, indicative values are in the region of a £5,000 lump sum and £400 a month for 12 months for those with dependent children. Those without children will receive a £2,500 lump sum and £150 a month for 12 months.

Bereavement support will do a number of things. First, it will provide additional upfront help in the year after bereavement, when it is needed most. Secondly, it will be available to childless people under the age of 45 who would not have been entitled to bereavement allowance or widowed parent's allowance. Thirdly, it will be disregarded from capital and income calculations for entitlement to other benefits. Longer-term support will be provided through other benefits as appropriate. The bereavement support payment will not be payable to anyone over pension age. If a person is entitled when reaching pension age, entitlement will cease. Current beneficiaries will retain their rights under the existing scheme. That is an important point to underline.

Finally, the Bill contains a number of private pensions measures. Some of the provisions are designed to build on earlier reforms, such as the introduction of automatic enrolment, and to encourage private pension saving, while others are purely technical in nature. Under the current system, every time someone moves to a new job, there is the potential for them to leave behind a small pension pot that they may lose track of over the years. However, knowing the Members of the House, I suspect that some have kept a very close eye on those pension pots. The Bill, therefore, contains powers to introduce a pot-follows-member system of automatic transfers of small pension pots. That will help people to keep track of their pension savings and ensure that they reap the intended benefits of automatic enrolment.

The Bill extends powers to set minimum quality requirements for workplace pension schemes and limit or prohibit charges to ensure that such schemes are well governed and administered.

In addition, the Bill contains a number of measures to clarify and strengthen existing private pensions legislation, including a power to prohibit the offering of incentives to transfer pension rights. The Bill gives the Pensions Regulator a new objective to minimise the impact on the sustainable growth of an employer when regulating defined benefit pension scheme funding. It also makes changes to the calculation of the pension protection fund's compensation cap to reflect long service.

4.15 pm

In conclusion, the Bill introduces significant reforms to both state and private pensions. The central issue is about ensuring the financial stability of the state pension system for the future. Expenditure on state retirement pension in Northern Ireland in 2012-13 was more than £1·9 billion, which equates to just under £37 million a week. I accept that some parts of the Bill, such as the accelerated timetable for increasing state pension age, may not be universally popular. I would be the first to say that, in an ideal world, we would not want to increase state pension age. Equally, however, I think that there is a consensus that pensions must be sustainable and fair across the generations. We cannot leave a legacy of unsustainable pension costs to be picked up by the current younger generation. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I suppose that, at the outset, I should declare a vested interest in that my pension is not that far away, but we will move on. I thank the Minister for his remarks about the Bill.

The importance of pensions cannot be underplayed. Everybody hopes for a healthy retirement and a good and fair pension to ensure the security that they need to enjoy that time of life. The Westminster Bill reforming pensions came into operation in May 2014. The Committee received a briefing on that Bill in June 2013. The Department also briefed the Committee on the equality impact assessment for the Bill, which gave the Committee an opportunity for a question-and-answer session about the projected impacts of the Bill prior to its introduction.

As Minister Storey outlined, the Bill consists of seven Parts. He touched on each Part in some detail, and I do not intend to repeat what he said. Rather, I note that the detailed consideration of the Bill will take place in Committee over the coming weeks, and the Committee will report back to the Assembly in due course. Departmental officials gave a pre-introduction briefing on the Bill to the Committee just a couple of weeks ago, during which the Bill was described by officials as something of a mixed bag. That is an apt description, as it proposes changes to the state pension, private pensions and bereavement benefits.

I will comment on some but not all of the Parts to which the Minister referred. Part 1 raises some of the key issues. The headline issue is that a single-tier pension will replace the current two-tier scheme that consists of the basic state pension and the second state pension. On the surface, this appears to be an attractive proposition. The Committee welcomes proposals that will reduce the complexity of pensions and provide people with certainty about their pension income on reaching state pension age.

As a result of these changes, there will be winners and losers, and others will fall somewhere in between. As the Minister mentioned, the Committee heard, for example, that the state pension will be £148·40, contingent on meeting the full qualifying criteria. That is more than the current rate, but the number of qualifying years for a full pension will increase from 30 to 35 years. I believe that the departmental briefing stated that any major changes to policy in the current fiscal environment will involve trade-offs; this is an example of such a trade-off.

Young people will also be long-term losers. The TUC calculated that losses increase over time. It has estimated that, the longer the period of service after 2016, the greater the shortfall against the current system. Even lower earners are likely to receive significantly less if they retire after 2037. A person aged 49 years on £26,000 a year, for

example, would be £29 a week worse off, while people in their mid-30s would be £40 a week worse off.

It might be argued, as is the intention of the Bill, that uncertainty about state pension entitlement would encourage people to take decisions about private savings towards provision for retirement at an earlier stage in their lives. It is undoubtedly important that everyone takes responsibility and plans financially as best they can for their retirement. It may be the case that knowing that you will have less of a pension acts as an incentive to do so. However, to some Committee members, that sounded like, "Expect to work for longer and to get less for your contributions."

There is also concern about people in low-paid jobs who cannot save much for their retirement, with the possibility that, in the long run, the Bill will simply increase the number of pensioners in poverty.

Contracting out also raises a concern that the Committee will further explore with the Department. People who are in private sector final-salary schemes that are contracted out will get more of a state pension but will pay more National Insurance — they will pay an increase of 1·4% — as will their employers. That is a swings-and-roundabouts scenario. The Bill will allow employers to recoup the loss of their rebated National Insurance contributions, which is currently 3·4%, by changing scheme rules or increasing member contributions. The Committee will clarify those powers with the Department to ensure that there is an equitable balance between employers and employees in sharing the burden of those associated negative impacts.

Members will note that the Bill will increase the minimum qualifying period for receipt of a state pension to 10 years. The Committee will seek to better ascertain the potential impact of that in the North and the number people that it is likely to affect. However, it is likely that those who are close to retirement age will be the most seriously affected, as they will have less time to make alternative provision.

We need to ensure that there are transitional arrangements in place to address that issue and that an effective communication strategy is in place to ensure that the relevant groups are made aware of issues they might face and steps they might take to minimise any adverse impact.

A person has a right to their spouse's or civil partner's pension based on the National Insurance contributions of that spouse or civil partner. The Bill intends to remove that right for a person who reaches state pension age under the new scheme. I am sure that the Committee will wish to consider the issue in more detail and to reflect on whether it agrees with the Department that the current provisions no longer reflect today's society, given that most individuals will qualify for a full state pension on their own National Insurance record.

Part 3 of the Bill details the arrangements for accelerating the timetable for phasing in the increase to the state pension age. To be clear, the increase in state pension age to 67 will be phased in earlier than previously anticipated. It will happen between 2026 and 2028 instead of between 2034 and 2036. Again, people's ability to plan for retirement is the issue.

It is also clear that anyone who reaches the state pension age before 5 April 2016 will be excluded from the new rules with the possibility that some, although not many, will be better off under the new scheme. The Committee will discuss with the Department the options that are open to those people, including the purchase of extra years to maximise their state pension.

Part 5 of the Bill will introduce a new bereavement support payment to replace existing bereavement benefits. The rationale for that change is to simplify the current arrangements, which comprise three different payments. The Department has advised the Committee that the aim is not to save money but to change how it is dispensed. That means that it will be paid upfront rather than over a long period.

The Committee has been given only indicative sums, with a commitment to provide the actual values and details of instalments in subsequent regulations. However, I think that the Committee will be eager to know what those are sooner rather than later.

It would be unfair of me to not mention the winners of the proposed reforms. The self-employed will benefit, and the Committee welcomes that. They will get the full state pension as long as they have accrued the 35 qualifying years. Lower earners and carers will also benefit from the measures in the Bill. However, in the Committee Stage, the Committee will have to weigh up the pros and cons of the Bill in discussion with the Department and stakeholders.

The Committee has begun its engagement process on the Bill with the Department. However, pensions are complex, and the Bill is highly technical, and as such, it will require detailed consideration. The Committee will be taking its time to give the Bill the consideration that something of that importance warrants. We will be engaging with stakeholders to get a broader and better sense of the anticipated impacts of the Bill and will discuss those with the Department.

The Committee is also committed to working with the Department to ensure that the eventual impacts of the outworkings of the legislation are as positive as they can be, minimising any outworkings that could have a negative impact.

People may be living longer, but that does not automatically mean that they are healthier. Everybody is entitled to feel secure in their retirement and confident that they will have the financial resources that they need. It is clear, however, that the Westminster Government's aim is to prevent poverty in retirement, not to provide a replacement income for those who earn enough to provide for their own retirement.

As I noted, we must recognise that there will inevitably be winners and losers as a result of this legislation. It is young people who will perhaps most noticeably lose out as the retirement age increases and they find that they have to save more towards their retirement.

This might be bundled up as incentivised saving, and, of course, we can all acknowledge the benefits of encouraging prudent saving. However, we cannot ignore the challenges and difficulties that this will also inevitably present, particularly at a time when people are still struggling to find employment in the first place, and when the ability to amass personal savings cannot necessarily be relied on. The importance of pensions for people's peace of mind cannot be overstated. The Committee looks forward to scrutinising the Bill in more detail over the coming months and will embark on this scrutiny process with this

thought in mind to ensure that the impact of the new Bill on real people's pensions is as positive as it can be.

I will now make a couple of remarks as an MLA. A report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies on the GB Bill estimated that most people would have to live to over 100 to be better off overall under the new system. Some of us may reach that milestone, but I am not sure how many of us will do so. The only significant exceptions to that are the long-term self-employed and people who start to receive credits to the basic state pension but not the second state pension. That is under universal credit, which, of course, has not been introduced and may well not be.

The other issue in relation to the new scheme was about how it is likely to be indexed. The Department, when asked about that, did not really seem to have an answer. So, there are many questions. A lot of the political thought behind this is to encourage people to save, which is fine if you have an income that allows you to do so, but not for the majority of people and the majority of pensioners. Here in the North and in Britain, we have the meanest state pension in the developed world, so I think that we need to bear that in mind as well. While the Government, a couple of years ago, were talking about £185 being a minimum amount of pension, they are now talking about approximately £148. Obviously, that has not taken into account inflation and all those other issues. So, I think that this is something that the Committee needs to address seriously. Obviously, we will do that as we scrutinise this Bill.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Pensions Bill. The Deputy Chair is absolutely right when he talks about declarations of interest. I think that we all have a declaration of interest here. Sadly, I am now looking at putting my pension age up to 68, so I dread to think what it will be by the time that date arrives. If only we all had the Deputy Chair's genetics, we might all live to that older age, as he knows from his own family.

We know that we have to make changes to our pensions scheme in line with the changing demographic make-up of our society. When the pensions scheme was first introduced, there was an underlying assumption about life expectancy, and, of course, gender-specific roles in our society. That resulted in many women receiving a much lower pension than others. These assumptions are no longer experienced by our society and, therefore, to make our system fit for purpose, it is important that we make the necessary changes. In England, this change has already occurred, as the Minister said, with the Pensions Act 2014 receiving Royal Assent in May this year. Northern Ireland needs to bring this Bill into being to be, amongst other reasons, in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

From April 2016, the proposed new state pension will replace our existing pensions scheme as we know, and I am pleased to say that the new pension rate will be set above the basic level of means-tested support, which is known as the pension credit standard. The aim of the changes is to simplify the pensions system and make it more user-friendly. We are already aware that a high number of older people in our community miss out on payments that they may well be entitled to either because they do not know about their entitlement or because they are put off accessing the money because of the complex system of application and the effect on other forms of income. The new scheme will, hopefully, empower people to make positive choices for their own future, and I believe that this is a positive move for our society and will encourage the need for more financial responsibility, albeit that I concur with the Deputy Chair that there are issues around that. There are issues especially for people who are slightly older and are facing a later pension age where they do not have the necessary time in place to build that pension pot up to a viable level.

The state pension should not be seen as a retirement scheme, and we have already seen the implementation of the requirement of employers to provide pension schemes for their employees. I am happy to note a number of changes to private pension schemes in the Bill that should help individuals to make more positive choices about their financial future. However, we have to ensure that those most vulnerable to the changes are protected while the transition occurs. I am pleased to note that a number of transitional arrangements are in place that will protect that group.

4.30 pm

The changes proposed in the Bill will create a simpler, fairer and fit-for-purpose system. Through these changes, we will have a robust pension system that will stand us well into our future. Our current system is simply not maintainable when we look at the changes in our lifestyle and at our projected life expectancy coupled with a lower birth rate.

I look forward to debating and scrutinising the Bill further in Committee and support its passing Second Stage.

Mrs D Kelly: The SDLP has been steadfast in its fight against the attacks on public servants, at Westminster and Stormont. The SDLP voted against the Public Service Pensions Bill in February this year. However, it became law as it was supported by the DUP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party. We were the only party to oppose that Bill because of its detrimental impact on the 210,000 public sectors workers across the North. It was the most far-reaching legislation to pass through the Assembly for some time.

Whilst, in principle, we welcome the concept of a simplified system, as outlined by the Minister, that would help pensioners living in poverty, we have a significant number of concerns about the Bill. Changes to pension ages mean that, when the Bill comes into effect, public servants will be forced to work until their state pension age or 65, whichever is greater.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Maybe she has lost sight of something, so I remind her where we started this process. It was her colleague Margaret Ritchie, now the MP for South Down, who put forward the proposal to increase the state pension age to 66, 67 and then 68. Maybe that will tone down the Member's contribution, rather than her just making a political point in the House.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his intervention. I do not think that there is anything wrong with stating the party's position on the increase in state pension age.

As the Minister will well know, there has been lobbying from various public sector workers. Workers in the Fire Service, for example, lobbied on the basis of the impact that raising the state pension age would have on their performance and ability to do their job. That is also true of other public sector workers in the teaching, medical and nursing professions. I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that we want to listen to as many people as

possible who will be directly impacted and want to raise concerns. We do not want more and more people having to take the option of being medically retired because they are not fit to go on for much longer. That is, I think, a fair comment from our party.

As I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge, public sector workers get a bad press, which is not, I think, justified on most occasions. As the Minister will know, many of these jobs are not only physically demanding but emotionally demanding, and I hope that he will listen to those concerns. Our party will listen to them as the Bill goes through its various stages.

We will have the opportunity to table amendments. It is the intention of our party to look at that and try to convince people of the argument. We are all very much aware of the financial constraints under which we have to make tough decisions. However, there are some principles in relation to terms and conditions that the trade union movement and others fought long and hard for. In fact, over the past 100 years, some people died for the very protections that others are so blithely giving away. As members of a party that retains labour in its core values and, indeed, title, we will seek to protect those principles as we scrutinise the Bill's passage.

As the Deputy Chair said, we should take the opportunity to reflect on the poverty levels among pensioners in the North and on the high cost of living versus the level of income that many of our people are receiving. Poverty levels are rising, not just among children and young people but among pensioners. That is something that our party is very alert to. We make no apology in the House or elsewhere for saying that they need to have their voices heard in Chambers such as this and on such pieces of legislation, which will have far-reaching consequences for many.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments at Second Stage in place of our social development spokesperson.

The Bill makes a number of changes, some of which are very significant. Of course, the Bill mirrors the provisions of Westminster's Pensions Act 2014. Pensions across the UK are parallel. Although I believe that the Assembly is right to use its powers to dissect every technical aspect of welfare reform, we are right to exercise caution with pensions. Our pension system needs to be forward-looking. Given our rapidly ageing population, as well as that across the wider UK, support for our elderly is going to demand increasing attention, as well as financial investment, over years to come. We need to keep our pensions structure flexible, but we must also ensure enough stability to allow people who are approaching pension age an awareness of what support they are likely to receive.

I welcome the fact that one of the Bill's objectives is to reduce the number of people who have to rely on pension credit, but, of course, the objective may differ from what happens in reality. Therefore, that will need to be watched carefully.

I hope that the introduction of the new pension scheme in two years' time, with its single component flat rate, will lead to a more simplified system. In addition, the introduction of the bereavement support payment will, hopefully, move to a more uniform structure and a simplified payment system.

One area of concern that my party has is the further change to the pension age. As the Minister said, bringing forward the planned increase in state pension age to 67 — or 68, I think, in some cases — by eight years will deliver net benefits-related savings to the Department for Social Development of almost £2 billion in real terms. That is a significant sum. The continual changing of the timetable, however, is not ideal. One must remember that, in the 2008 Act, the pension age was meant to increase to 66 between 2034 and 2038. The 2012 Act brought that forward to October 2020, and this Bill proposes to accelerate the increase to 67 years from 2034-36 to 2026-28. In other words, this is the third increase and/or acceleration in six years. That continual moving of the goalposts is going to have an increasingly significant knock-on impact on people's ability to save and plan for the future.

Only today, when meeting teaching unions, we heard how many teachers wish to, or need to, retire early and 68 years may not suit many teachers. We need flexibility. Therefore, I ask the Minister, dependent on future provisions in Westminster of course, whether the Bill will settle the issue for the foreseeable future or does he envisage further changes?

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister and Members who have contributed to the debate so far. Undoubtedly, changes need to be made to our pension system, not least because of our requirement to keep parity with the Pensions Act that became law earlier this year but also because of our ageing society and the need for a sustainable approach to the future for those whom we owe a pension.

There are changes to the state pension age, and the reality is that life expectancy is also increasing. We need to try to maintain the proportion of life that is spent in retirement. I have heard the arguments for those who feel that the nature of their employment does not permit them to work to the new pension ages that are being proposed, and I will be interested to hear those arguments worked out in the Committee. Nevertheless, life expectancy is perhaps substantially longer than it was when many of us started our employable years, and certainly when I did.

The Pensions Act 2008 provided for an increase to 67 by 2034-36, but since the projections used to calculate that timetable were published, the predicted average life expectancy and state pension age in 2027 has increased by a year and a half, or thereabouts, for men and women.

So, we need to be mindful of sustainability. Those are important issues, and we have heard in the last few days continued concerns about our economic recovery. The Office for Budget Responsibility expects spending on state pensions to rise by 5·5% of GDP in 2018 to 7·9% in 2063, which is a year that I probably do not expect to see, but I need to stand here today planning for people's futures in respect of that. I really do not think that I will be here at that stage, but it is important for those of us who are closer to retirement — like Mr Brady, I declare an interest; I am not at pension age yet, but I am getting there — that we do not leave our younger generations with a financially unsustainable system. That is one of the key elements of what we are trying to do in the new Bill.

I particularly welcome the changes that allow for more flexibility in the transferring of small pension pots between employers. Evidence shows that the average number of jobs that people have in their lifetime is increasing. It is, therefore, important that we make adequate provision to reduce the number of dormant pension pots and make it easier for people to keep track of their pension

savings. Perhaps it would be more useful than the tax statements that people have received recently from the Inland Revenue, telling us how much we have to spend on various other things but reminding us that we have small pension pots and encouraging people to make sure that they are all joined up and that they get the benefit of the larger investment.

I also welcome the introduction of the new bereavement support payment. Many, if not all, of us will know someone who has been affected by a bereavement and the considerable associated costs. The impact of spousal bereavement can be particularly acute in the months immediately following loss. It is a time when people definitely do not need the stress of worrying about how to negotiate the welfare system or how their other benefits may be affected. Therefore, I welcome the simplification of the payments and the fact that they will no longer affect other benefits. I am, however, concerned that whilst the initial support up front may be there, money to keep supporting families longer term through, for example, the widowed parent's allowance, will disappear. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that. What steps will he take to mitigate the worst effects for families who will require support until their children are no longer dependent?

Finally, while the Bill is undoubtedly a necessary response to changes that have already been made at Westminster and our changing society, I believe that it will require detailed scrutiny. We have heard many comments around the Chamber about how that can and should be scrutinised, and I look forward to dealing with those matters further in Committee.

Mr Allister: I will be brief, in no small measure because this is largely a futile debate. Everyone knows that pension policy, of necessity, has to follow the pattern set in the United Kingdom. Even those who protest and pretend that they are unhappy with, wish to see changes to and are opposed to various propositions in the Bill know that there is no other way, because, as part of the United Kingdom, we are quite properly bound into a national scheme relating to pensions and indeed welfare.

Indeed, in my view, it is folly to have even had pension policy devolved to this House because we can only be a rubber stamp in respect of it and, likewise, in respect of welfare. Yet, we go through the motions of the Bill, with each and every person knowing perfectly well that we have no option but to legislate in this direction through the Bill. That is because of the very simple premise that if you are part of a nation and if you contribute in a common taxation system, paying the same taxes as everyone else, you are right to expect and receive the same benefits as everyone else.

That includes pension benefits.

4.45 pm

If, as a constituent part of that nation, you are in a situation, as we are, where you raise less than you spend, it would be a very foolish individual indeed who would say, "Ah, we want to have a different taxation system, we want to have a different pension system, we want to have a different welfare system". If you said that, you would need to be careful what you wished for, because you would get the obvious riposte, "Well, if you do, then pay for it". If you are a region such as we are that spends more than it raises, that situation would be utterly unsustainable. That is why parity on pensions is essential, right, and in our interests in this part of the United Kingdom. Of course, the same argument applies to why it is absolute folly to contemplate anything like devolving corporation tax, which reduces the block grant correspondingly and gives the Treasury the glorious opportunity to say, "If you want to reduce corporation tax, you raise the shortfall for your education, your hospitals and everything else". It is the same principle. It is the principle that there are certain fundamentals, certain guy ropes, that hold the United Kingdom together, and one of them is a common taxation arrangement, a common welfare arrangement, a common pension arrangement and matters such as those. No matter how much some people might pontificate on these issues, they know that, in practice, in reality and for very good reason, they cannot and will not do anything about it.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr D Bradley: I have listened to what the Member has said. Does the Member not recall that, when the previous Pensions Bill went through the House, amendments and modifications were made to it, one of which was in favour of the Fire Service? It is not good enough for us to sit back and pass whatever Bill comes before the House without question or amendment; it is our duty to scrutinise it and, where we can, amend it and make it better for the people in Northern Ireland. That is our duty.

Mr Allister: I accept in some measure what the Member says. Yes, incidental changes can and have been made. Indeed, I have been instrumental in making one of them myself. However, on the fundamental of, for example, the critical issue of retirement age, the House kids itself if it thinks that, realistically, it could depart from what is in the pension legislation of the United Kingdom. It utterly kids itself if it thinks that.

On the big-ticket issues, the point that I make is that there is nothing that the House can, should or will do about the fundamentals. Indeed, it is interesting to note that, when the consultation — a UK consultation — took place in April 2011 on state pension reform, the explanatory document tells us, five responses were received from Northern Ireland. That is recognition by the people of Northern Ireland of the immutable reality that their pension arrangements and policies, of necessity, are set as part of the bigger picture of the United Kingdom. When, further in 2011, the Government published their proposals for a regular review of the state pension age, there were three responses from organisations in Northern Ireland. Again, that is recognition of practical political reality. That practical political reality has to inform very much our debate on this matter.

Mr Storey: At the outset, I thank the Members who participated in the debate this afternoon. I want to make a few comments as we bring this stage of the Bill to a conclusion. Before I go to Members' contributions, I will say that I intend to put in the Assembly Library a ready reckoner, and I think that most Members, if they have not already seen it, will want to look at the dates to see exactly when their retirement date is. A number of Members have sort of made declarations of interest about when they are retiring or the longevity that they want to attain. Self-interest, of course, goes no further than me, and I looked at that. I fall between 6 March 1961 and 5

April 1977, and so I will receive my pension on my 67th birthday. Therefore, it applies to the Minister just the same as anyone else. I will put an updated version of that in the Library, so that Members will have access to it. That will be helpful and, I trust, useful, particularly for Members who will be asked about it by their constituents, because that will become an issue and relevant questions will be asked.

Let me turn to the comments of the Deputy Chair of the Committee. I thank him for his comments. I also thank him for the commitment that he has given in relation to working with the Committee. That is certainly my intention. That has already been the case for my officials, and they will continue to engage with the Committee and provide whatever relevant information is necessary.

Mr Brady covered a wide range of issues. I thank him for the interest that he takes, on a personal basis, in the issues, given his history and the work that he has done in the community in giving advice to people on a range of issues, not least this type of issue.

I should point out that the new state pension is part of the wider pension provision, and automatic enrolment is being rolled out, which will ensure that most workers will be building up a private pension at the same time. Whilst the rate of the new pension will be above the rate of pension credit, pension credit will remain, so that those not entitled to a full pension will have access to pension credit. The safeguards remain, which is an important point.

The new scheme merges two schemes: the basic state pension, which involves qualification after 30 years, and the state second pension, which is up to 32 years. Thirty-five years strikes a balance, and we need to remember that.

The Member also raises the issue of life expectancy. Life expectancy in Northern Ireland at the age of 65 is broadly comparable with the north of England and Wales and is higher than in Scotland. Whilst healthy life expectancy for men here is lower than the UK average, it is higher than Scotland, and, for women, it is the same as Scotland and higher than Wales.

I want to refer to the Member's point about pensioners and the suggestion that, in Northern Ireland, we have some sort of mean deal for our pensioners. That issue has repeatedly been raised, and Members can easily make comments that cause concern to those who take the time to listen to the issues, particularly pensioners who are listening to us even this evening. I want to make a number of comments in relation to pensioner poverty in Northern Ireland and the way it compares with the rest of the United Kingdom. Pensioner poverty is in decline across the United Kingdom. Levels of poverty can be considered before housing costs or after housing costs. After housing costs analysis for Northern Ireland is comparable with the rest of the United Kingdom, and before housing costs analysis is not. That is due to the difference in the way in which. in particular, water charges are collected. The percentage of pensioners in relative poverty after housing costs is lower than the percentage of pensioners in relative poverty in the before housing costs category. That is due to pensioners having lower housing costs compared with the population as a whole, with approximately two thirds owning their own home in 2011 and 2012.

In 2012-13 in Northern Ireland, 20% of pensioners were in relative poverty before housing costs, which represents some 58,000 pensioners. That figure decreased by four percentage points from last year. In 2011-12 and 2012-13, relative poverty for pensioners was at its lowest over the period. In 2012-13, the percentage of pensioners in relative poverty after housing costs was 14%, which is one percentage point lower than in 2011-12. That is the lowest point in the time series and six percentage points lower than the series high of 20%. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 'Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2013' found that the proportion of UK pensioners in poverty was at its lowest for almost 30 years.

You could ask what measures are in place to address pensioner poverty. No one would want to treat poverty just as a statistical issue; it is a real issue that is relevant to people in Northern Ireland. Pensioner poverty is monitored through a range of national statistics, such as the annual 'Households Below Average Income' report, which provides a full analysis of the levels of relative and absolute poverty for pensioners and of pensioner material deprivation.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is developing the new Active Ageing strategy to consider issues such as poverty, housing, transport, health and social care and education. The strategy proposes a number of cross-departmental initiatives. Along with OFMDFM, the Department will develop projects to improve the uptake of benefits by older people, as we heard in Question Time, and of the warm homes scheme, which will then be part of the Active Ageing strategy.

Mr Brady made other points to which I want to refer before I move on. Someone with 30 qualifying years will get significantly more under the scheme: £127 a week as opposed to £113 under the current scheme. We also want to make it clear that the proposed amount of £148·40 will be uprated in line with earnings. That is an important point for us to bear in mind.

I will comment on Dolores Kelly's contribution. The SDLP, of course, never fails to have a memory loss when it comes to some things. I reminded the Member that her colleague Ms Ritchie introduced the increase in the pension age. On that issue, all good accounting should start at home. We currently spend around £37 million a week on state pensions, which is undoubtedly a considerable amount of money. It is not the case that we are trying to do it on the cheap. I take the Member's points about specific groups of people. During the Bill's progress here and in Committee — she is a member of the Social Development Committee — Members will have every opportunity specifically to scrutinise the provisions and how they will impact on people in the years to come.

Mr Kinahan referred to life expectancy. Let us face it: this is a good news story.

Someone once said that life expectancy is longer in Ballymoney, or that it at least seems that way. I do not know whether that is the case, but, as someone who is proud to live in the town, I say that you can come to Ballymoney and your life expectancy will be extended.

5.00 pm

I do not think that anyone could stand here and say that the state pension will not increase in the future. Indeed, the Westminster Government propose a review of the state pension every five years. It has been an issue. When I met my officials on the issue, I was reminded that, over a

number of years, there have been ongoing reviews of the state pension age. I do not think that we are any different in that cycle.

Mr Stewart Dickson referenced a number of things, including longer-term help for the bereaved. That will be provided for through a wider social security system. The intention is that financial help for children will be provided through universal credit. I look forward to us moving forward with that legislation. I do not think it is a case of having one piece of legislation and not another. While they are not inextricably linked, I think that they are component parts of an overall process and system being put in place.

When we look at the overall National Insurance contribution that Northern Ireland makes, we see that it is somewhere in the region of £1·7 billion. We needed an annual subvention to that particular pot somewhere in the region of £334 million in 2012-13. That bears the point that we are beneficiaries of being part of the United Kingdom. Being part of the United Kingdom brings to Northern Ireland considerable financial advantage. It is clear that, in this process and given the amount of money that is involved in the provision of the state pension, that will continue to be the case.

I thank Members for their contributions. I know that engagement with the Committee will commence very soon. It is now over to the Committee to take the Bill and to have its proper legislative scrutiny of it.

In conclusion, the Bill aims to create a pensions system that is financially sustainable in the light of demographic, social and economic challenges. In the future, all the years that are spent contributing to society, whether through paid work or caring responsibilities, will be of equal value. I trust that I have dealt with the issues that Members raised. However, if I have inadvertently failed so to do, I am quite happy to write to Members. Members know that, at any stage, I am happy for them to raise specific issues with me as the process continues.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Second Stage of the Pensions Bill [NIA Bill 42/11-16] be agreed.*

Assembly Business

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Disgraceful comments were made in the Chamber during Minister Jim Wells's statement on child exploitation. Sweeping statements were made on west Belfast and Donagh. They were made by other MLAs and, probably even more disappointingly, by Minister Wells himself. He went off at a tangent from the enormously important issue of child exploitation to score cheap political points. Our party is very disappointed by the lack of intervention from the Deputy Speaker and, indeed, by the tone in the House today. I ask the Deputy Speaker and the Speaker's Office to review comments and to come back to us. I inform the House that we will be making a complaint to the Speaker's Office. Go raibh maith agaibh.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, it is a recognised truism —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Sorry, could I deal with —

Mr Allister: — that the truth hits home.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Would the Member please be seated? I will certainly undertake to review the record and I will come back. I hope that the Member appreciates that it was a very difficult debate to chair. I am of the belief that I did my best; however, the Member has raised the point and I will certainly come back.

Mr Storey: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, does the Deputy Speaker think that, in the contribution that has been made by the Member, she is challenging the authority and actions of the Deputy Speaker when he was in the Chair?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): No. I do not believe that at all. I believe that any Member is entitled to ask a question about a particular debate and the contributions that were made across the Floor. Personally, I was not happy with it; but I believe that I did my best in very difficult circumstances.

Ms Ruane: I was not challenging the Deputy Speaker in any way, but I believe that the debate was totally inappropriate and I am very disappointed in the role of the Minister of Health. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I am really disappointed that, despite my efforts earlier in the day to persuade people not to make remarks from a sedentary position, even now when we are discussing it, it is still going on. That really disappoints me and it reduces the standard of debate in the Assembly to a level that I am certainly not happy with. I made that clear on several occasions earlier today.

Does Mr Allister wish to raise a point of order?

Mr Allister: Further to Ms Ruane's point of order, I made the comment and I repeat it: the truth has a habit of hitting home.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That is not a point of order and, again, I express my disappointment that any Member should abuse their privilege in the Chamber by using a point of order to make remarks that are not appropriate. Hopefully, we can proceed.

Private Members' Business

Commonwealth Youth Games 2021

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): 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.

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the success of the Olympic Games in London 2012 and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014 and the impact hosting these games has had to positively transform those cities; and calls on the Executive to develop a bid for Northern Ireland to host the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021 with a view to a future bid to host the Commonwealth Games.*

I am delighted to move the motion. Northern Ireland has a proud history of involvement with the Commonwealth Youth Games. The games are a multi-sports event for participants between the ages of 14 and 18. The youth games were first held in 2000 in Edinburgh, and they attracted 773 athletes from 15 countries, competing in 112 events across eight sports. The most recent Commonwealth Youth Games was held in the Isle of Man in 2011, and it saw 804 competitors from 62 participating countries. Pune in India played host in 2008 to 1,220 competitors from 71 countries; and Perth in Australia witnessed 980 participants from 63 countries. It has developed into a fantastic global occasion.

Team Northern Ireland has played its part with a total of 23 medals won across the four youth games that have been held. That is a fantastic return for such small nation and a tribute to the athletes, their families, the coaches and the officials involved.

Evidence shows that the youth games can act as a springboard for future sporting success. Jessica Ennis competed in the 100 metres and high-jump events in the 2004 games, and Kirani James, the reigning 400 metres Olympic champion won gold in 2008. Our own boxers, such as Michael Conlon and Joe Fitzpatrick have tasted success at the youth games. It presents an incredible opportunity to witness the development and nurturing of the next generation of global superstars. The next two cycles will see Samoa play host next year, and St Lucia in 2017.

There is not only a history but a clear intention to encourage the smaller nations of the Commonwealth to play host to the youth games, and I want Northern Ireland to bid for and host the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games.

Northern Ireland has shown that it is more than able to deliver world-class events on the global stage. In recent years, we successfully played host to international events such as the MTV European Music Awards in 2011, the Irish Open golf championship in 2012, the World Police and Fire Games last year, the Carl Frampton world title fight and the Big Start of the Giro d'Italia this year. In future years, we can look forward to the Irish Open returning in 2015 and 2017, with the prospect of the Open Championship returning to Royal Portrush, perhaps as early as 2019.

We have seen how well we can accommodate not only athletes and officials but spectators and supporters. I believe that Northern Ireland is more than capable of developing a successful bid and delivering an amazing games experience. Events such as those that I mentioned, as well as the Commonwealth Youth Games, serve as an invaluable vehicle to promote Northern Ireland internationally. I am proud to say that, as a nation, we have a tremendous amount to offer, and it is essential that we market ourselves effectively by showing off what is positive, which is an incredible amount.

What is required to bid for and host such an event? A Commonwealth Youth Games programme must consist of a minimum of six and maximum of eight sports, with no more than two of those permitted to be team sports. All are selected by the host city, except athletics and swimming, which are compulsory. The other sports must be chosen from those recognised by the Commonwealth Games Federation. The sports chosen by Samoa include boxing, lawn bowls, archery, rugby sevens, squash, tennis and weightlifting. The Isle of Man's programme included badminton, boxing, gymnastics, rugby sevens and cycling.

Consider some of the infrastructure that we will have in place by 2021. Northern Ireland will have some fantastic venues, including Ravenhill, Windsor Park, Bangor Aurora, Queen's Sport Upper Malone, the National Badminton Centre in Lisburn, the Odyssey complex and the Mary Peters athletics track, to name just a few. We are in excellent shape to produce an amazing bid.

To house the athletes, officials and supporters, we now have a great range of hotels, student accommodation at Queen's Elms and the proposed University of Ulster accommodation in the city centre. The cost to the Isle of Man of hosting the event was in the region of £1·7 million, and I understand that the expected expenditure to host the Games in Northern Ireland would be in the region of £3 million to £4 million. Considering that £13·8 million was spent on the World Police and Fire Games and over £4 million on the start of the Giro d'Italia, that represents reasonably good value for money for a week-long series of events.

This is a tiny investment when one considers the potential positive benefits that Northern Ireland in general, and our sporting fraternity more specifically, can derive from holding such an event. Children in primary school today will be the athletes competing in these games. Imagine having a home games to aim for in seven years' time and the boost that that could give aspiring athletes in the next few years. Imagine the encouragement given to local sports organisations to become involved not only in the training of local competitors but in the organisation of a local games in the knowledge that they have the full support of Northern Ireland behind them. You need only look at the effect that a partisan crowd had on home athletes in the London Olympics and Glasgow Commonwealth Games to see the fabulous boost that it would be for our local participants.

In advance of the bid, it will be necessary as a country to show our commitment to the Commonwealth Youth Games, so we should endeavour to send as strong a team as possible to Samoa and St Lucia. I encourage the Minister to engage positively with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council and to provide what assistance and support her Department can. I understand that participation in Samoa next year for approximately

17 competitors and 13 coaches and support staff will cost in the region of £70,000. However, the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council has not yet been provided with an opportunity to discuss future funding with Sport NI, and I am concerned that funding for that organisation will cease in March 2015.

5.15 pm

It is vital that out team be supported if we are serious about bidding for the games. We cannot logically expect other countries to support our bid if we are not seen to be playing a full part in other games. It is also important in development terms. If we want to grow as a sporting nation, we need to be taking part across a range of sports. I urge the Minister to do what she can to assist the NICGC as it seeks to secure the necessary financial assistance.

I believe that a successful bid for the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games is achievable, but it needs our support. The first step, I feel, would be a very clear message being sent from the Assembly of our unequivocal desire to see the Commonwealth Youth Games come here. The next step would be for the Executive to work with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council to develop a strong, persuasive bid. The 2021 bid must be submitted to the Commonwealth Games Federation before the host is determined at the general assembly in Auckland during August 2015.

Since initially writing to the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee in the summer and subsequently meeting the NICGC to discuss the proposal, I understand that NICGC has had positive meetings with senior officials from the Minister's Department, as well with as a representative from the major events bid group. I believe that there are encouraging signs from the group. Any business case, however, will need to be finalised and approved by late spring. That is undoubtedly a tight timescale, and I really hope that it can be met.

Having seen how Glasgow, Melbourne, Delhi, Manchester and others have been able to market themselves on a world stage, I would hope that a successful bid and event for the youth games could serve as a launch pad for a future Commonwealth Games bid by Northern Ireland. We have a proud and rich sporting history, and it is not outside the realms of possibility that the second largest multisport event in the world could take place on these shores. I look forward to the rest of the debate, and I hope that I can get the support of the House.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh mile maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé sásta labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin. I am happy enough to speak on this subject. We have all seen the impact that a number of major sporting and cultural events have had on this part of the world in recent years. Last year, the City of Culture in Derry left a huge and lasting legacy for the city and further afield. Investment in the legacy of that event will mean lasting sporting provision for the Derry City Council and Strabane areas, as well as adjoining council areas. That has addressed and will address a long-standing deficit and is most welcome.

Likewise, the huge success of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann has provided the opportunity to bid for its return in 2016 and also to bid for the Irish City of Culture in the same year and, hopefully subsequently, the European City of Culture.

Last week, I met the Loughs Agency and other interested bodies in the north-west that are developing a very exciting infrastructure project, on the back of the World Police and Fire Games, with huge potential. Should that come off, and I see no reason why it should not, the whole Lough Foyle basin could be hoaching with a series of small and medium-sized projects that, when combined, would provide a facility and attraction second to none. All that from a very modest sea-angling competition at Longfield.

Likewise, the success of local golfers has made the North the world's oyster in attracting the major competitions — the Irish and British Opens. Hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, we might see confirmation of the Rugby World Cup coming to these shores and to this city.

Those of us of a certain age remember the dark and dismal days when to suggest any provision of world-class sporting events would have raised more than a single eyebrow. Our boxing success down through the years has benefited from well-worn routes through county, Ulster, all-Ireland, British, European, Commonwealth and world titles to justify alone the promotion of any of those methods of advancement of in-the-ring prowess. I am very proud that a significant number of boxers from my local club, St Canice's Amateur Boxing Club in Dungiven, have received their plaudits at nearly all those levels. Indeed, Eamonn O'Kane captained the Commonwealth boxing team at the 2010 games, a team that returned with its then greatest haul of medals. They were, of course, outdone in the same disciplines in the 2014 Glasgow games, at which other successes included lawn bowls and judo.

In all, 117 competitors took part in 14 sports during 11 days of competition. The entire team, including coaches and mentors, numbered 160. The continued and increasing success of athletes and competitors at this and indeed at any level is due to the careful encouragement and nurturing of our young people in sport.

Like many other competitions at whatever level, the Commonwealth Youth Games will provide many young people with the opportunity to compete in Samoa in 2015 and St Lucia in 2017. The fact that it caters for young people from 14 to 18 years of age will ensure that many of our young people, particularly in the younger age groups, can compete at the very highest level for their age. Notwithstanding the governance and selection issues, I see no reason why a bid cannot be made to host the youth games here, with a view to hosting other national and international competitions in this part of the world.

We have come a long way in our communal promotion of sport. We still have a bit to travel, but to forgo any opportunity for our young people would be remiss of us in our duties and responsibilities. I, with others here present, attended the charity event for deterMND at the Kingspan Stadium on Saturday night, and I applaud the courageous efforts of Anto Finnegan and others to bring people together in the name of sport and to challenge a deadly and disabling disease. I have, through the years, witnessed the healing power of sport and passionately believe that we should all work together for its promotion. In this spirit, I endorse the motion.

Mrs McKevitt: I welcome the opportunity to extend my warmest, sincere congratulations to the entire Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team. The joint effort and perseverance of the 160-strong team of athletes, coaches,

management and other support staff ensured that outstanding success, and the Assembly must ensure that the necessary support is available for them to replicate and hopefully exceed this achievement in 2018. I also hope that we experience similar success in the upcoming Commonwealth Youth Games in Samoa in 2015 and wish all those involved the best of luck. No discussion of our Commonwealth Games success would be complete without highlighting the dazzling performance of our boxers, who secured nine of the 12 medals. Their skill and commitment set the bar at the highest standards that Northern Ireland's athletes can attain.

The Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games were great successes for the cities of London and Glasgow respectively. The prospect of replicating that in cities across the North is very exciting. Sports tourism is a booming industry, and Northern Ireland would benefit greatly from the economic and social benefits that the Commonwealth Games and the youth games would bring.

Recent years have seen Northern Ireland firmly establishing itself as a fantastic host for world-renowned sporting events. We made European Tour history with the Irish Open in 2012 by being the first regular event to sell out completely. This brought in £1·2 million of sales in accommodation and £9·5 million in tourism revenue, and it generated £12 million in economic benefit to Northern Ireland's businesses. Likewise, our ability to host a successful sporting event was made clear through the Giro d'Italia and the World Police and Fire Games. The economic benefits of sports tourism do not end with each event. Tourists return to visit again, and the reputation of Northern Ireland will be enhanced by each event.

Northern Ireland has dedicated, skilled athletes as well as the unwavering support of fans, and we must do our utmost to nurture that. Our athletes must be allowed to focus solely on their performance without the burden of worrying about inadequate funding or resources. If the Executive are to make such a bid, it is essential that they also ensure that the North has the facilities and infrastructure in place. I have visited boxing clubs in Newry where the coaching staff and boxers have to deal with snow falling in around them in winter because of the lack of repairs. We must listen to people who avail themselves of these facilities day in and day out and hear the calls of the 80% of boxing clubs that see improved facilities as being a top priority. All our sports need to be funded adequately and enjoy full support from the Department and the whole Assembly. The 2018 Commonwealth Games pose a real opportunity for us to maximise our success.

I also urge the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to take measures that will encourage the full participation of women. Almost 15% fewer women than men actively take part in sport, and there is a very real disparity between men and women in Northern Ireland sports. The provision of adequate funding and facilities, such as women's changing rooms, is the first step in tackling this. I urge the Minister to do her utmost to support all our excellent athletes and inspire more through the provision of the best training, resources and facilities. We have some of the best athletes and coaches, so let us make sure that they have the facilities to match in time for a bid for the Commonwealth Youth Games. I am delighted to say that the SDLP will support the motion.

Mr Cree: It is nice to hear us all apparently singing off the same hymn sheet; I will try not to change that.

The Commonwealth Youth Games were first held in Edinburgh in August 2000, the second games were held in Australia in 2004 and the third in India in 2008. In 2011, it was the turn of the Isle of Man, while Samoa has been lined up for 2015 and St Lucia for 2017. The number of participating countries has increased from 15 in Edinburgh to 63 in the Isle of Man, while the number of athletes rose from 773 in Edinburgh to a peak of 1,220 in India. The number of sports involved has ranged between seven and nine.

We are all appreciative and supportive of our Northern Ireland athletes, both at junior and senior level, but that does not happen overnight; it requires extensive training to take part in competitions, and that is best started at a young age. It also requires investment in state-of-the-art training facilities. Our athletes certainly proved their competitiveness in medal success at this year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow by bringing home 12 medals, ranking Northern Ireland fifteenth out of 71 countries on the medals table. That was a great achievement, considering that there were over 6,500 competing athletes at the event. Indeed, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure hosted a reception for local athletes at Stormont in celebration of those outstanding achievements.

In light of Northern Ireland's recent successes in attracting major sporting events such as the World Police and Fire Games, the Giro d'Italia and the recent Carl Frampton world title fight, the Minister stated that her Department, through Sport Northern Ireland, would continue to develop facilities subject to the availability of budgets. That is welcome news, as Sport Northern Ireland has identified lottery funds of £17·5 million to invest in a capital programme to improve sports facilities over a five-year period from 2014-15 to 2018-19. I am also pleased to learn that Sport Northern Ireland is developing this programme and, as a first step, procuring a specialist organisation to develop a sports facility strategy. With its links to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's new strategic vision for events and its representation on DETI's global events bidding group and international events development group, which considers the facilities that are available when bidding for events, I remain optimistic that Northern Ireland will be well positioned, through the Executive, to bring a bid for Northern Ireland to host the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021, which is, of course, the centenary of the founding of the state of Northern Ireland, and it would be extremely fitting if the Commonwealth Youth Games were to take place here to help to mark that date. Perhaps a future bid to host the Commonwealth Games may be an option after that.

We have first-class athletes in Northern Ireland. What a wonderful platform it would be for local athletes to welcome hundreds of young people from across the Commonwealth to join them in a spirit of friendship and hospitality to compete at the highest level on home ground. I support the motion.

Ms Lo: First, I thank the Members who tabled the motion; it certainly has the Alliance Party's support.

Last month, the House congratulated all our athletes who competed in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow over the summer. I asked the Minister then whether a feasibility study could be carried out to see whether a

future Commonwealth Games could be hosted in Belfast. We saw how successful the World Police and Fire Games were; it would be brilliant to build on that. I agree that hosting the Commonwealth Youth Games would be an appropriate step to encourage more international events to be held in Northern Ireland.

The Commonwealth Youth Games is the biggest multi-sport event for the 14-18 age group and is a stepping stone for athletes who aspire to win medals at future Commonwealth Games.

That is not just a theory; Michael Conlon, who won a bronze medal in the bantamweight division in the India youth games in 2008, went on to win a gold medal in Glasgow this year. The Commonwealth Youth Games provides the perfect dry run for athletes, coaches and support staff. It is the nearest thing to the real thing that those young athletes can get. They experience the build-up, the pressure and the excitement that is all part of a large multi-sport event.

5.30 pm

Sporting activity increases confidence, empathy and a sense of community. Of course, it is not about just talent; it is about discipline, training, coaching, resources and a positive mental attitude. When we debated the success of the Commonwealth Games, I mentioned that perhaps one of the most endearing qualities about Northern Ireland is that we are self-deprecating. The problem is when that translates to sport. We tend to see ourselves as the underdog. At times, we assume that we will never be the best. That is a shame when you consider that there are many sports in Britain where athletes are some of the best in the world.

Part of the problem, as with most things, comes down to money. Better training facilities, quality full-time coaches and travelling to international competitions are all very expensive, but they make a huge difference. With the fantastic successes of the Giro d'Italia, the World Police and Fire Games and the Irish Open, we know that we are more than capable of hosting world-class international events. Let us be ambitious. Investing in sport is worthwhile for not just the development of our athletes but the economic benefits. It would also showcase the many wonderful things about Northern Ireland.

Mr Hilditch: I, like others, support the motion. It was only a few weeks ago that we celebrated and acknowledged the success of many of our sportsmen and sportswomen who had returned from Glasgow having represented Northern Ireland so proudly and who showcased their individual sports, reaping the reward of years of hard work, dedication and commitment. I certainly share the view that the time is right to look at the long-term future and to start setting goals and targets more in line with how our sportsmen and sportswomen plan their careers and futures.

The Executive have, to date, a fairly decent record in the delivery of international events, should they be sporting, political summits, music or the arts. Here is an opportunity for the Executive to develop a bid to host a major international event, which can really connect at a local level and involve grass-roots sports, with the potential to leave a lasting legacy in our sporting communities, complementing the work of the professional bodies like Sport NI and the great work and contribution that the Northern Ireland Sports Forum, which is a voluntary association, makes to our society. Its membership consists of some 84 governing bodies in the Province.

The main thrust of the motion is to host the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021. That is a reasonable target, physically, through our existing sporting infrastructure, and financially, as, having looked at the concluding reports of some previous hosts, I think a realistic figure can be achieved to deliver the project. However, while the youth games are a small-scale version of the Commonwealth Games, there is no reason why the Executive, and, in particular, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, could not set in motion a development plan and devise a strategy that could lead to a future bid to host the Commonwealth Games.

While I stated that the youth games are a smaller version of the Commonwealth Games, it would be no mean feat if a bid were successful to host the event, with the potential of over 1,000 athletes competing in a packed programme over seven or eight days. I have no doubt, however, that many in our sporting communities could step up to the plate and deliver, in conjunction with government organisational structures and using existing skills from previous events, like administration, finance, marketing and event infrastructure.

Another strength is our record of volunteering in Northern Ireland. While 2021 is still some time off, a lot of our experience gained from the likes of the World Police and Fire Games has been a valuable contribution. Hopefully, the enthusiasm of volunteers would be repeated and built on in the future.

What an opportunity 2021 would be for our young people. Many who are now just starting to participate in organised sport could look towards 2021 as a target on their ladder of achievement. It could be a goal for many to strive for. We are all aware of how our divided communities rally behind our sportsmen and sportswomen, which adds a potential legacy to any event.

While our sporting experts will determine the six or eight sports and the two team sports of any bid, what an attraction it would be to the other Commonwealth countries to come to some of our well-known locations. Athletics and swimming could be at the Mary Peters Track and the Bangor Aurora respectively. Cycling could be in the Mournes or the Antrim coast area, sailing on the ideal waters of Belfast lough, rugby sevens at Ravenhill, and boxing at the famous home of amateur boxing, the Ulster Hall. Who could resist such a bid?

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé i bhfách leis an rún seo inniu. I support the motion.

It is always a pleasure to see people excel in their field. We heard about and witnessed successes among local sportspeople in the recent Commonwealth Games, the Olympics and the World Police and Fire Games. Once again, we wish to extend sincere congratulations to each and every one of our local sportsmen and sportswomen who competed in those events, particularly our local boxers who brought back so many medals. We also commend those who, despite not making it onto the medal table, nevertheless broke personal records and achieved greatness in other ways.

Medals are undoubtedly important, but there is so much more involved that is worthy of our admiration: participation with a genuine sporting attitude; commitment to lengthy hours of training, which takes real dedication; and the volunteerism that has been an emerging feature of such events, which allows everyone to take part and creates a route into the sporting world for so many. Recognition must also be given to support staff, trainers, coaches, families and friends, who deserve to be commended for their roles in the great achievements of athletes.

Such achievements are a source of great pride for us all. We should continue to encourage and support those athletes in their pursuit of sporting excellence in whatever way we can. Sport NI is the body with responsibility for sport. Its remit is to support a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport that contributes to a healthy, fair and prosperous society.

Dúirt Antoinette McKeown, príomhfheidhmeannach, ar na mallaibh go bhfuil an eagraíocht s'aici tiománta do ráth i spórt a bhaint amach mar ghnáthrud seachas mar eisceacht. The chief executive of Sport NI, Antoinette McKeown, stated recently that her organisation is committed to the achievement of success in sport being the norm rather than the exception. She went on to say that a review of the Commonwealth Games performance would be carried out in a very detailed way to set targets for future games, to identify where resources can be best used, and to learn particular lessons from the success of boxing in Glasgow this year. This review will be very important and will include participation from the Commonwealth Games Council and all the governing bodies of all the sports.

If our sporting organisations are to reach their full potential, it will be important for them to address the under-representation of women as sporting participants, coaches and representatives on sports governing bodies. In terms of equality, there must be a focus on strategies to increase the involvement of women in local sport.

While competitive sport is very important, it is also crucial that we continue to encourage all people to undertake any form of physical activity so that we are protecting our health and creating a better quality of life. We know that inactivity and poor diet go hand in hand with health problems. We cannot continue to be blasé about the rising levels of obesity, particularly in children, which often lead to diabetes and other serious diseases in later life. Our support of sport must include creating opportunities for all people to lead a more active and healthy life in whatever way they can.

It is with all that in mind that we turn our attention to the next challenge and to see where we can set our sights. It would be a real opportunity if we were able to attract a major sporting event to the North of Ireland that will focus on our young people and give them a great goal for which to strive. If the sporting fraternity wishes for the North of Ireland to become the host for the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021 with a view to a future bid to host the Commonwealth Games, we have a responsibility to ensure that we do all in our power to make that a reality.

The benefits that can be achieved will ripple right through the community here. We know that after hearing about the legacies of the Isle of Man youth games and Glasgow 2014. The Isle of Man's Minister for Community, Culture and Leisure said that the Manx games:

> *"saw the whole Island come together and put on a fantastic event that showcased the Manx hospitality to our Commonwealth friends. We provided a platform and offered an opportunity for people of all ages to be part of an outstanding celebration of sport. It is testament to the success of the Games that a lasting legacy lives on."*

Leis an fhocal sin, a LeasCheann Comhairle, molaim an rún. On that note, Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCausland: I thank my party colleagues for bringing the motion before the Assembly. It is a good motion, and I am glad to see that there is support from all parties in the Assembly for it and for bringing the Commonwealth Youth Games here to Northern Ireland.

My colleague Michelle McIlveen set out very clearly and extensively the potential for and the benefits that would flow to Northern Ireland by bringing the Commonwealth Youth Games here in 2021. A number of smaller countries have hosted the event, and there is absolutely no reason why Northern Ireland should not be in a position by 2021 to bring the games to the Province. We have seven years between now and then, but it is important that we start very quickly.

Northern Ireland has considerable experience and expertise that has been built up by hosting major events, a number of which Members listed. We have demonstrated time and time again that we have the capacity, the skills, the experience and the infrastructure — all the things that we need to make major events a success. If we encounter difficulties in a particular area, we have the capacity to work our way through them.

A lot of work has already been done to improve our sporting infrastructure. More work is under way, and more is to come. In addition, where accommodation is concerned, I think that we would be in a very good position to bring such an event to Northern Ireland.

One of the key things for me was a comment that the Minister made about the Commonwealth Games. She said that the Northern Ireland team brings back:

> *"a sense of pride and achievement."*

That is good for Northern Ireland. It is good for the country; it brings a sense of pride and achievement to people; it raises Northern Ireland's profile on the international stage, which we are always keen to do to generate good publicity and business; it is good for the athletes because they have an opportunity to perform on their home territory; and it is good for the sports, because it raises their profile and will, I hope, encourage higher participation levels.

With the Commonwealth Youth Games in particular, we want to increase the potential for participation in sport amongst young people. Quite often, young people will go through their school years participating in sport, and when they leave school there is a dropping off in their level of participation. Something like this could help to sustain participation, because it is in the period at the end of the school years that you see it drop. As a number of Members highlighted, there are potential health benefits from sport, including an opportunity to tackle obesity. All those things are good.

There are no downsides to this. It is good for the country's profile, good for the pride of the people of Northern

Ireland, good for opportunities for the athletes and good for the sports.

We are in a much better place today than we were some time ago. I notice that Cathal Ó Oisín referred to "dark and dismal" days in the past when people did not want to come to Northern Ireland. That was true, and we know the reasons for it only too well. For the vast majority of people, Northern Ireland has moved on and is now a better place. We want to reap the benefits of that, and one of those is to see events of this type coming to the Province.

5.45 pm

I am glad to hear that conversations have already started and that discussions are under way between the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council and Sport NI and, presumably, officials in DCAL. As the motion says, this has to involve everyone. It calls on the Executive to develop a bid. This has to involve Sport NI, the Commonwealth Games Council, DCAL and the Executive. I hope that we will be in a position to make a good strong bid to bring the event here to the Province.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas daoibh as an rún seo inniu. Thank you very much for today's motion and debate. Everyone who has spoken has listed the major events. For me, there is no doubt that the Olympics, the Paralympic Games and the Commonwealth Games have played a particularly positive role in the transformation of the host cities, which I had the privilege of visiting and participating in during the aforementioned events. Members know and I should clarify for their sake, particularly the Members who tabled the motion, that responsibility for the events rests with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and, indeed, her global events bidding group.

In response to the motion, I have considered three key areas. The first is in respect of the impact that hosting a major event can have on people and their communities. Secondly, in considering the motion, we need to be realistic about the type of events that we should aspire to host. Thirdly, I will explain why I would encourage the Executive to support the development of a bid to host the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021.

Major events are extremely influential and increase the number of people who participate in sport across the community, and we have seen that in recent years. It has helped to improve health and well-being, which are priorities not only for DCAL but for the Executive. Recent experience of international sporting events such as the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games and, for us, the World Police and Fire Games and the Giro d'Italia have raised the profile of sport in a very positive way.

These events and the athletes and, indeed, the teams who took part did inspire more people to get involved in sports, and, for us in recent years, that has meant cycling, gymnastics, boxing and athletics. Local sports clubs have seen applications to their clubs increase in numbers, and we can be certain that the success of local athletes in major events across the world has been a real and contributing factor. Hosting major events here brings a sense of pride. That was demonstrated when many of our local communities came out on the streets to support the torch relay for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. They certainly supported the Giro d'Italia, and, indeed, they came out across the many venues that hosted the World Police and Fire Games events and activities.

Secondly, the motion calls for us to consider hosting a future Commonwealth Games, which is much bigger than the Commonwealth Youth Games. While I am confident that we currently have the facilities to host the Commonwealth Youth Games and that this will need to be explored in much more detail before the bid is made, we need to be realistic about our expectations of hosting the Commonwealth Games in the near future.

In January 2014, the Assembly Research and Information Service published a paper entitled 'International Sporting Competitions'. That paper looked at the hosting of major international sporting events and, indeed, the infrastructure required to hold them. I am sure that all Members saw the paper. The first key point in that paper noted that we do not currently have the capacity to hold major sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games. While we certainly do aspire to host major competitions, we need to be sure that the infrastructure is there and that we are ready to do so.

Finally, to address the main element of the motion, I am supportive of the proposal that we should bid to host the Commonwealth Youth Games. These games, whenever and wherever they have been held, have offered a wonderful opportunity to our talented young athletes for their experience. It is an international competition with a strong network of support. The Commonwealth Youth Games can often be the first stepping stone for young athletes in their international sporting careers and has been the foundation for some of our athletes, many of whom the Members here have mentioned.

I referred to the influential role that major sporting events can play in the development of sport, and other Members mentioned their power in community cohesion.

For athletes who have taken part, major events can provide an opportunity to build and develop. Additional facilities can be built, and the coaches and governing bodies, who work very diligently with great commitment behind the scenes to support our athletes, can develop their skills and expertise. Such events provide opportunities for volunteers to help out and develop their organisational and leadership skills.

Our athletes, and others like them, have inspired people from across communities to get out, get involved and have a go. That has to be welcomed by everybody. By bringing the Commonwealth Youth Games to the North in the future, we can build on our achievements of the past. We have a lot to be thankful for.

The Youth Commonwealth Games can also provide us with an opportunity to reach out to other cultures, given the diverse nationalities now participating in the Commonwealth Games.

The motion calls on the Executive to:

> *"develop a bid ... to host the Commonwealth Youth Games".*

As I said earlier, the responsibility for submitting a bid to the Commonwealth Games Federation rests with our local Commonwealth Games Council, and it is important that the council receives the support that it needs to make the bid happen. I know that the council has held preliminary

talks with DETI and the Tourist Board, and it has the sole responsibility for bidding for future sporting events. My officials, along with Sport NI, have also met the council to hear about the proposal and find out how we can help.

There is no doubt that there are significant challenges in taking the proposal forward, and we are all very mindful of the timescale involved in carrying out feasibility studies and submitting a final bid for the 2021 youth games by May of next year. That will involve ensuring that we have all the facilities and funding required to deliver such an event, an amount that is lower than the proposer of the motion indicated. It would be anything between £3 million and £5 million, possibly up to £7 million. That said, I think that it is an investment worth going to the Executive for.

I believe that the youth games would offer another fantastic opportunity for us to showcase the North and all that we have to offer. I would be happy to give Minister Foster my support should she wish to take a proposal to the Executive. I would also be happy for my Department to work in collaboration with DETI, the Tourist Board and the Commonwealth Games Council in their preparation of any proposed bid.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the former Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Michelle McIlveen, who, on her comeback, moved the motion so enthusiastically. During her contribution, she pointed out that those who take part in the Commonwealth Youth Games have to be between 14 and 18 years of age and that the first youth games were held in Edinburgh in 2000. She also said that Northern Ireland boxers such as Michael Conlon and Joe Fitzpatrick had taken part in the games and delivered success. She also mentioned that Northern Ireland has successfully hosted the MTV awards, the Irish Open, the World Police and Fire Games, the Giro d'Italia and the recent Carl Frampton fight. She told us that the games had to consist of at least of six sports and possibly up to eight, two of which need to be team sports. She said that our sporting infrastructure and facilities had been greatly improved and that hotel accommodation had been put in place.

Mr Ó'hOisín talked about the boxers and the success that they had attained in 2010 and in this year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. He also mentioned the successes delivered in lawn bowls and judo.

Mrs McKevitt said that she hoped that the success realised by the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team this year would be replicated in 2018. She mentioned how important it was to have proper training facilities in place and coaching to support that. She also talked about the economic benefits that would flow from the Commonwealth Youth Games being held in Northern Ireland. She mentioned world events that Northern Ireland has hosted, the Giro d'Italia and the World Police and Fire Games, and said that continuing investment needed to be made in sporting facilities, particularly boxing.

Leslie Cree mentioned the 12 medals that Northern Ireland won in the Commonwealth Games in 2014, which placed it fifteenth in the medal table. He also talked about the lottery funds and said that £17·5 million is in place. He talked about Sport NI's sports facility strategy. He said that he looked forward to welcoming many young athletes from across the Commonwealth in 2021. I hope that you are about to do that as well, sir.

Anna Lo talked about the youth games. She said that they would provide a great opportunity for Northern Ireland and that competing in the likes of those games would well prepare young athletes for the full Commonwealth Games as they develop as sportsmen and sportswomen. She also said that sport increases confidence and discipline.

Mr Hilditch talked about the importance of legacy. He said that the Executive and DCAL should have a development plan put together and be working on the bid now. He also talked about volunteering and how important that is. He said that 2021 had to be the target and that we had seven years to work towards that goal.

Ms McCorley talked about the commitment and training of not only the athletes but their coaches. She talked about the Sport NI review of the Commonwealth Games that had been discussed by the chief executive of Sport NI. She also said that it is important that coaches be given the recognition that they deserve. As well as that, she talked about how sport can be important in tackling obesity and in dealing with health issues.

Nelson McCausland said that we must use the next seven years to prepare. He talked about Northern Ireland's profile being increased internationally because of events such as the Commonwealth Games and others that have been held. He said that much of the infrastructure is either in place or is being put in place and that there are other announcements to follow. He also mentioned accommodation, particularly in the city of Belfast, that would host the athletes as they arrived from across Her Majesty's Commonwealth. He said that there is considerable experience here of delivering events and that there is great pride in achievement. He also referred to the comments that the Minister made about that.

The Minister said that the bid would have to be made by the Commonwealth Games Council, with, from an Executive point of view, it coming from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment through the global events bidding group. She talked about athletes, their skills, their achievements in the recent Commonwealth Games and the legacy of the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team from recent competitions. She talked of the achievements of the past and about reaching out. She said that it is important that the Commonwealth Games Council get the support for a bid. I absolutely agree with that.

Northern Ireland has a great legacy from the Commonwealth Games. If we look back at Mary Peters, Mike Bull, Philip Beattie, Davy Larmour and a list of boxers and bowlers, we see that we have a tremendous legacy from the Commonwealth Games. However, it is limited to a small number of sports. I follow the Northern Ireland football team but not just at full international level. That is a point that Ms Lo made. I follow them at youth level, under-19 level and under-21 level, because the development of young players is very important. As they move through the age groups, they get the experience to develop as players, enabling them then to compete on the full international stage.

The same applies to other sports. Last week, the Irish Bowling Association was before the Committee. Its representatives made the same point about attracting young sportsmen. That is something that we need to do. We need to attract young sportspeople, and we need to ensure that

they are trained and that the facilities are available for them to develop and compete on the international stage. We also need to retain those sports personnel.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Humphrey: I am happy to.

Mr Ross: The Member has rightly outlined other sports in which Northern Ireland has a good track record. One in which we have many elite athletes yet cannot participate in Commonwealth Games is hockey, for which there is not a Northern Ireland team. Does he agree that the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee should look at the example that cricket has set? We are not looking at having a Northern Ireland team for all events but for those in which Northern Ireland could participate, such as the Commonwealth Youth Games. Does he agree that we should look at setting up a hockey team specifically for that event?

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. The development of elite athletes, individually and in teams, is hugely important. I made that very point in our most recent debate on the Commonwealth Games.

Ulster Hockey really needs to sort out the issue of hockey players like Iain Lewers, who has to play for England and is no longer available to Ireland. Such players cannot play for the Northern Ireland hockey team at the Commonwealth Games because we do not have a Northern Ireland hockey team. There are two or three other younger hockey players who are following him into the England set-up and not playing for Ireland because they want to compete in England and then they can compete at the Commonwealth Games.

6.00 pm

The same applies to rugby and rugby sevens. The Commonwealth Youth Games could be held here in Northern Ireland, but we may not have a Northern Ireland team taking part in the rugby sevens. That, to me, seems ludicrous. Both those sports — hockey and rugby — need to sort that out, so that we can have the situation that prevails in swimming or boxing, where you can compete for Ireland or GB at the Olympics, but you compete for Northern Ireland at the Commonwealth Games, and that is absolutely right. If we are to maximise our medal haul, we have to maximise our participation in sports and provide training and support for coaches.

We in the DUP are very keen to see the games coming. We have met the Commonwealth Games Council, and we have had conversations with the chief executive of Sport NI around the very points that Mr Ross made in his intervention about ensuring that the maximum number of sports personnel are able to take part in the maximum number of events. The governing bodies need to address the issues that we have just raised.

I welcome the debate today. It was very good and positive. I will conclude by saying that, as Northern Ireland celebrates its centenary as a state in 2021, it would be great to have the Commonwealth Youth Games here. The Minister will have noted that our motion calls for the Executive to take action and put together a bid. I welcome the Minister's commitment to working with and across Government, particularly with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that the bid will be put in place. I assure the House that all of us will work together for the sake of the young athletes of Northern Ireland, who, at that time, will be in their prime and able to compete in the Northern Ireland youth games that we will host here on behalf of the Commonwealth across the Commonwealth of Nations. It is vital that that work is done now.

I welcome the commitment from all across the House to the motion. I am delighted that, as we had in the previous debate around the Commonwealth Games, we have full agreement across all the parties in the House, and I look forward to the work commencing very soon, led by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment but with commitment from all Ministers —

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

Mr Humphrey: — across the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that we deliver the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Youth Games here in 2021.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the success of the Olympic Games in London 2012 and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014 and the impact hosting these games has had to positively transform those cities; and calls on the Executive to develop a bid for Northern Ireland to host the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021 with a view to a future bid to host the Commonwealth Games.*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I invite Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

'Appreciating Age': A Report from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Ramsey: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly welcomes the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland's Report, 'Appreciating Age', which places an economic value on the wide and varied contributions made by the over-60s across Northern Ireland; acknowledges the positive contributions made by older people through caring, childcare, volunteering, replacement parenting and working; and will seek to challenge negative perceptions around older age in order to make Northern Ireland a better place to grow old.*

This is an all-party motion, and we thank the Business Committee for facilitating and prioritising it, given the timing of it and the launch of the recent report. I welcome the junior Minister Jennifer McCann to the debate. Her presence and comments are important.

I welcome the opportunity to highlight the positive contributions — and Jonathan, thank you; both of you are very welcome — made by older people across Northern Ireland and to recognise the many and varied roles that they play in our lives. The report clearly attaches an economic value to the many and varied contributions that they make. The SDLP welcomed the establishment of an older persons' commissioner and would like to thank her for the work that she has done to ensure that the voice of older people is heard and that they are involved in all policy-making decisions at that level.

Northern Ireland is an ageing society, with the most rapidly ageing population in the UK. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) figures show that, by 2062 — a long way away — there will be an additional 318,000 people over 60 in Northern Ireland than there are today. For too long, we have heard just one side of the story: that older people cost money and that they are an economic burden. When cuts to public services need to be made, it is often older people's services that are cut. The motion offers an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that older people actually contribute more than they cost — a staggering £24·7 billion over the next 50 years.

Among the contributions included in the report were caring, childcare, volunteering, replacement parenting, kinship care and working, as well as paying taxes that, over the next 50 years, will amount to a staggering £117 billion. We all know someone who looks after their grandchildren, a spouse or a family member. In 2012, older carers saved the Northern Ireland economy almost £1·02 billion. We are all aware of many older people who volunteer.

In my constituency, there are many examples of good volunteering by older people who play key roles, including the Culture Company volunteers who ensured the smooth running of events during our wonderful City of Culture year last year. Many of them were over 60, they brought maturity and a sense of perspective to their job, and they acted as mentors in many regards to many of the younger people who participated in the events. Many older people continue to work and, therefore, continue to contribute to the economic fabric of our society through their taxes and other financial contributions.

The commissioner's report also takes account of the associated costs of older age-related spending, including benefits such as pension credits, disability living allowance, attendance allowance and winter fuel payments as well as protected housing and health and social care costs. The projected spending over the next 50 years is £92·2 billion.

The report challenges the one-dimensional view of ageing and tells the untold story of the positive ways in which older people contribute to our society day in and day out and how they will continue to do so for years to come. The report is based over 50 years; therefore, it is in everyone's interest to change the way we as a society view and talk about older people.

The SDLP wants to see an end to discrimination against older people in the workplace. As well as being grossly unjust, such discrimination is costly and inefficient. All of us, one day, will be deemed older — many of us probably already are by many of the younger generation. None of us would like to think that our age would stop us contributing positively to society. I will continue to promote the rights of older people in every aspect of work in the Assembly. I welcome the commissioner's report and wish to fully support the motion.

Mr Weir: It is good to see a motion that has cross-party support, and I think that the House will unite today. It is also cross-generational. Mention was made of those who will be turning 60. I look to Mr Lyttle, who will be turning 60 a few years after me, and I look to others in the Chamber, such as Mr Ramsey and Mrs Dobson, who will be turning 60 a few years before me.

Mr Ramsey: Point of order.

Mr Weir: Pat, if you are younger than me, you have had a very hard paper round.

I look to colleagues to my left, such as Mr Anderson, who has achieved that level of —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It might be time to stop digging, Peter. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: Yes, I know.

Quite often, when we are debating the issue of an ageing society, there is a tendency to concentrate on the negative aspects and so we look at, for example, the impact on pension provision as we look into the future and at the impact on the health service. It is particularly positive today that we are able to look not simply at the very positive aspects that our older community contributes but at ones that are based on hard evidence and hard fact and that show a very positive way forward. That can be shown through a number of aspects. For example, the extent to which there will be a higher number of older people in years to come has been mentioned. In many ways, we look at the problems in the health service, but it is sometimes important to take a step back and say that a tremendous positive has happened in the last generations in the extent to which people's life expectancy has increased. That is

positive and to be celebrated. Sadly, we often still see in our society tragedies such as that last week in north Antrim where a young person died. The old adage about life expectancy is three score years and 10 or 70 years. However, now, if somebody dies at the age of 70, it is deemed to be quite young. The vast bulk of our citizens can look forward to a much greater age. We should celebrate that.

With celebrating age and appreciating age, as the report says, it is also about respect for age. I found myself in the unusual situation of having common cause with the Member for Mid Ulster Ian Milne when, at the weekend, I saw and took exception to the portrayal of a 94-year-old man from Castledawson whose contribution to a programme was subtitled. I think that it was completely unnecessary for it to happen, and the question in my mind when thinking about that was this: did the BBC subtitle him because of where he came from or because he was 94 and perceived to be frail and elderly? Either way, it is unacceptable. It shows the need for us to show respect for the full community, particularly our older folk.

The importance of the report is in highlighting not just the individual stories but the broad facts and figures and the financial contribution that is to be made over the next number of years. Financial circumstances mean that a lot of people now go beyond retirement age, and, although some of that can be through the pressures of economic circumstances, in other cases, there is an opportunity for people to work on through choice and have that liberating experience. They can make an enormous contribution. The report is particularly good in highlighting, in many ways, the hidden advantages of the financial contribution that has been made. We talk about contributions, particularly as the glue to hold the family together, whether it is through volunteering — the proposer referred to the City of Culture but it can be on a whole range of subjects — whether it is through the contribution of care as unpaid carers or whether it is on the basis of either childcare with the grandparents directly looking after their grandchildren or, indeed, even as replacement parenting. A massive contribution is made to our society that, in the report, is highlighted at around £25 billion in net contribution, which is probably a conservative estimate. That is even taking into account the various cost aspects that are in play.

I believe that there are a great deal of positives in the report. I commend the Older People's Commissioner for producing the report. There is a lot of substance in it, and I look forward to the rest of the debate. I support the motion.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion, which welcomes the Commissioner for Older People, Claire Keatinge's major report, 'Appreciating Age'. I commend the commissioner for her efforts to reframe the debate regarding older people and society while having the contributions of older people properly valued. More importantly, we, as legislators, must draw upon the report's positive findings and make time for exploring how best we can invest resources, time and effort in making our local communities great places to grow old. The report, which was launched on the UN International Day of Older Persons, reveals that the over-60s living in the North of Ireland will contribute almost £25 billion to the economy over the next 50 years through volunteering, caring, childcare, replacement parenting and working. The report attaches an economic value to contributions made by older people to highlight the positive roles that they play, while considering the cost of older-age-related spending, subtracting those costs from the total contributions in order to give a true reflection of the net economic value older people bring to society.

6.15 pm

As more of our citizens are living longer and healthier lives than ever before, older people work, volunteer, provide care and participate widely in community and family life, contributing significant social and economic value to life in our local communities. The report helps to ensure that those important contributions do not go overlooked. Along with a full range of civic actors, we must challenge the negative voices that say that older people are a burden on public expenditure and, therefore, on society.

'Appreciating Age' challenges the negative perception that older people are a drain on the public purse, as it clearly shows that the over-60s put much more into society than they take out, in economic and in social terms, to the tune of almost £25 billion. The report, however, is not just about older people. Those who are 20, 30 and 40 years of age today are the older people of tomorrow. They will contribute in many different ways over the next 50 years, so it is in all our interests to change the way wider society perceives older age.

My colleague junior Minister Jennifer McCann made the following comment at the time of the report:

> *"As this report shows, we all gain from the contribution of older people to society. Too often the discussion focuses on the costs related to an ageing population. However, older people have extensive life experience and skills to share".*

I am glad that the Executive have committed to creating a society that values older people and supports them to live actively to their fullest potential. The Executive's Active Ageing strategy aims to ensure strong foundations for the future generation of older people to age with respect, dignity, choice and good health.

While commending the good work and many initiatives aimed at promoting positive and active ageing, we must not allow austerity to hit our older people. People who need a nursing home or home care must be able to count on it unconditionally. Austerity should not affect the basic needs and dignity of our older people. If we are to ask people to work longer, we need to give them opportunities. Equal access to employment, education and health insurance are crucial, as well as opportunities to contribute to an active and healthy life in old age.

It is critical that we recognise our debt to older people and encourage everyone to challenge ageism and fully appreciate the vast contribution that older people make, socially and economically, to make our society a better place. The report dispels the myth that is often propagated in the media, which is the idea that ageing populations are a burden on the state, on working people and on younger people.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to tonight's debate. I did smile, however, during Mr Weir's contribution, when he pointed out that I would reach pensionable age before him — a fact that I know people watching the debate will find incredible. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: It is true.

Mrs Dobson: True, but not to those observing. I will give him style tips at some point. *[Laughter.]* As has been said too often when we are discussing a growing and ageing population, too much of the focus is on the cost of support and not on what our older people give back to society in return. There is no doubt that an increasing elderly population will put greater pressure on some of our care services, but we must never forget that those additional costs are offset by the massive contribution that our elderly people make in their later years. They are not only an economic asset worth heralding through directly supporting our local economy but our elderly generation make a major societal impact on their communities.

On a day when the Assembly considered yet further fundamental reform to our pension system, it is imperative that we look at the massive and positive contribution of our elderly population. Whilst the report is to be warmly welcomed, I note that pension costs have not been included. In basic financial terms, we cannot ignore that fact of life. Until we look properly at pension costs, how can we plan for the pressures of our ageing population?

It is to be celebrated that people are living longer and are able to continue to make a greater contribution to our society than was possible in the past. That is why it is important that older people have the opportunity to continue working, if they choose to do so. We all know many examples of older people who are doing brilliant work and providing key services. Take, for instance, grandparents providing childcare for their children's children. In some of those cases, without that arrangement, the cost of childcare would be too prohibitive to allow the parent to work at all.

The childcare role is especially relevant in Northern Ireland, where, despite the many promises and strategies, our local childcare system is still largely ineffective. In addition, without the dedication and commitment of older people, many of our best-known charities would not be nearly as successful. As I know too well from my association with the many local organ donation charities, volunteers, many of them over 50, make a fantastic contribution every day. The value of volunteering, whether through charities or, indeed, our church organisations, is enormous each year and could never be accurately costed. From supporting local events to sitting on committees and relaying their knowledge and experience, older people are often the backbone of many local charities and institutions, using their expertise to help others and bring forward leaders and champions for the future.

Whilst the Assembly talks about preparing to care for an ageing population, we must remember that older people themselves are often the ones providing the care. At a time when our Health Department and the trusts appear so committed to reducing key services, huge numbers of older people living here say that they regularly help out their elderly neighbours. If services like domiciliary care are to be reduced, reliance on that generosity is only likely to grow. In addition, it is hard to get an absolute definitive value of the contribution made through care, as it is typical of Northern Ireland people to be modest when asked how many hours they spend helping their neighbours and friends.

We need to remember that growing numbers of older people are exploring new opportunities as they reach pension age. Those in the current generation of pensioners — the baby boomer generation — are the best educated that Northern Ireland and the UK have ever seen. People in the current generation, with their relatively good health, ideas and energy, will no doubt make an even greater contribution than their predecessors.

In conclusion, I hope that tonight's debate will have a positive impact on the wider public debate about the future of our ageing population.

Mr Lyttle: The Alliance Party fully supports the all-party motion and commends the excellent work in 'Appreciating Age', the Commissioner for Older People's report. The report sets out clearly the immense value of older people and the vital contribution that they make to our community. I recognise the wider work of the Commissioner for Older People and her staff. One of the key commitments in her corporate plan is the promotion of positive attitudes towards and about older people. I think that this evidence-based research is a clear demonstration that the commission is well on its way to achieving that aim.

The report complements the work that the commissioner did in a previous report, 'Valuing an Ageing Workforce', the launch of which the Alliance Minister for Employment and Learning, Stephen Farry, supported here at the Assembly. That report clearly states that, if the Government can enable older people to remain in the workforce for as long as they wish, the benefit could be as much as £2·3 billion by 2037. I welcome the Minister for Employment and Learning's investment in lifelong learning, including the Step Ahead 50+ programme, which is in line with the Alliance Party manifesto commitment to lifelong learning, as well as skills development to help older people to remain economically active and independent.

I would also like to recognise the work of the NGOs in our community, such as GEMS NI, that have excellent lifelong learning programmes for older people.

We have heard that Northern Ireland is indeed an ageing society. We are living longer lives, and that absolutely must be celebrated. However, there are also negative perceptions or, as Age NI aptly put it, "benign prejudices" about older people that must be tackled.

The report not only collects very valuable data but has some key testimonies from vital organisations such as Business in the Community, which states:

> *"Older workers are now the fastest growing age group in the labour market",*

and that there are opportunities for employers to harness the skills and experiences of older people. Parenting NI states:

> *"many families would lose out both financially and in emotional stability if it were not for the support of grandparents",*

and that children:

> *"gain enormously from having a second nurturing environment".*

We also have Volunteer Now, which states:

> *"Older volunteers are a very important resource for the community in Northern Ireland, giving their time to support a range of community activities and services".*

I think of the many football coaches I have had over the years and of Cecil Braniff, who is a fixture at our own football club. He puts in many hours, despite being of an old age. He is an extremely active gentleman. I think of Boys' Brigade leaders and GAA volunteers whom we saw at the weekend coming together for the Game for Anto. There are those in our churches, and there are community safety volunteers, like Street By Street, in my constituency, East Belfast. These are all people who make vital contributions to our community.

We also hear from Carers NI, who reference the fact that:

> *"our community care system would collapse without the input of older carers. However, this unpaid work needs to be valued and supported, otherwise it can come at a real cost to the older carer's own health and wellbeing".*

Kinship Care is a vital organisation which estimates that between 8,000 and 10,000 children live in kinship care and a huge proportion of them — 41% — are with grandparents. There are key testimonies drawn out in the report.

There is also valuable data that over the next 50 years older people will contribute about £25 billion to our economy in many different ways. It is summed up best by chief economist for Danske Bank, Angela McGowan, who said:

> *"This latest report by the Commissioner's Office shines a bright light on the true value of older people to both our economy and ... society as a whole. By providing a greater understanding of the direct and indirect benefits of older people this report both progresses us socially and provides older people with recognition for their extensive economic contribution."*

Despite that, we still have prejudice in our community, and another vital contribution to tackling this will be the OFMDFM older persons' strategy, Active Ageing. That is a positive step which presents a real opportunity for government to increase participation and ensure the care and protection of older people in our community. We also have the important work of Age NI, the Age Sector Platform and the Pensioners Parliament, which provide vital advocacy for older people in our community. There is vital intergenerational work as well by organisations like Linking Generations —

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

Mr Lyttle: — and I think that this report is another important contribution to ensuring that older people are valued in our community.

Mr Anderson: At the outset, I declare an interest in the cross-party motion before us as I am a member of that illustrious over-60s club. I am proud to be in the age group to which this report refers.

A Member: How far are you into it?

6.30 pm

Mr Anderson: We will not go into that, but my party colleagues would have been disappointed had I not referred to that. They are always reminding me of that, not only in the House but outside it. They should maybe learn to respect their elders. *[Laughter.]* On a more serious note, I am greatly encouraged by the report of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland on the subject of appreciating age. It is timely and helpful. It ought to be warmly welcomed by all, and I am glad to see that that is the case in the House.

We live in a rapidly changing society. People over 60 still have much to offer society in many ways. What they lack in youth and youthful vigour, they more than make up for in experience. As the report highlights, people over the age of 60 contribute in a great variety of ways, socially and economically. In the words of the commissioner:

> *"The evidence in this report will help to challenge negative attitudes towards ageing and highlight the very positive difference that older people make to our quality of life and our economy."*

We now live longer and, generally, healthier lives. Life expectancy has increased by 11 years since 1950. The number of older people living in Northern Ireland is set to rise significantly. According to the report, the number of older people living in Northern Ireland will increase by 86·9% over the next 50 years, and they will then represent one third of the population. In that light, it is right and fitting that the Assembly acknowledge older people's positive contribution and lead from the front in promoting it.

The stand-out headline from the commissioner's report is, no doubt, the fact that older people in Northern Ireland are set to contribute almost £25 billion to the economy over the next 50 years in a variety of ways. That totally demolishes the myth that older people are nothing but a drain on a country economically. The figures are clearly set out in the report. It is full of detailed statistics and projected figures on the anticipated contribution from the over-60s during the next 50 years. I will not simply repeat what is in the report, but it is interesting to note the range and variety of these contributions.

Such contributions can be seen in the business world. In many SMEs, for example, which are the backbone of our local economy, senior members of a family firm are likely to keep their hand on the tiller for much longer than was the case a few years ago. In the public sector, those who have given many years of dedicated service to society are now able to work on well beyond the age of 60, health permitting. In doing so, they set a fine example to younger staff by giving added value to the overall performance of the Civil Service and its delivery of front-line services.

Older people are also engaged in many roles in the voluntary, community and charity sectors, where their skills and experience are invaluable in helping others. We are all well aware of the significant contribution that older people make through caring, which enables loved ones, relatives or friends to live a dignified life at home for longer, thus also saving the health service millions of pounds every year. Grandparents play a crucial and growing childminding role. Indeed, grandparents, who have always been important in family life, are now key figures in the family, often childminding out of love and seeking no financial reward.

Those are just some of the vital and positive contributions that the over-60s in Northern Ireland provide now and will provide to an ever-increasing degree in the years to come. The report presents a positive picture for the over-60s. It tackles negative perceptions head-on and clearly highlights the key roles that older people continue to play in the community and family in so many ways across Northern Ireland.

I will conclude, as Mr Lyttle did, with the words of the chief economist for Danske Bank, Angela McGowan:

> *"This latest report by the Commissioner's Office shines a bright light on the true value of older people to both our economy and NI society as a whole."*

I agree entirely with that and wholeheartedly commend the motion to the House today.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat. I am grateful to be afforded the opportunity to respond to the motion. Junior Minister Bell and I welcome research of this kind, and, indeed, we attended the launch of the report on 1 October in the MAC in Belfast. It was a very informative and well-supported event.

When the First Minister and deputy First Minister were taking legislation through the Assembly to create the office of the Commissioner for Older People, they felt it critical that promoting positive attitudes towards older people should be a major part of the role of the commissioner. In fact, the Commissioner for Older People Act 2011 places a legal obligation on the commissioner to do so. I know that Claire Keatinge and her team have worked tirelessly to bring issues facing our older population to the fore and to help to change attitudes to this valuable and diverse section of our community.

The publication of the report is particularly relevant given the changes in population here. Over the 10-year period between 2002 and 2012, the number of adults aged 65 and over increased by 20%.

The trend is expected to continue, and the number of people in that age group is projected to increase by 12% between 2012 and 2017 and by 64% between 2012 and 2032.

It is good news for all of us. It means that people should be able to enjoy an active life for longer and be able to share their skills, knowledge and experience with the rest of the population. We all gain from the contribution of older people to society. However, too often, the discussion on this topic focuses solely on greater pension and health and social care costs. That is a highly imbalanced and inaccurate picture and feeds prejudice against older people. We do face challenges in those areas, but the central fact is that, as a society, we greatly benefit from people living longer and contributing longer.

That should be the starting point for any discussion about what is referred to as the "ageing population". For example, the size of our working-age population is declining, yet many people in their 50s who need to change jobs or their career to continue working to support their family are unable to do so because older workers can be particularly disadvantaged owing to unfair attitudes about their ability to work. That could become an even greater problem in the future as the state pension age rises. People with decades of experience and many skills could become benefit claimants for many years before getting their pension, and we need to tackle ageist attitudes wherever they are found.

The focus on costs in discussions about people living longer implies that the key factor in getting older is that people become ill, frail and dependent. The reality is that the great majority of older people are living healthier and active lives. That is an issue that many older people feel strongly about. During the recent consultation on the draft Active Ageing strategy, many people expressed anger about the ageism, discrimination and disrespect that older people experience. It is a prejudice that some people feel no qualms about expressing, and that should not be tolerated in any society. It is very important that we challenge prejudice and ensure that people are aware of the very significant contribution that our older people make to society.

Additionally, research has shown that holding negative attitudes towards ageing when people are younger may cause poorer health for those people when they in turn reach old age, and it may even lead to a shorter life. The prejudice becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, so it is in all our interests to view the entire life course as the positive, fulfilling journey that it can be.

We need to instil respect in our communities for the older population: people who have often worked all their life, raised a family and supported others. As well as the financial contribution that our older people make to the economy, we need to recognise their non-financial contributions as well. There are many examples of our older people providing valuable services to the community. They have high levels of membership and leadership of many local organisations, groups and societies, and they also share their time, skills and knowledge through volunteering. Indeed, Minister Bell and I had the pleasure of hearing Mary Scally, at the launch of the report at the MAC, talk about her experience of volunteering and the many hours that she is giving to many volunteer programmes and projects, from which she gets a lot back.

Mr Ramsey: She is from Derry.

Ms J McCann: She is from Derry. That is right, Pat.

By being active users or customers of community-based facilities and resources such as local shops, post offices and libraries, older people are supporting the viability of local services. They also play a central role in contributing to childcare. Grandparents are often unpaid childcare workers who enable parents to work. Older people vote in much greater numbers than those in other age groups, supporting the democratic process. Although those things cannot be quantified in cash terms, they are no less valuable and vital and must be recognised as such.

We acknowledge the many contributions made by older people to our society, but we must not lose sight of the significant challenges faced by some. Too many older people are living in social disadvantage and poverty, particularly fuel poverty. As part of the development of the Active Ageing strategy, which we are currently finalising, we have strategic aims to address those issues, and we will work with Departments to develop the outcomes that we want to achieve. We have also worked with Departments to develop signature programme proposals under the Delivering Social Change framework. The programmes are designed to complement the existing programmes, policies and services of all Departments that have primary responsibility for tackling these issues.

We need to recognise that individuals' personal circumstances will impact on how ageing affects them. For example, people from minority ethnic communities may have particular experiences and needs, especially around language issues, obtaining information about services that they are entitled to, discrimination and feelings of isolation. Older women who have remained at home or worked part-time owing to caring responsibilities may have less

pension income than men as they will not have built up as much of a personal employer's pension, and they may live in poverty and fuel poverty as a consequence.

Fear of crime is another major issue of concern to older people. More generally, it is important to stress that, for some older people but not all, living longer can also mean living longer with illness, disability or a dependency on others. The benefits of living longer will only be realised if we recognise and respond to both the challenges and opportunities that it brings. In order to do that, we must first listen to older people and discover precisely what services and policies they want and are entitled to have in place. We must then involve older people in their delivery so that those services can change to meet their needs.

Over the years, the Executive's policies have focused on the health and social care needs and inequalities faced by the growing number of older people in our society. While we need to continue to support the proportion of older people who have health needs, we also need to recognise that older people are changing and are living more active and fulfilling lives.

In order to address the challenges to people fulfilling their potential in later life, we are, as I said, in the process of finalising the active ageing strategy. We will continue to work with our ageing strategy advisory group, which includes, as members, older people and representatives from organisations with expertise in this area. At our request, the Commissioner for Older People chairs that group. The strategy's vision for the North is to be an age-friendly region in which people, as they age, are valued and supported to live actively to their fullest potential with their rights respected and their dignity protected.

I very much welcome the research that has been published in this area, which highlights the very positive contribution that older people make to our society. I encourage everyone to strongly challenge ageism wherever and whenever they encounter it. It is critical that we recognise our debt to older people for all their support and expertise and for the leadership that they have shown us. I am sure that there is not one person in the House tonight who does not have a grandparent or an elderly aunt, uncle, mother or father who they have gained from and used as a role model. It is very important that this motion has all-party support tonight.

Mr Dickson: I suppose that I need to declare an interest as well: I know that none of you can imagine that I am actually over 60, but, as the motion makes reference to it, indeed I am. I am living proof that you can look a lot younger.

This has been a very positive and welcome debate. I will briefly run through the contribution of all Members who spoke. Pat Ramsey reminded us at the beginning, as has just been referenced, that this is an all-party motion and that it is important that the voices of older people be heard and celebrated and that their contribution be noted. That could be through volunteering, and he made particular reference to volunteers at the City of Culture. I do not know whether he remembers, but I remembering seeing a short news piece, probably on the BBC, which interviewed a number of the older volunteers who were acting as city guides during the City of Culture events. What stuck in my mind was their positivity and eagerness and their delight that somebody had recognised that there was value in the job that they were doing as volunteers.

Peter Weir definitely dug a very deep hole, certainly with Jo-Anne Dobson at least, if not with a few others in the Chamber. He mentioned the cross-party support for the motion and for the positive contribution that older people make. He specifically mentioned the facts and figures contained in the report, as did others. He particularly made reference to the need for respect for those who are of an older age.

Bronwyn McGahan told us that the report reframed the debate on the value of older people and how we should invest in them. She said that communities should be great places to grow old in, and I thought that that was a very important comment for the Assembly to make: every corner of Northern Ireland should be a place in which people should be valued in growing older.

Jo-Anne Dobson referred to the value of people who volunteer in a whole range of styles and activities and with a raft of organisations across the community. She referred to those of us who might be described as baby boomers, perhaps better educated than the previous generation, and the positive impact that we, they and older people can make to this society in giving back some of our life and work experiences. However, some of us do not see our work careers as being over for a very long time yet.

6.45 pm

Sydney Anderson fessed up to being in the over-60 club with some of us. He also welcomed the report and told us that it had much to offer. He referenced the key figure of the £25 billion contribution that it made to tackling negative perceptions.

Chris Lyttle commended the commissioner's report to us as well, particularly the benefits of an ageing workforce and the importance of how we focus, quite often, on young people being unemployed rather than the employment pressures on those who are 50-plus who perhaps have not been reskilled to meet the needs of a growing workforce and of encouraging employers to ensure that they value older workers. He also referred to the value of volunteers, as many have done. He mentioned in particular the work of people like Kinship Care and their contribution to society.

The junior Ministers are both present, with Jennifer McCann speaking today. They welcomed the report. They noted that the role of Commissioner for Older People had been brought into existence by the Assembly and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. She cited it as an important role that was brought into being by the Assembly and delivers for older people in the community, which, I think, has to be described as a positive step forward among the many things that we do not see as very positive in the Chamber. Again, she referred to all the activities that older people do to contribute to our community and to various organisations across the community, particularly in supporting local services. Many get involved in campaigns, such as saving local libraries and things like that, because, very often, they are the backbone of the community.

The Minister also made an interesting reference to those who are in isolation, particularly ethnic minorities. As people who come from an ethnic minority continue to live in Northern Ireland, they will also grow old with us here. We have to make special provision and note how people from an ethnic minority background should be looked after and cared for in our community and that they, too,

have a contribution to make to society in Northern Ireland. I watched the Commissioner for Older People's video and the contribution that was made by one particular gentleman.

I thank everyone who has contributed to the debate tonight. I do not want to bore people with the facts and figures that we have already gone through, but there are perhaps one or two things that I would like to say by way of conclusion. We have referred to all the things that people do. I would like to highlight in particular the volunteers who work hard in community organisations across the Province. Churches perhaps are neglected when it comes to that reference. There is not a church in Northern Ireland that could operate in the way in which it does or make a contribution to communities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland if it were not for the contribution of older people.

We know the amount of money that older people can put back into the community. That is very important.

The report asks us to appreciate age. We must ask ourselves how we recognise the positive contribution of older people. It is often said that a way of measuring a society is by looking at how it treats its older people. The reality is that the day will come when, after all those years of paying taxes, volunteering and caring for others, many older people will themselves come to depend on the state to reciprocate with quality community transport, access to community services and perhaps even excellent nursing and health care. I have taken a particular interest in the latter that is in part due to the failings of facilities in my constituency. I must say that we have been found wanting at times in the care of older people in this community.

In my opinion — I believe that this is backed by recent reports — while the majority of those who care for older people do an outstanding job, we could do a lot more with regard to robust oversight and protection to ensure the best care for them when they come to the time of life when they, in turn, need to be cared for. That would be one way of recognising the positive contribution that they make by saying this: you have served our society, and now we will serve you by ensuring that your last years are spent in comfort, peace and dignity.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly welcomes the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland's Report, 'Appreciating Age', which places an economic value on the wide and varied contributions made by the over-60s across Northern Ireland; acknowledges the positive contributions made by older people through caring, childcare, volunteering, replacement parenting and working; and will seek to challenge negative perceptions around older age in order to make Northern Ireland a better place to grow old.*

Motion made:

> *That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Fish Kill: Sixmilewater

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Girvan: It is with great sadness that we have to have a debate about what is another major fish kill in the Sixmilewater. Unfortunately, it is not the first incident that we have had in the area; we have had several incidents. There was a fairly major one in 2008. There was a further incident in 2011, where a very major kill took place. It wiped out not only the fish but the invertebrates in the watercourse right through to Antrim town.

The incident took place at what is probably a very important time in the spawning calendar. Unfortunately, it has wiped out mature fish. Lough Neagh has an indigenous species: the dollaghan. They make their way into the river courses. The Sixmilewater is very important to me, but other rivers feed into Lough Neagh as well. They also make their way into those river courses, but the Sixmilewater is key. As a consequence, certain protections have to be put in place.

On the day on which the incident was identified — we do not know the exact time — we know that it was identified by a young fisherman who was on the river. He identified that fish were floating in the water. A pollutant had made its way into the water and wiped out a large number of fish. On the morning in question, 30 to 40 fish were lifted out of the water right away. Officials were on site, but they did not engage in removing fish from the water. That created frustration among the individuals who were there. They could see the fish struggling for breath, but officials did not accept fish that had been removed for samples. It ended up with 964 fish being removed from the river. That might be only the tip of the iceberg; there might well be others that were not picked up because we do not know exactly when the incident took place.

I do not wish to point fingers directly, but it happened at the south side of Ballyclare. There is an industrial park in that area, and there is a major water treatment works that recently received approval to have £2 million of spend on upgrading the site. Most of the water makes its way into the combined system and then passes through the sewage treatment works before it enters the watercourse.

I appreciate that the Minister of the Environment is here. Perhaps the Minister for Regional Development and the Agriculture Minister should have been present as well because this issue crosses several Departments. Unfortunately, there is serious frustration with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) because of how it went forward with the issue. There has been delay. People who take a great interest in the river are willing to do samples and everything, but they are frustrated. There is a lack of a two-way street in relation to feedback on communication.

The NIEA is happy to take information from individuals, but it will never feed back information on what is going on in a timely fashion.

The most recent incident took place on 29 October. I mentioned other incidents, when it took years before we got what were not even answers but vagueness, which was not necessarily directed to where the problem arose. I have my own suspicions. I still believe that there is an intentional cover-up. We need to get to the bottom of exactly what went on. We heard that a meeting was to be held at the latter part of last week to review this case and come back with some information. We have still not heard what caused this pollution and what the contaminant in the water was that caused us to lose a serious amount of fish.

I live on the Ballynure side of Ballyclare. The river water in that area has been great. Fish counts indicate that there is great recovery at that part of the Sixmilewater. I just hope and pray that the invertebrate tests that are being undertaken show that we still have invertebrate and fly life in the river bed. That is important.

There is frustration about the way in which officials dealt with the matter on the day. When they arrived, they were ill-equipped to go into the river to take samples and deal with the matter.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Girvan: I am happy to give way.

Mr Clarke: I note what you say about the actions of the officials. You touched on the fact that the issue is cross-departmental. Do you agree that there has to be a more joined-up approach, with all Departments working together? I was there that day, and they were working hundreds of yards apart and not joining forces.

Mr Girvan: I said that a major cross-departmental approach is needed. These are wonderful natural resources. Whether people believe it or not, fishing is one of the most-followed sports in Northern Ireland. Fishing does not take away from fish in rivers; it ensures that there are fish in rivers. We have catch and release to ensure that we have a sustainable fish stock in the watercourse of the Sixmilewater, and that is vital.

On many occasions, money also came from other Departments to help to restock the river. Funding came from DARD and DCAL to help us with that. However, we are not addressing the link. If a farmer had been guilty of this pollution, a smoking gun would have pointed us directly to where it came from. In 2008, we had a major problem on the Ballymartin river, which feeds directly into the Sixmilewater. That wiped out virtually everything right down to Antrim.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Girvan: I will, yes.

Mr Clarke: I appreciate that I will get an opportunity to speak in a few moments, but you mentioned farmers and smoking guns. I am pleased that the Minister of the Environment is here today. Does the Member agree that the paltry fines for people who have been caught and prosecuted do not deter them from doing it again? There are anglers in the Gallery today, and some of us have been approached about another discharge into a watercourse in the same vicinity. When people are prosecuted, they get only a paltry fine, which does not deter them from doing it again.

Mr Girvan: I have to agree with the Member. Sufficient penalties are not in place to ensure that they do not do it again. It is sometimes easier to allow the pollution and pay the fine. Unfortunately, that has been the case on many occasions. We need to ensure that that loophole is closed and that those who pollute are made to pay. That needs to be dealt with correctly, whether by a government agency or a Department.

I referred to the Ballymartin incident, which polluted and killed everything from where the discharge entered in Mallusk to where the river enters Lough Neagh. There is a water treatment plant in Lough Neagh that extracts drinking water, and it is not far from where the Sixmilewater enters Lough Neagh. We also have to think of the public's health and welfare. Whatever goes into Lough Neagh and the Sixmilewater ultimately ends up in our drinking water.

7.00 pm

It is vital that we are having this debate this evening. I am opposed to Departments trying to cover up and not engage or feed back the information to those who are on the ground. We have the Six Mile Water Trust, the Ballynure Angling Club and the Antrim and District Angling Association, all of which have best interests at heart in trying to deal with the matter. Unfortunately, the Department tends to hide behind saying, "We have to take the samples; you can't bring us samples. We have to actually take the fish; you can't take the fish out of the river." When the incident was happening, the fish were struggling in the water. Three weeks later, we still have not got any results or answers about what caused the incident or what pollutant was in the fish. So, I will be asking further questions.

I hope that the Minister takes this back. There is a frustration about how NIEA has dealt with this matter and how it deals with other such matters. I appreciate that the Minister is here this evening, but I believe that the Department for Regional Development, which, along with DARD, potentially causes more pollution than any other Department, should also be represented here to answer questions.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas as an seans an t-ábhar seo a phlé.

I thank Mr Girvan, a Member on the opposite Benches, for securing this topic for the Adjournment debate. I declare an interest as an angler and, indeed, as a Member who has been trying to put together an all-party group on angling for quite some time. There are quite a number of active anglers in the Assembly, and I think that it would be useful to put together such a group so that we can discuss these and other matters that affect angling, which is, of course, one of the biggest participant sports in the world.

It is very unfortunate that we are gathered here yet again to discuss another pollution incident, particularly on the river in question. Wearing my DCAL hat — I also wear a DRD hat — I have worked with anglers, particularly those on the feeder streams of Lough Neagh. I was instrumental in putting together a funding package for Professor Paolo Prodöhl, a professor of genetics and DNA in Queen's University. He was working on a project on dollaghan in Lough Neagh and the individual species in the lough and its feeder rivers. I know that quite a number of the anglers helped with that by providing scale and fin samples. They

were working towards producing a report, so the pollution incident was a major setback to that development work and to the unique species that is Lough Neagh dollaghan. We have dollaghan in other lakes across Ireland, whether it is ferox in Lough Corrib or gillaroo in Lough Melvin. They are a unique species and attract many foreign visitors who come for a specialist fishing experience.

The fish-kill details are quite horrifying when one considers the length and state of the water. I know that it is called the Sixmilewater, but I believe it is 26 miles long. There will be a gae lang yarn in telling how the name came about, and I am sure that Mr Girvan knows it. Regardless of that, it is quite horrifying that, over two days, 964 fish were confirmed to be recovered, but that is not to say that there were not hundreds, if not thousands, more.

I have the details here. On 29 October, there were 82 1 lb-plus fish, 294 2 lb-plus fish and 68 3 lb to 10 lb-plus fish. On 30 October, there were 201 1 lb-plus trout, 106 2 lb-plus trout and 66 3 lb-plus trout. The last two categories are the breeding stock, so if you lose them at any stage, there goes your stock in the river.

Mr Girvan referred to a number of officials, and I think that part of the problem that we have in dealing with pollution incidents is that it is a multi-departmental issue. I have a very detailed report from Ballynure Angling Club from 29 and 30 October. The club had people on the ground, and there were departmental officials and officials from NI Water, NIEA and DCAL and what have you. I share Mr Girvan's frustration about the lack of information so far, which will continue in the days and weeks ahead.

I will refer to another incident on my own river in July 2005, which happened mid-afternoon.

By 5.00 pm, I knew the chemical involved and the source of the chemical involved. I knew the timing of the incident, and I nearly knew how many fish were killed. It still took the NIEA until 2011 to identify the polluter, and it took until 2013 to actually bring it to court. The company was fined a derisory sum at that time. I do not think that that sends out the right message to anybody who is interested in our natural environment and in our native species. That is an example. I am giving fair warning not to expect an answer any time soon. It is up to us to push this matter.

It is regrettable that responsibility for this matter goes across four Departments: DARD, DRD, DOE and DCAL. That is the nature of it, and I think that it is something that we have to look at in the Assembly, particularly with anything to do with rivers and the wildlife there. As I said, the very detailed report from Ballynure is there. I think it is a very good idea that it was recorded. It is a blow-by-blow account. It is almost a minute-by-minute account of phone calls going into the Departments, the responses of the officials, and how they came out.

I was contacted by the DCAL inland fisheries people as recently as yesterday. They said that they have talked to the likes of Billy Robinson, the chair of Ballynure Angling Club, and they have said that they want to clarify how angling clubs can assist DCAL with any further fish kills. I welcome that, and I hope that that piece of work will be done sooner rather than later.

I understand the restrictions there might be on removing fish because we do not always know what source the fish will come from, but I think that a general assessment can be made that, once there is a fish kill, nobody will be bringing fish in from any other river until what has happened there and then has been assessed.

So, there is a piece of work that we must do in hoping to address this. It will be poor consolation to Ballynure anglers and other anglers. They have lost 1,000 fish from the stock. How many years will it take to rebuild that? It is the breeding stock. Fortunately, some of the up-river breeder streams have been saved, and, seemingly, the pollutant passed through relatively quickly. It is a regrettable incident, and I think that, in real terms, environmental crime like this should get the punishment it requires and not the paltry sums that companies and others are being fined. I have absolutely no bother in supporting the debate, and I hope that everyone else will.

Mr Kinahan: Before we start, I need to declare an interest in that I own some land that neighbours on to the Sixmilewater. I am not sure that that means that I actually own any of the river, but I declare an interest anyway.

I welcome the debate. It is sad that we have to do it again. One of the first debates I led was on exactly this subject a few years ago. We really have to get to the point where it does not happen, and I hope that it never happens again.

The Minister has heard the details of this fish kill, and what I am really asking for is that we look at a new way of dealing with things. We are asking for a review of how things are done so that we get an immediate, comprehensive and open and transparent action on the day, and from then on, so that we eventually know who the polluter is and that the polluter pays. We all need to be involved, but it needs to be immediate and fast.

I know that DCAL and the NIEA were down on the day. I am sorry that I was not there; I was away on holiday. They could not cover every angle, and I feel that we should have a really comprehensive list, on every river, of all the people who neighbour on to a river and all the people who could pollute it so that when a pollution incident happens people know exactly who to check and who the most likely polluters are. They could then go straight to those locations and not be limited by numbers.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he recognise that the nature of the water and sewerage system in this part of the world is, for the most part in many, many places, a combined storm and sewerage system? To actually trace the original source is sometimes very difficult, and that is maybe something that we have to look at as well.

Mr Kinahan: I certainly agree that it is difficult, but it is a task that I think we should start doing. If you at least have a good database, you can move forward. Within that, you need to have trained samplers.

I have asked for that already in the Chamber two or three times. We really need much better use of volunteers and all the people who are involved on the rivers and could sample. We need to look at where sampling should be happening all the time and how it should be done. We should also ensure that it is not just government sampling by government sources. We need some form of independent sampling and something that can hold government to account if, indeed, it is the polluter. It needs to be thorough, and it needs to happen extremely quickly.

I know that one Member mentioned that the treatment plant may have been responsible in this case. However, there are two industrial areas that need to be checked and a waste area that might be leaching. We need to have a thorough check. As I said, that all needs to happen at the beginning. Therefore, we need a good database.

I know that we have extremely good groups working on the river, and some of them are sitting here in the Chamber above me. We have the Six Mile Water Trust — the anglers. Today, I want to praise not only them but the good work done on many occasions by the A8 team when they were contacted. When things went wrong, they dealt with them. However, things should not have gone wrong. We also have very good relationships with the wastewater plant. Yet, there are still things that we can all do better. Everyone is working together, and the reason I raise that is because that is the way we should be working — in partnerships. We need to find better ways of working, particularly at a time of fewer resources.

As already touched on, we need suitable fines. Under the fining system, for an offence committed on a non-commercial basis it is a £2,000 fine plus a compensation order with a sentencing range between £1,000 and three months in custody and compensation. For an offence committed on a commercial basis, two months in custody and as high as a £10,000 fine and three months.

Mr Girvan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I am happy to give way.

Mr Girvan: I appreciate that the Member is focusing on the fines, most of which will apply to private businesses. If it is identified that pollution comes from a government agency, how do we deal with that? That is one of the problems that we have. On many occasions, we pursue the wee man, but, sometimes, it is a government agency that has caused the problem. How do we ensure that such agencies are made answerable so that it does not happen again?

Mr Kinahan: I entirely agree. There is a maximum £20,000 fine, but the Minister and we, as politicians, need to find a better way forward so that there is a suitable punishment and suitable compensation is paid. That is key.

I have been told by one observer that otters, kingfishers and dippers were back on the Sixmilewater and that they had all come back since 2008, although I have not seen them myself. I wrote a note of congratulation in the press when we heard that dollaghan, trout and salmon were well back in the river and of a decent size. Then we got the pollution. That is why I ask the Minister again to review how we deal with this.

On Friday, the Six Mile Water Trust met Jim Nicholson. Many other issues were raised, all of which are relevant. We do not seem to be working properly to the European water directive. Will the Minister please look at how we can enforce that throughout Northern Ireland and not just on the Sixmilewater?

There used to be two very good biannual cross-sectoral departmental meetings at which everything was discussed. Those have been stopped. They were very useful for everybody, and we need those to start again or find something suitable to replace them.

We need to know who is responsible for cleaning out rivers — when things are left in rivers, whose responsibility is it? If we do not know who is responsible, items just stay in rivers, and you get flooding like that which happened in Antrim a few years ago when the bridges blocked up and the water found its way into people's homes. Equally, there does not seem to be any monitoring system for consents to discharge: when someone has consent to discharge, no one checks what they discharge.

A whole lot of things lead to the pollution of rivers, and what I am really asking is whether the Minister will review the situation. I know that the Deputy Speaker will be very keen for me to stop there. However, remember that angling is not just a hobby or a livelihood; it helps the whole ecosystem. I look forward to things changing in the future.

7.15 pm

Mr Clarke: I am happy to follow on from the comments that my South Antrim colleague has made. I was fortunate — unfortunate, I should say — to be there that day. I say "unfortunate", because none of us wants to be there when such devastation is caused to a river. We have anglers in the Public Gallery tonight. On the day of the incident, I noticed that there were some very young anglers present. They are the anglers of the future. Seeing their disappointment struck me more than anything else.

I have listened to the other contributions. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, your colleague on the Benches opposite talked about DCAL's responsibility. Among the things that struck me that day were, first, the time that it took DCAL to come out and, secondly, the time that it took its officials to act when they got there. They tried to explain the responsibility rather than get on with the job of trying to find the source of the problem. Many of the anglers knew that, if the fish kill did not happen during the night, it certainly happened in the early hours of the morning. However, DCAL officials arrived at 1.00 pm and spoke to some of the fishermen in, I would say, an argumentative manner. The fishermen thought that they were doing their best by bringing some of the fish out and preventing them going further down river. I also thought that the fishermen, particularly some of the young lads, were doing their best. The Member opposite gave us a very detailed account of the number of fish involved. However, DCAL discounted any of the fish that already had been lifted out. Everyone from the fishing fraternity who was there was interested in that stretch of the river. They certainly were not introducing other fish on that day. Anything that was lifted out that day came from that stretch of the river.

I am not necessarily trying to get into the blame game, but we have had agencies involved in pollution before. Departments have been a bit cloak and dagger about some of this stuff, because the first fish that were identified that day, certainly up to the time that I was there, were identified downstream from the waste water treatment works. That would lead you to the very strong conclusion that the pollution was coming from that facility. As a public representative who was there that day and went to the waste water treatment works, I did not see cooperation: I did not get past the gate. It was nearly as if they were in defence mode — "We'll keep you guys out, because we don't want you to see what is going on in here". I am led to believe that someone from the fishing fraternity was there before me. I am unsure of what sort of reception that individual got, but, when I arrived at the gate, there was not a very welcoming reception. It was not one that said,

"We've an open-door policy. Come on in and see that we are not guilty. We're actually trying to work with you to prevent incidents such as this". From a government point of view and a public representative point of view, it was very disappointing. There was not much transparency at the waste water treatment plant.

That does not take away from the responsibilities of others. Regardless of whether the treatment works turns out to be guilty or not guilty, it needs to be more transparent in its operation. As my colleague said, there has been a suggestion of investment for that plant. There are also suggestions of a requirement of investment for other plants. The sooner that the Minister brings that to fruition, the better, because, if it was not the treatment works this time, there is every possibility that it could be it in the future. We are not going to prevent such incidents until proper investment is made in the plant.

My colleague from South Antrim mentioned discharging and consent to discharge. He makes a very interesting point. The Minister is here to respond today. One of the things that strikes me is that, although this was the Sixmilewater, we just have to travel further towards Antrim. Up until next year, Minister, you have power over planning. I have always been intrigued by the fact that DOE's Planning Service passed so much development on the edge of the river. Look at Grainger's Mill on the road into Antrim and the flooding incidents there. Look at the pollution that that has to cause. Once the river breaches its banks, gets in around developments and enters the sewerage system and oil tanks, it is pretty obvious that that pollution will enter a river. As a public representative, I have always been disappointed at how the agencies in the consultation process have approached the planning process. They do not give any consideration to our rivers.

Some Members talked about what the angling clubs have done. I know that another representation is being made to each of the South Antrim representatives on an incident on the upper side of Glenavy, where there has been a report of another fish kill. There has been huge investment there by anglers, just as there has been a lot of investment by anglers on this stretch of river. We had another incident earlier this year, and it is believed that the person responsible has been guilty of polluting before. What does that say? Does it say that you can continually pollute? Pollute, pollute, pay a small fine and pollute again. It is time that you, Minister, and your Department did something to prevent that. Discharges are happening and have happened, and, if someone has been found guilty, something has to be done to prevent them using the discharge opportunity to go into our watercourse.

Unlike the Member opposite, I was a fisherman many years ago when I was a young lad, and, when I was at the Sixmilewater, I was struck by the passion that those young lads had about fishing. I have family who regularly come from England and bring people to fish our rivers in Northern Ireland, so what we have here is attracting people. We have a rich resource and some good fishing grounds in Northern Ireland, and there is tourist potential for that. However, if such incidents are allowed to continue, what we have we will lose, because, unfortunately, it takes the rivers some time to recover. I note that some Members said today that the pollution flowed past quickly in this incident, but what about the next one? That is what alarms me most.

The people who are in the Public Gallery are not here tonight for tea and sympathy. I think that they want to hear the Minister coming forward with sound suggestions on how we will tackle the problem. We have talked about it before, and we could come back here in three months' time and talk about the same thing. We need action from DOE, DRD and DARD. The sooner the three Departments knock their heads together and try to take a coordinated approach to prevent incidents such as this happening again, the better. It is better for the Sixmilewater, and it will be better for all the watercourses in Northern Ireland. Until it is sorted, all the tea and sympathy that we can give will make absolutely no difference. We need action on the rivers, and we need it now.

Mrs Cameron: I rise as a Member for South Antrim and not as Deputy Chair of the Environment Committee. I thank my colleague Paul Girvan for bringing this important matter to the House this evening.

On 29 October, anglers discovered dozens of dead fish in the stretch of Sixmilewater. Upon inspection by the Rivers Agency, a total of 964 dead fish were found, and a major fish kill was declared. The Department of the Environment and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency assessed the area, and the pollution in the river was classified as being of high severity. It is the third major incident on this stretch of river in the past six years. It has been a devastating blow for local anglers, particularly for Ballynure Angling Club, who have worked tirelessly to restock the river following previous pollution incidents and ensure that the environment is conducive to aquatic life. This latest incident has, once again, decimated the river and undone all the hard work that has been carried out to return the river to full stock.

Given that the river is an important tributary of Lough Neagh, the pollution of the river has huge implications for the whole of Northern Ireland. As we are all aware, Lough Neagh has a vastly significant ecosystem, and the wider implications of fish kills such as this should not be underestimated. Lough Neagh is a significant breeding and spawning ground for fish such as pollan, Atlantic salmon and European eels and is home to kingfishers, sand martins, otters and bats, amongst many other species of flora and fauna.

Pollution on the scale of the recent Sixmilewater incident is sure to affect the delicate environmental balance of the area for many months or even years to come. The Sixmilewater is an important habitat for the dollaghan trout that migrate from Lough Neagh in the autumn to spawn in its tributaries. Given that the latest incident occurred in late October, it will have a devastating effect on the dollaghan population of Northern Ireland. Whilst I am pleased that the Department of the Environment, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure acted quickly to minimise the impact of the incident in the short to medium term, a commitment must be given to find the source of the incident, and the perpetrator must be brought to justice.

The penalties for environmental crime are simply not robust enough to act as a deterrent to individuals and businesses intent on wreaking havoc on our environment. I would like to use this opportunity to call on the Minister of Justice to ensure that adequate resources are directed to ensuring that the perpetrators of environmental crime feel the full force of the law. Currently, sentencing is inconsistent and too lenient and serves no purpose in

acting as a deterrent to those who feel that it is acceptable to carry out such acts.

A joined-up approach between the Department of the Environment, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Justice is long overdue so that a clear message can be sent to the culprits of environmental crime that they will be subject to the full rigor of the law. I hope that the recent incident on the Sixmilewater is fully investigated, the source identified and prosecution sought. Environmental crime is a growing problem that cannot be overlooked or underestimated. It is a problem that affects each and every one of us, although, at times, it is often taken lightly. The long-term ramifications cannot be disregarded, and we must do all within our control to discourage and deter those who think that it is acceptable to pollute, contaminate and poison our environment.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. My Department was first alerted to the fish kill on the Sixmilewater at Ballyclare on the morning of Wednesday 29 October 2014 when a report was received, via the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's water pollution hotline, of a number of dead fish at Ballyclare. Mr Girvan said that it was with great sadness that people learned of the incident, and that is certainly and sadly true.

NIEA staff were immediately tasked with investigating the report. During the subsequent NIEA investigation, statutory samples were collected from two different premises, and NIEA's investigation of events at those premises remains ongoing. A number of other potential sources of pollution in the catchment were also visited and investigated by my NIEA staff to rule them out of the inquiry.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is the lead Department for fisheries protection, and its inland fisheries group was also informed of the fish kill by NIEA.

Mr Clarke: I appreciate the Minister giving way. I know that you are moving on to DCAL, but in your Department, we are some weeks past, and you said that you have ruled some out. Is the Minister prepared to say on the record today who has not been ruled out, whether the wastewater treatment works has not been entirely ruled out and where NIEA is at with those samples? The Member opposite has stated the number of years it has taken to get an outcome on these.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Clarke for his intervention. As only two have not been ruled out, I am not really at liberty to identify who they are at this stage. However, as I said, investigations are ongoing. We want to be sure that we get these investigations right and that we ensure that not only does the polluter pay but that the polluter prevents any incidents of pollution from happening again.

The subsequent DCAL investigation confirmed that a total of 964 fish of all sizes had been killed. Mr Ó hOisín gave a breakdown of the sizes of the fish and, given his expressed interest in angling, I was waiting to hear about the one that was this size.

As part of the investigation, NIEA also collected a number of investigatory water samples and carried out a detailed biological survey of the river and its tributaries. Analysis of the findings from those samples and surveys is continuing. I am very conscious that there have, unfortunately, been two previous serious fish kills on the Sixmilewater in recent years, one in 2008 and one in 2011, and other Members referred to that. It is, therefore, particularly disappointing that a further serious fish kill has now occurred, especially given all the hard work by local angling clubs and by my Department in the aftermath of those previous incidents. Following the two previous serious fish kills, NIEA devoted a lot of time and effort to minimising pollution risk throughout the Sixmilewater catchment, including, for example, detailed inspections of all industrial premises in the Ballyclare and Mallusk areas. Those inspections identified a number of pollution risks, all of which were addressed, greatly reducing the overall pollution risk in the catchment.

7.30 pm

NIEA has worked closely with a wide range of stakeholders, such as anglers and a number of other agencies, to protect and improve the Sixmilewater. Mr Girvan expressed frustration that interaction and collaboration with river users is not what it should be, but it certainly cannot be accused of being non-existent. A good example of that practical cooperative effort is that, about six years ago, NIEA established a number of catchment stakeholder groups to allow the public to have a direct input into protecting their local rivers. As part of that initiative, a dedicated Lower Bann stakeholder group was established, whose area of responsibility includes the Sixmilewater and its tributaries. Those stakeholder groups each meet twice a year and allow local anglers and local people to work directly with a wide range of Departments and agencies to help protect and improve their local rivers.

I understand that anglers on and around the Sixmilewater have been particularly enthusiastic participants in the stakeholder groups and that their practical input has been and is of great value. For example, anglers on the Sixmilewater have taken part in environmental monitoring programmes, which feed into and complement government-led monitoring programmes. Officials have also been closely involved in providing advice and support to the Six Mile Water Trust, which I am aware plays an important role in the protection and enhancement of the river. I therefore understand and share the frustration of local people and anglers that, following all that enthusiastic hard work, a further serious fish kill has occurred.

Mr Clarke and others spoke of the paltry nature of the fines, and, yes, there is indeed some strong evidence that average fines for water pollution offences are higher in, for example, England and Wales than here in the North. However, as quite rightly identified by Mrs Cameron, the levels of fine imposed are entirely in the power of the courts and are well beyond the remit of my Department. I can, however, assure you that I and my Department are committed to thoroughly investigating the cause of the latest fish kill and to continuing to work — and improving that work — with other Departments, local anglers and local people to protect the Sixmilewater and other rivers and watercourses.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for giving way. It is not in my constituency, but the Minister and others referred to the fines and sentencing. Has the Minister had any discussions with his colleague the Justice Minister to consider whether there is room in the Justice Bill to look at changes to sentencing or at working with that agency to look at a potential change to fines?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the intervention.

In conclusion, I hope very shortly to outline how I intend and am determined to work with other Ministers on this topical and very important subject. Indeed, it is very important that we get this right. I am firm believer that, in any case, the polluter should pay, and I am keen to work with others to identify how we manage our systems better. If that involves utilising volunteers, which it clearly does, I am happy to do that as well. What I am getting loud and clear here today is that partnership working has to be improved, and while I will work with partners and other Departments, let me assure the House that I will not be complicit in or tolerate any whiff of the cover-up that was implied by some Members.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency does not just go after the wee man. The agency pursues other and all polluters. As an outcome of today —

Mr Girvan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: Yes.

Mr Girvan: I did not wish it to be implied; I wanted it to be totally overt. It definitely has gone on and is going on. It is alive and well in the Civil Service.

Mr Durkan: I give the Member an undertaking and a commitment to investigate his allegation — it is not an insinuation any more — robustly.

As an outcome from today, to give the anglers in the Gallery, those anglers in the Chamber and the thousands of anglers outside some sort of comfort and something other than the tea and sympathy that they might expect from here, I am happy to give a commitment to the House that I will undertake to review how the system works and how my Department works with others, including DCAL, DARD, DRD and, importantly, the Department of Justice. I will be happy to get on to that as soon as possible.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: I am interested in Mr Ó hOisín's proposal of an all-party group. I wonder why that has not got off the ground to date. I will give way.

Mr Kinahan: Minister, you said that sectoral groups were meeting, but I am being informed that those meetings have stopped. Whether it is departmental meetings or other meetings, will you please make sure that those are restored so that the partnerships work?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is almost up, but you are at a very important point in your response, so we have a little bit of laxity for you.

Mr Durkan: I am finished the most important parts, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, but, in response to Mr Kinahan's question, I will ensure that existing groups are meeting. Perhaps there is a need for more groups. A group that exists and does not meet might as well not exist, so it is important that we ensure that everything that had previously been put in place and yielded some successful outcomes continues to operate and function.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank all Members for their contributions and the Minister for his attendance and response.

Adjourned at 7.37 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 November 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Speaker's Ruling: Standards of Debate

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before we commence today's business, Members should be aware that they are expected to treat each other with courtesy, good temper and moderation when in the Assembly. The standards of debate are there to try to protect the dignity of the Chamber.

I advise Members that Deputy Speaker Dallat has written to the Member who raised a point of order after the Health Minister's statement last week and we consider the matter closed. However, we are increasingly concerned about the number of remarks being made and conversations taking place from a sedentary position. This is a debating Chamber, and Members are not expected to be heard in complete silence. However, a number of Members are constantly barracking and conducting private conversations, making it difficult for the Chair, and indeed anyone else, to hear the Member who has the Floor.

We will, therefore, be keeping an eye on Members who continually talk disruptively while other Members have the Floor. They may well find that they will not be called to make their own contribution to a particular debate. I ask Members to bear that in mind and ensure that they treat this Chamber and other Members with courtesy and good temper in what they say.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order to ask whether the Speaker's Office will be initiating or seeking any investigation into the revelation that Sinn Féin MLAs have been laundering expenses through bogus front organisations?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): As the Member will know, that is not an issue for the Speaker's Office. An independent body is charged with looking after the financial considerations of Members. It will be its duty to further investigate. I believe that that body is consulting, and if it deems it necessary to alter the rules and regulations at some point in the future, that is an entirely independent issue for that body. Members do, of course, have a right to debate any issue, but, ultimately, the decision on such matters has been formally granted to the independent body that governs Assembly Members' expenses.

Public Petition: Putting Patients First

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Ms Maeve McLaughlin has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes in which to speak.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to present this public petition to the Assembly. The petition 'Putting Patients First' is not only a principled approach to how we should and could deliver health care, it also gives voice to thousands of people across the North in their support for their general practices. Over 16,000 people across the North have signed the petition. In order to shift left, from acute to community or primary care and early intervention, it is important that we acknowledge the increasing pressures on GPs and that we equally support the infrastructure to deliver the very services that we all envisage under Transforming Your Care.

GPs will be a necessary part of the shift from hospitals to care in the community. The petition calls for general practice to receive 11% of the health-care budget. That shift would enable general practice to deliver shorter waiting times for appointments and more flexible opening hours, longer appointments and consultations, better continuity of care and positive benefits for health services as a whole, and reducing pressures, very clearly, in our hospitals and emergency departments.

Funding for general practice in the North fell by £21·2 million between 2008-09 and 2012-13, which is a decrease of 8·2%. That is alongside a 7% increase in activity at general practices last year alone. GP out-of-hours activity has increased by 18% over the last five years. Therefore, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker — Mr Deputy Speaker, gabh mo leithscéal — to deliver care to an ageing population, Transforming Your Care needs to deliver more GPs, practice nurses, district nurses and health visitors, backed up by pharmacy colleagues and members of the allied health professionals in the community.

GPs are indeed encouraged by recent investment in premises and they encourage more investment in the hub-and-spoke model. I am particularly pleased that the city side in Derry has been identified as a priority project. However, GPs feel that they are not engaged with the Transforming Your Care process and they most certainly feel that work on the process to shift the base has not followed.

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I am pleased to present this petition and I look forward to a positive response.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I will forward the petition to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and send a copy of it to the Health Committee.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Transport — Roads and Transport

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Deputy Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in the transport sector held in Armagh, on Wednesday 5 November 2014. The meeting was chaired by Minister Donohoe and was attended by me and Minister Durkan. My statement will address the agenda items which relate to my Department.

The Council discussed the UK road user levy for HGVs. We agreed to continue to liaise on the issue and its potential impacts. The Council welcomed the continued cooperation between the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department for Regional Development on strategic transport priorities throughout the island, including the ongoing engagement on key areas, such as development of the strategic road network, enhancing east-west connections, driving a shift to public and more sustainable modes of transport and exploring the potential for shared cross-border public transport in border areas.

The Council acknowledged the ongoing positive cooperation between relevant Departments on EU-related transport issues and the opportunities that are being explored to pursue EU funding in a mutually beneficial manner, including maximising cross-border Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) transport funding opportunities; utilising INTERREG programmes for a joined-up cross-border transport and tourism infrastructure; and pursuing Horizon 2020 smart, green and integrated transport cooperation opportunities.

We noted the current position on key EU dossiers of mutual interest, including the Europe 2020 mid-term review and the outcome of the informal ministerial meeting; port services; the cross-border exchange of information on road traffic offences; the fourth railway package; and the Single European Sky ATM Research (SESAR).

The Council welcomed an update of the progress of the INTERREG IVa-funded refurbishment works on the Dublin-Belfast Enterprise rail service and the Drogheda railway viaduct.

The Council welcomed the continued investment by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department for Regional Development in the promotion and development of sustainable transport options, including cycling.

It also welcomed the strategic joint decision by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to support the identification and development of possible INTERREG V funding for cross-border greenways. The Council welcomed my Department's work on establishing a greenways working group, initially consisting of key stakeholders from Northern Ireland, to scope a plan for the development of greenways. It noted that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport would welcome any invitation to be included in full or in part on that working group.

On major road projects, the Council noted the ongoing public consultation on the final report informing the appropriate assessment process for the A5, and it was

also noted that, when published, the new environmental statement will be subject to a public consultation and may lead to a further public inquiry. We also noted that both Governments remain committed to the A5 scheme. The Council welcomed that the A8 project is progressing well and that the road is expected to open by spring 2015.

The Council agreed to hold its next NSMC transport meeting in April 2015.

Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I thank the Minister for such a brief statement. I note that his statement says that the Council raised the matter of the HGV levies and the perceived impact that they may have on hauliers from the Republic coming to Northern Ireland. However, did the Minister raise the not perceived but very real fact that there are tolls in the Republic of Ireland and that they have an impact on Northern Ireland hauliers travelling down there?

Can the Minister provide the House with details of the greenways working group that he appears to have established but that some of us are maybe not familiar with as yet?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question and, indeed, for his compliment that my statement was brief.

The Minister of the Environment will largely deal with HGV levies, and he will do so in some detail — he will thank me for that — in his statement. However, it is fair to say that the issue that the Member raised about the differences that exist because of the tolls that apply in the Republic of Ireland is worthy of consideration and should therefore not be ignored in the context of that discussion.

I think that there are potential opportunities to get assisted European funding for the cross-border greenways initiative, and the Member will be aware that, in Newry and Mourne and in the Cooley areas of County Louth in the Republic of Ireland in particular, there are greenway projects for the advancement of cycling and walking. Those are the matters that we would pursue on that.

Obviously, the NSMC does not have any role in considering greenway projects, such as the Comber greenway, in Northern Ireland.

12.15 pm

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the statement that the Government remain committed to the A5 scheme.

Following on from Mr Clarke, I will pick up on the greenways working group. I welcome the fact that it has been established. I note that the consultation on the draft bicycle strategy concluded on Friday. Will information from the greenways working group feed into the bicycle strategy's delivery plan?

I will draw on the experience that the Committee gained from going to County Mayo, where we learned about the Great Western Railway, which has been transformed, with part of it being used as a greenway with great success in the local area. Is the Minister minded to look at the possibility that sections of the Great Northern Railway in Ulster be part of a similar type of greenway project?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Indeed, he will know that my Department's cycling unit has begun work on scoping out a greenway plan for Northern Ireland, although it does not envisage being involved in the delivery or construction of the greenways, because my Department's statutory responsibilities relate to public roads. The majority of the greenways will be located off-road.

Our aim is to bring together the relevant organisations and to support and facilitate greenway projects being developed by local authorities in a coherent way. The Member will also note the clear distinction about work that is being looked at or brought forward by the North/South Ministerial Council, which is what we are discussing today. There may be schemes or projects that we would be interested in looking at on a cross-border basis. Obviously, greenways in Northern Ireland remain the preserve of local Ministers.

Mr Dallat: I desperately want to bring a bit of good news to the Chamber this afternoon. I inform the Minister that I was on the Belfast to Derry train on Saturday, and it was packed to capacity in both directions. Many of the passengers whom I spoke to were from the Republic. Will the Minister assure the House that, in cooperation with the Republic's Government, everything is being done to source European funding to help to rebuild the infrastructure of the permanent way and the railway stations, particularly the station in Derry?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his good news. It is good news that there are ever-increasing numbers using not only trains in Northern Ireland but the cross-border Enterprise service. We can happily agree that that is indeed good news.

The Member will also be aware of the very good news that, under the INTERREG IVa project, through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), we are getting additional finance to refurbish the Enterprise service extensively, which will be good news. I also travelled on the Enterprise service recently. Whilst it was a very good experience, I think that there are grounds for further improvements.

The Member will also know that the Department is pursuing opportunities for further European funding projects, including for the old Waterside station. I know that he and the Committee for Regional Development will support that as we seek to move it forward.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his statement. I also welcome his comments on the old railway station in the Waterside in Londonderry. Will he detail the work that is being carried out by his Department under Horizon 2020?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his positive comments and, indeed, his contribution to the Committee for Regional Development and his commitment to projects in the north-west.

Horizon 2020 is the EU's biggest research and innovation programme, with nearly €80 billion of funding available between 2014 and 2020. The transport objective under the Horizon 2020 programme is entitled 'Smart, Green and Integrated Transport' and has been allocated a budget of €6·4 million. It aims to support:

> *"better mobility, less congestion, more safety and security with a substantial reduction of traffic congestion; with a substantial improvement in the mobility of people and freight ... and by reducing accident rates, fatalities and casualties and improving security."*

There could be significant opportunities for DRD, other Departments and our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland to work in partnership in the identification of projects and the preparation of applications that seek Horizon 2020 funding. With the aim of maximising those opportunities, I recently led a delegation to Brussels to meet the CEO of the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency, which operates Horizon 2020. My Department is open to working together with those of Minister Donohoe and Minister Durkan through the NSMC forum to ensure that those opportunities are realised.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the identification of sustainable transport, including cycling, as a strategic priority for the North/South Ministerial Council. How are the Minister and the Minister of the Environment working to ensure that the introduction of a single-tier taxi scheme does not overload bus lanes or limit his attempts to improve bus and cycle provision in Belfast and Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I am very grateful to the Member for the very clever way in which he introduced business that is not the business of the North/South Ministerial Council or the report of the meeting into his question. Clearly, he has learned a political skill. The Member will know that there are ongoing discussions between me and Minister Durkan as to how that issue can be properly resolved to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his statement. On strategic transport priorities, you talked about enhancing east-west connections. What are you are talking about in terms of enhancing those? Will you expand?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. Clearly, whilst NSMC will deal with cross-border issues, we will always seek to maximise opportunities through the British-Irish Council (BIC), which is not part of the statement. We clearly reference that work as being important; it is not just North/South but east-west. We look positively at opportunities that there may well be for us in that respect.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo. I thank the Minister for his statement. Under strategic transport priorities, Minister, you talked about:

> *"exploring the potential for shared cross-border public transport in border areas."*

Will you elaborate and expand on that?

Mr Kennedy: Could the Member repeat the latter part of the question? I beg your pardon.

Mr Lynch: You talked about:

> *"exploring the potential for shared cross-border public transport in border areas."*

I would like you to expand on that, Minister. Thank you.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Principally, it is the work around the Enterprise, which is important work, and the rail services. Of course, there are also the Translink and bus services on a cross-border basis that occur. It is to look to see how we can best improve timings, ultimately, of the Enterprise service, hopefully, to put it into more frequent service given its popularity and to ensure that the cross-border bus services are fully efficient and effective.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement. In relation to strategic transport priorities and the east-west connections that you mentioned, have you had any continued discussions with the Scottish Government on the A75, given the effect that freight transport has travelling on the A75 from the ports of Larne and Belfast? That is something that was being looked at under European funding possibilities as well.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his interest in and question on the matter. The A75 link route into Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom has to remain an important focus of our cooperation on an ongoing basis. We continue to look at ways of improving it through lobbying the Scottish Government and perhaps bringing forward innovative ideas that would garner support not only in the Executive but, potentially, with the Scottish Government and which would also have EU involvement. Some of that work is still at a relatively early stage, but I am happy to confirm that we are pursuing it.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an ráitis sin. I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, given that some EU funding has been used in the provision of transport and tourism infrastructure, namely the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry, were there any discussions on extending that to make sure of a year-round service of that ferry?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. As he and other Members, particularly Mr Dallat who has raised this issue on an ongoing basis, will know, my Department has had no previous involvement with the funding of that project, and there are no plans to change that at this point. I am aware of the interest of Members, particular Members from that constituency, and of the councils involved. However, primarily, that would be a project for the councils involved to carry forward.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome his mention of the A5 road. In relation to the A5 road, would the Minister support the call locally for the new bridge that would be required across the Finn between Lifford and Strabane to be started as a very positive signal showing a serious commitment to the building of this project?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Of course, the Member has a longstanding interest in seeing the development of the A5. As I have outlined here, and, indeed, at the NSMC, the current situation is that we continue to work through the various reports to inform the appropriate assessments. I am not at liberty to go further than that through the statement or at this time.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's mention of the A5 and confirmation that it remains an Executive and a North/South Ministerial Council priority. Can I ask the Minister to outline the timetable for progressing the A5 project in the remaining weeks of 2014 and in 2015? What level of funding commitment is there from his Department and from the Government in Dublin?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. The Member will know about the appropriate assessments: the three assessments that have been carried out and the one on Tully Bog, consultation on which is due to end later this week on 28 November. We will need to take those into consideration. The next step in progressing the scheme will be the publication of the new environmental

statement, draft vesting orders and draft direction orders. Development work on those is at an advanced stage, but a firm date for publication cannot be given until after consideration of any submissions to the ongoing public consultation exercise on impacts on Tully Bog.

Publication of the new environmental statement and draft orders will be followed by a further consultation lasting a minimum of six weeks, when formal representations and/or objections to the scheme can be made. The Member will know that this consultation is likely to lead to the need for a further public inquiry, but a decision on this can be made only following careful consideration of the representations and the level of objection received in response to the consultation exercise. That may lead to a new public inquiry, which would be likely to be held in 2015.

12.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes questions on the Minister's statement.

North/South Ministerial Council: Transport — Road Safety

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the seventeenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in the transport sector, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 5 November 2014. The meeting was attended by me, the Regional Development Minister, Danny Kennedy, and Minister Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Minister Donohoe chaired the meeting.

I will address those agenda items for which my Department has responsibility: mutual recognition of penalty points; and road user and vehicle safety.

During our opening remarks, we discussed the UK road user levy for HGVs. We agreed to continue to liaise on the issue and its potential impacts.

The Council discussed mutual recognition of penalty points. We noted that a draft EU directive facilitating the cross-border exchange of information on road safety-related traffic is due to come into force in 2017. This will cover the offences being considered by the mutual recognition of penalty points — or MRPP — project. The MRPP steering group will continue to examine the directive and the outcome of a European Commission review of the need to strengthen enforcement with regard to traffic offences, and the implications of these for the MRPP project. The MRPP working group will meet to explore issues relating to the counting down of penalty points in both jurisdictions, and both jurisdictions will continue to carry forward work regarding the prosecution of offences with a view to providing an update on those issues at a future NSMC meeting.

The Council welcomed the continued sharing of knowledge and experience between officials from both jurisdictions on the delivery of road safety measures. We noted the progress and enactment of legislation in both jurisdictions designed to improve road safety, including measures and proposals to address drug- and drink-driving and reform of the learner driver regime.

We welcomed the continuing proactive cooperation to target a wide range of illegal activity in the goods haulage and passenger transport industries, including continuing liaison on successful cross-border enforcement operations in 2014 in both jurisdictions.

The Council noted the recent meeting of a tripartite enforcement planning forum to maximise the benefits of enforcement efforts and to identify synergies from a coordinated enforcement approach, and it welcomed the continued training exchange for enforcement officers.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): That was short, Minister.

Mr Durkan: I just went faster than usual.

Ms Lo: Obviously, road safety is a big issue for the Committee, and it is always very concerned about fatalities and injuries. There have been joint advertising campaigns between the two jurisdictions and sharing of production costs. Given the financial restraints, North and South, was coordination and sharing in these expensive advertising campaigns discussed?

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Lo for her question. It is not often that I get accused of being short in any respect.

Road safety advertising is an emotive issue and, as Ms Lo points out, it is expensive. It has also been extremely effective. Ms Lo quite rightly suggests making it more efficient, if possible, through cross-border collaboration.

She quite rightly said that there has been collaboration on several public information campaigns. Between 2000 and 2007, DOE and the Road Safety Authority shared the production costs for campaigns where there were similar road safety issues to be addressed. For example, there were joint campaigns on issues such as drink-driving, seat-belt wearing, pedestrian safety and speeding.

There has also been the purchase of ads from us by the Republic of Ireland Government and vice versa. Given the financial constraints that both Governments are having to operate within, it is certainly worth exploring where further collaboration can be achieved. We have a tremendous opportunity, through the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, to harmonise the drink-driving limit on both sides of the border. That might provide an opportunity for a new shared campaign.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his brief statement to the House this morning. In relation to road safety, Minister, what actions will you be taking in light of the very tragic death of eight-year-old Adam Gilmore recently? Will you be working with the Education Minister towards ensuring that we have the best road safety measures for our schoolchildren?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for her question. Obviously, the tragedy that occurred recently will have — and certainly should have — focused all our minds on how we can work to maximise road safety and minimise the potential for such a tragedy to occur to anyone on our roads. The fact that something like that could happen to children or a family on their way to school beggars belief, particularly in light of concerns that were raised with the local education and library board on the very real dangers — I was going to say "potential dangers" — being faced by children day and daily on their way to get buses in rural areas or, as is the case in many areas, walking the whole way to school on roads with no footpaths because they do not have buses to get. That is a very important issue.

There is a ministerial working group on road safety that generally comprises me, the Minister for Regional Development and the Justice Minister, but I am keen for an invitation to the next meeting to be extended to the Education Minister to see what work can be done with education boards on the matter.

As a Department, we work very closely with schools. We have outreach programmes that are run very successfully with the schools: the schools enjoy participating in them and find them extremely useful. It is important that we build on the work that has been done and do everything we can to ensure that the likes of this tragedy does not occur again.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. In light of the increase in road fatalities — across the island, there have been nearly 250 road deaths this year — will he consider using media outlets like they do in the South — for example, some of the radio stations in the South notify the number of deaths — to try to get the message out again. I do not believe, Minister, that the message that we have is working, given that there have been 20 more deaths this year than there were at this time last year. Will he consider using other media outlets to get the message out? Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I have said in the House before, and I am happy to say again, that I will consider any option to reduce the number of deaths on our roads. To say that what we are doing is not working may be a wee bit unfair given the drastic reductions that we have seen in the number of fatalities on our roads over a number of years. In 2013, there was an increase on the number in 2012, but 2012 had the lowest number of fatalities on our roads on record, with just 52. That is not to say that we should be resting on our laurels and saying that we cannot do better. For me, one death on our roads is one too many, and I aspire to a time when we have zero road deaths. That may seem beyond our ability, but it certainly should not be beyond our ambition.

The Member's suggestion that we keep the public informed about how many fatalities there have been on the roads is worth looking at again. Last week was Road Safety Week, and I attended a couple of events across the North. I know that Members possibly attended — they certainly would have been invited to — events in their own constituency. I remind all Members of their responsibility to use any opportunity that they have to reinforce road safety messages to their constituents.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers thus far. Why has it taken so long to get to the point of mutual recognition of penalty points?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Eastwood for the question. Progress has been made on advancing that work, and some key policy and operational issues have been agreed to date. The mutual recognition of penalty points working group is continuing to explore the issues relating to the counting down of penalty points in both jurisdictions, with a view to providing an update on those issues at the next NSMC meeting in the transport sector.

The issues arise from a number of technical differences between the two penalty-point systems. For instance, on disqualification, all points on a Northern Ireland licence are wiped, whereas those on a licence in Ireland are suspended. Therefore, a driver disqualified for drink-driving who already has three points for a speeding offence on his or her licence will have those points wiped if it is a Northern Ireland licence, but the points will be on his or her new licence if the driver requalifies after the period of disqualification in the South.

Those differences could in certain circumstances lead to issues of double jeopardy. Given that lawyers are constantly searching for grounds on which to challenge driver disqualification, I am sure that Members will recognise the need to ensure legal certainty on these complicated but important issues. Both jurisdictions will continue to carry forward the work on the prosecution of offences, with a view to providing a report to the next NSMC meeting. The issues include courts' treatment of summonses served outside the jurisdiction, on which Departments are working with their respective courts services to clarify an appropriate, robust way forward.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for the brevity of the report, if nothing else. Mutual recognition is a major benefit, but

there is some concern that it seems to have taken a long time. The report obviously makes reference to 2017 as the date of the EU directive coming into force. Following on from the previous Member, are there any plans to bring in legislation to pre-empt that so that we can be moving rather than waiting? Has there also been any discussion about mutual recognition with the authorities across the water so that we can have a system that applies across the entire British Isles?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Weir for his question. The timetable for the implementation of mutual recognition of penalty points will be dependent on the progress made in assessing how parity in the counting down of penalty points across both jurisdictions can be achieved and on the continuing work on the prosecution of offences. I remain extremely keen to implement mutual recognition as soon as possible, but I recognise that we need to do so confident that there is unlikely to be a successful legal challenge to what is groundbreaking work. The issue of mutual recognition between us, the Republic of Ireland, and England, Scotland and Wales, for example, is one that has been raised with me recently and one that I will raise at the next NSMC meeting.

12.45 pm

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will be aware of my party's total opposition to the introduction of the levy for HGVs travelling into the North. Is he aware of serious disquiet among hauliers in the South and among businesses in all parts of the island regarding this levy? In his discussions with the Irish Government, has he encountered any appetite on their part for introducing a reciprocal levy, which would be a disaster?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McElduff for that question. I am well aware of his party's position on the matter, and I am sure that he is well aware of mine and the fight that I fought to resist having to enforce legislation here that was implemented from elsewhere. I am aware of disquiet among hauliers and other businesses in the Republic around this legislation, and that is more around the legislation than the fact that the DOE will be enforcing it as opposed to the DVLA. In fact, over the weekend, I was, I suppose, approached by a couple of different businesses in the Republic and had similar discussions with them.

I do detect from the Minister in the Republic of Ireland Government an appetite to help me to gain the evidence that will be required to show that the levy is detrimental to the economy in Donegal and in other border areas on both sides of the border. The damage to trade could well take place on both sides of the border. There is a review ongoing by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment of the cost of the haulage industry and the cost of doing business in the haulage industry. I very much hope to tie into that and to figure into that hard evidence from hauliers and from other businesses on how this levy is affecting them. It was the sheer lack of this type of evidence that was used as an excuse, if you like, by Robert Goodwill MP not to grant exemptions here.

Mr I McCrea: I agree with the Minister's comments. As I have said before, one road death is too many. I certainly do not think that it is beyond our ambition to try to achieve zero road deaths. The Minister referred to drug- and drink-driving. He will be aware that detecting people who are drug-driving is very difficult. Was there any discussion about or is the Minister aware of any possible technologies that could be used to try to detect drug-driving? It is probably more overlooked because of the lack of technology.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his very pertinent question. Often, it appears that our focus is on drink-driving, and, while drink-driving remains painfully high, when we look at the causation factors for fatal collisions, drug-driving is well up there as well. It is currently an offence here in the North to drive when under the influence of drink or drugs. The prosecution of this offence requires evidence of impairment at the time of driving, and, all too often and all too sadly, we do not have that evidence until after the event. Again, all too often, it is obtained through a post mortem.

While we have significantly more deaths and serious injuries on our roads through drink-driving, as I said, drugs still figure extremely highly. Last year, six people were killed due to driving while impaired by drugs, whether illegal drugs or, indeed, legal prescription drugs. That is a growing concern. I plan to address this issue with the creation of a similar offence to that recently introduced in Britain that will help to better detect and collect evidence from drivers who are suspected of being impaired through drugs. In effect, this move will bring drug-driving detection into line with drink-driving detection. Proposals for change here will be informed by the work ongoing in Britain and Ireland, but, given the complexity of the issues involved, it is unlikely that the Bill could be taken forward before the next Assembly mandate. In the meantime, I welcome the progress in developing a Road Traffic Bill in Ireland, which will include a range of measures, including the roadside testing of drivers for the presence of drugs. I look forward to the harmonisation with that up here. It would pretty ridiculous if someone could be caught for drug-driving in Donegal and be able to avoid detection just a minute or two down the road.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement and look forward to even greater cooperation between North and South on road safety. Minister, your Department will endure very considerable cuts. Will those impact on road safety, North and South?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. Since a Budget for 2015-16 has not yet been agreed, I cannot provide a full assessment of how resource pressures will impact on any area of my Department or on our road safety partners. I can assure you that I remain fully committed to continuing to work with stakeholders to improve road safety and reduce casualties. However, reductions in funding will make a number of activities a lot more challenging, including, as Ms Lo referred to earlier, the creation and airing of road safety advertising. There will also be an impact on road safety grants that are made to community groups and on our road safety education programme that we carry out in conjunction with schools.

I am very conscious that it is not just cuts to my Department 's budget that will impact on road safety. Cuts to the Regional Development budget will obviously have an impact on roads maintenance, and where you have street lights that are out and potholes and gullies that cannot be cleaned as regularly as they should be, there will be a detrimental impact on road safety. That is without doubt. Furthermore, one would imagine that the cuts to the police as a result of cuts to the Department of Justice's budget

will lead to fewer police on the road to carry out traffic activities.

There is no doubt that the financial situation will require us to continue — in fact, to start — to work in a more joined-up way across government to do things that make all of us, as road users, improve our behaviour and reduce the likelihood of fatalities and casualties on our roads.

Mr Spratt: I want to go back to the themes of justice and policing that the Minister has just mentioned. The police reduced its road traffic branch long before there were any cuts, and it is now merely a service that deals with motorway policing. Given the detrimental effect that that has on fatal road accidents, has he had any discussions with the police to fully re-establish that branch and make it effective to deal with road safety issues?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. My officials are in constant contact with their counterparts in the PSNI and, indeed, the PSNI is an integral member of our road safety working group. I have had discussions with a succession of acting chief constables on that and on road safety issues.

Last Wednesday night, I was out on the ground, or in a car rather, with PSNI traffic officers in Derry and had a look at the type of work that they do. It is extremely important work, but, while they were not crying about it, it is painfully evident that there is not enough of them to do that work and that they are being spread very thin. We went to a speeding checkpoint, stayed there for 15 minutes and then had to go somewhere else.

One thing that very much impressed me that evening was that we went to Bridgend on the Derry-Donegal border and met some guards. There is ongoing collaborative cross-border drink-driving project, and that was very good to see. I am aware of the pressures facing the police budget. I have concerns about the impact of budget cuts on how many officers they have to carry out this job, but I have also raised with the PSNI how they spend the reducing budget that they have.

Mr Dallat: The Minister has just alluded to the question I was going to ask. He represents a border area where there have been appalling abuses of the road traffic laws by a small number of people on both sides of the border. Is the Minister satisfied that the level of cooperation between an Garda Síochána and the PSNI is sufficient to identify the people who have contributed so much to the heartache of families who, at times, have had multiple members wiped out by, largely, speeding offences, but by other traffic offences as well?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Dallat for that question. He is correct. There have been awful abuses of laws, and there have been even more awful losses of lives in that border area, and in others across the North and South. I am sure that collaboration between police services in both jurisdictions is good, but I will never be content that it cannot be better. I will continue to, and constantly, push for increased and improved collaboration on this and many other issues.

Mr Allister: The Minister has often spoken of the connection between speeding and fatalities on our roads. He will be aware of the recent publicity about the shocking scale of the number of drivers from the Irish Republic who are detected speeding in Northern Ireland but not pursued in respect of penalty and penalties outstanding. Did he raise that issue with his Southern counterparts or has he taken any steps with other Ministers to seek to better that situation and to act upon it?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question, and I thank him for highlighting a most unsatisfactory situation, which, no, I regret that I did not raise with the Minister from the Republic of Ireland at the meeting. I think that the publicity surrounding that issue emerged, possibly, the day following our meeting, but it is a matter that gives me great concern and it is one that I will raise at a future North/South Ministerial Council meeting.

In answering an earlier question, I alluded to the technical difficulties that have been presented in our attempt to achieve the mutual recognition of penalty points. It is my understanding that some of the difficulties around courts and summonses would be applicable in this case. However, I do not believe that they are in any way insurmountable. If people are speeding on a road in the North of Ireland, it is extremely likely that they are going to continue speeding when they hit the border, and beyond. A dangerous driver in the North is a dangerous driver in the South, and vice versa. There has to be collaboration; we have to work together to eradicate those dangers from our roads.

Mrs Overend: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the Minister for missing the start of his statement, although I was here for the large part of it. I note that illegal fuel laundering was not discussed at the meeting. It is a longstanding problem here in Northern Ireland and is worth £80 million in lost tax revenue. Is it an issue that the Minister will raise at a future meeting?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for her question. I assure her that, in missing the start of my statement, she did not miss much, but she might have missed me saying that this statement is on the transport sector as opposed to the environment sector, where the issue of fuel laundering has been discussed at every North/South Ministerial Council meeting that I have attended. Your party colleague Minister Kennedy is often keen to raise it. The cost of fuel laundering to our economy is huge. In that respect, it is, I suppose, relevant, in a way, to this meeting, given the impact that fuel laundering has on the costs of doing business for legitimate businesses in the haulage industry.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes questions on the Minister's statement.

1.00 pm

Executive Committee Business

Work and Families Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call the Minister for Employment and Learning, Mr Stephen Farry, to move the Bill.

Moved. — [Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Work and Families Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at Final Stage. Further Consideration Stage is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Child Support Fees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

> *That the Child Support Fees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

The regulations, which came into operation in June 2014, enable my Department to charge collection and enforcement fees for using the statutory child maintenance scheme introduced in 2012 under powers contained in the Child Maintenance Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. The 2012 scheme is delivered by the Child Maintenance Service.

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

The regulations form part of the wider reforms to rebalance child maintenance policy. The aims of the reforms are to support parents to collaborate and work together; and to create a more efficient and fairer child maintenance system that delivers more money to children and a better value-for-money service to taxpayers.

Before addressing the detail of the regulations, I should perhaps state that the programme of reform began in 2006 when Sir David Henshaw delivered an independent report on the future of child maintenance. His report recommended that the Child Support Agency no longer be the default option for parents. The introduction of fees was also recommended in order to provide both parents with an incentive to collaborate.

Since then, as part of the reform programme, parents on benefits are no longer compelled to apply to the Department to pursue maintenance payments. It is also worth noting that, since 2010, child maintenance has been fully disregarded for the purposes of assessing benefit entitlement. The 2008 Child Maintenance Act provided the powers to introduce the 2012 child maintenance scheme.

The reforms are designed to incentivise parents to take financial responsibility for their children and to encourage them to collaborate in the best interests of their children. Evidence suggests that children do better when their parents work together. A dual approach is being followed to increase the number of parents who work together to agree child maintenance rather than relying on intervention by the Department.

First, parents are supported to work together, not only on child maintenance but through the whole range of issues faced following a separation. Secondly, fees will act as an incentive for parents to consider whether they could set up a more collaborative family-based child arrangement without automatically turning to the statutory scheme. The new 2012 statutory scheme was introduced using a phased approach from December 2012. Following assurances that the processes, procedures and client interfaces were working well, the scheme was opened to all applicants in November 2013. The 2012 scheme operates alongside the two earlier child maintenance schemes, which have been in place since 1993 and 2003.

Initial reports are that the 2012 scheme is a great improvement on previous schemes. Customer satisfaction is at 73% compared with 55% on the older schemes. Anyone making an application to the 2012 statutory scheme must go through the child maintenance choices service. This provides free, impartial information and support on the various ways to set up maintenance arrangements, and it gives parents the information that they need to consider what arrangements are best for them.

The regulations introduce collection fees for any parents using the statutory collect and pay service. Sir David Henshaw's report recommended fees as a balanced incentive to encourage parents to consider whether the statutory service is necessary for them.

The collection fee payable by non-resident parents is 20% of the daily amount of child support maintenance that they are liable to pay. The fee payable by a person with care is 4% of the maintenance collected by the Department. It is only fair that both parents should make a financial contribution towards the cost of the service that both are using.

I must emphasise that fees are charged only on money actually collected by the Department. Non-resident parents face by far the highest charges, reflecting the fact that they have greater control over whether they use the collection service. There is no collection fee for parents who make their own family-based arrangement or who use the direct pay service provided by the child maintenance service. The decision not to introduce application fees in Northern Ireland has ensured that the statutory scheme remains open and accessible to those who cannot make their own family-based arrangements. That is a difference between the scheme that currently operates in the rest of the United Kingdom and here in Northern Ireland.

Direct pay is when the Child Maintenance Service calculates the amount of maintenance payable, and the non-resident parent then makes payments directly to the parent with care. That provides a way for parents to access the statutory service in a way that can help to rebuild trust between them.

Before fees were introduced, 24% of cases on the 2012 scheme used direct pay. Since the introduction of fees, the percentage of cases using direct pay has more than doubled to almost 60%. That shows that collection fees are having the desired effect in encouraging more parents to work together. Staff in the Child Maintenance Service have been working hard to ensure that parents are aware of the introduction of fees as well as how to avoid them.

The regulations also include a safeguard to prevent non-resident parents being forced onto the chargeable collect and pay service by the parent with care and also allows the Department to deduct fees from benefits in the same way that it can deduct maintenance owed. In addition, the regulations make provision for the payment of an enforcement charge by a non-resident parent when the Department makes a deduction from earnings order, a regular deduction order, a lump sum deduction order or an application for a liability order. Before the regulations came into operation, there was no financial incentive for non-resident parents to pay maintenance in full and on time. The introduction of enforcement fees is intended to act as a deterrent to encourage non-resident parents to comply with their commitments, and I think that it will also help to offset the cost of administrative action to enforce compliance.

The enforcement fees are as follows: deduction from earnings order, £50; regular deduction order, £50; lump sum deduction order, £200; and liability order, £300. It is estimated that the collection and enforcement fees will generate a revenue of about £1 million a year. That will provide a financial contribution towards the cost of the Child Maintenance Service, which will continue to remain heavily subsidised by the taxpayer.

Although the introduction of fees for child maintenance is a significant change, the aim of these reforms is to promote collaboration between separated parents to ensure that their children achieve the best outcomes in life.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee for Social Development considered the Department's proposal to make the Child Support Fees Regulations at its meeting on 5 June 2014 and considered the resulting statutory rule at its meeting on 3 July 2014. The Committee was supportive of the regulations.

The Committee took note that, although the primary power for child support fees is set out in the Child Maintenance Act 2008, this subordinate legislation is required to enable the full introduction of fees. The Committee noted that, among other measures, the regulations will introduce fees for collect and pay services in the 2012 statutory child maintenance scheme as an incentive for parents to work together to reach their own family-based arrangement or to pay each other directly via direct pay within the statutory scheme if they cannot reach their own family-based arrangement.

Under the equivalent regulations in Britain, there is a £20 applications fee to access the 2012 child maintenance scheme. The Committee is pleased at the previous Minister's decision that residents in the North will not be charged such a fee. Of course, it may sound like a small saving, but £20 is by no means an insignificant sum, and the removal of any financial burden to claimants of child support fees is very welcome, as it is in any circumstance.

In conclusion, the Committee for Social Development is supportive of the regulations and recommends that the statutory rule be confirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Wilson: I echo what the Deputy Chairman of the Committee said. The Committee did indeed consider —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Could you use the microphone? It helps Hansard staff.

Mr Wilson: Yes, sorry.

The Committee considered the regulations. Anyone who has dealt with people who have had to go through the Child Support Agency or the Child Maintenance Service will know that it was far from satisfactory and was one of the arms of government that had a very poor record, first of all, in collecting money where it was difficult to collect and, secondly, in dealing with changes in circumstances and queries. Sometimes, it was the parent with care who was adversely affected, and it was sometimes the parent who was having to make the payment.

The Committee had two concerns about the scheme. The first is that, where there cannot be cooperation between parents — according to what the Minister said, that is still the case with 40% of people who are receiving child maintenance — the fees, in effect, mean that a quarter of the payment that is received is lost in administration charges imposed by the Child Maintenance Service.

The second is — I hope that the Minister will keep a very close eye on this — that, given the chaotic way in which the Child Support Agency or Child Maintenance Service sometimes administered dealings with parents, I hope that, now that a 24% charge is being imposed, we will see greater diligence so that we see fewer of the kind of mistakes that were made in the past or, indeed, what could sometimes be regarded as lack of forcefulness in pursuing situations where payments were not being kept up to date. The Minister pointed out that that will still not cover the full costs of the service. Nevertheless, now that charges of that level are being levied, there should be an improvement in the service for those who find that, where there is non-cooperation, the agency is not pursuing the matter as quickly as it should.

Those are the only two caveats that I would attach to this. A large number of people will still have to go through the child maintenance arrangements, and they will now be paying in administrative charges a substantial part of the money that would normally have gone to the child. If that is the case, there should be a proper, effective service for the parents who, because they cannot reach agreement, find themselves in the scheme.

1.15 pm

Mr Storey: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Social Development, Mr Brady, for his comments and for the work of the Committee in relation to the issue. Turning to the comments of my colleague Mr Wilson, I think that we all need to set it in the context of the concern that we have all had, as public representatives who, in time past, have had to deal with the child maintenance service. In the past we clearly saw a system that was not fit for purpose for either component part of what is always a very difficult situation. It is not a process that is devoid of dealing with realities; we are dealing with families, children and very challenging circumstances.

I am conscious, and have been since taking office, that there was a good-news story about the progress that has been made in the child maintenance service. Look at the satisfaction rate that I referred to earlier. I suppose that you have to take any survey with a degree of caution, but moving from 55% to 73% shows that it is

working in the right way. Given what is happening across the water, clearly the introduction of the application fee, which we decided here in Northern Ireland not to do, has encouraged those who, for a variety of reasons, some very complex, have not felt it necessary to become involved in the scheme. I think that we have demonstrated that what is being delivered here in Northern Ireland is immensely better than what is in the rest of the United Kingdom.

There is a lesson for us to learn. I have had this discussion with my officials. It goes right across every part of the Administration and Executive. You can have a policy intent, but if the implementation of that policy intent is haphazard or far from fit for purpose, you lose the focus of the policy intent. I do not think that anybody disagrees that the reasons set in the new scheme need to be achieved and are the right parameters to operate in, but it is how it is implemented and operated. That is why, with the way that the scheme is operating, progress is being made. I hope that, as it rolls out, it will continue to be a success.

In conclusion, just last week a senior official in my Department received national recognition for the work that was carried out in the reorganisation in the Child Maintenance Service. I am very proud that that official from Northern Ireland was given recognition for the work being done in that organisation.

In conclusion, I am certain that we all want to ensure that all steps possible are taken to assist parents to work together in the best interests of their children. Obviously, the circumstances that face some families are difficult. I know too well just how difficult that can be and the pressures that it can bring to bear on families. I trust that this process will be an advantage to the Child Maintenance Service. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Child Support Fees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

Child Support (Ending Liability in Existing Cases and Transition to New Calculation Rules) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

> *That the Child Support (Ending Liability in Existing Cases and Transition to New Calculation Rules) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

These recommendations, which came into operation on 30 June 2014, allow my Department to close down the 1993 and the 2003 child maintenance schemes. Any parents who choose to use statutory schemes can apply to the Child Maintenance Service's 2012 scheme. The 2012 scheme provides a more efficient and fairer child maintenance system, delivering more money to children, as I said, and a better value-for-money service to the taxpayer.

Currently, there are three statutory child maintenance schemes providing for the collection and payment of child maintenance under differing rules: the 1993 scheme, which was established under the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991; the 2003 scheme, which was set up for all applications received after March 2003, following amendment of that order by the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (Northern Ireland) 2000; and the 2012 scheme, which was established under the Child Maintenance Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

The 2012 scheme was introduced on a phased basis in December 2012, and later opened to all new applicants from November 2013. The scheme introduced a new way of calculating child support maintenance based on historical income and a number of other important changes in relation to child maintenance. The transition period over which liability in existing cases under the 1993 and 2003 schemes will be brought to an end is expected to run until the end of 2017 and early 2018. Any parents using those schemes will have their case closed. During the case closure process, the Child Maintenance Choices service will provide help and support to separated parents. Parents will be encouraged to consider family-based arrangements, but, where that is not possible, can make an application to the 2012 scheme.

The closure of the 1993 and 2003 schemes will not remove non-resident parents' responsibilities to pay any child maintenance arrears that have accrued, unless those arrears meet the limited criteria for write-off; for example, where the parent with care no longer wants the arrears collected. The Child Maintenance Service will continue to ensure that parents meet their financial responsibilities for their children.

The regulations specify that the power to close cases will be exercised in stages known as segments. The order in which cases will be closed will be carefully controlled. The first cases on the 1993 and 2003 schemes to be selected for closure are those where the Child Maintenance Service has assessed that the non-resident parent does not have to pay any maintenance. The Child Maintenance Service has started the process of closing 1,129 of those segment 1 cases. Those will be followed by cases where there is a liability but no payment is being made. In both scenarios, there will be no payments to disrupt when the case is closed. The order of case closure has been determined so as to minimise payment disruption as far as possible.

Accordingly, the last cases to enter the process will be those where compliance is hard won. The ending liability scheme, which is published on the departmental website, provides more detail for parents on how and when cases on the 1993 and 2003 schemes will be closed.

Having all child maintenance cases together under the 2012 scheme will simplify the process, not only for staff in the Child Maintenance Service but, more importantly, for parents.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee for Social Development considered the Department's proposal to make these regulations at its meeting on 5 June 2014 and the resulting statutory rule at its meeting on 3 July 2014. The Committee was supportive of the regulations.

The Committee noted that the regulations will enable the 2012 child maintenance scheme to gradually replace the 1993 and 2003 schemes and ensure a smooth transition to the new scheme. The Committee notes that the regulations will make provision to end liability in cases on the 1993 and 2003 child maintenance schemes. They also ensure that people who wish to remain on the statutory scheme can exercise that choice and are handled by the new 2012 child maintenance scheme. The Department has advised the Committee that the powers will be exercised in such a way to ensure that payment to existing cases on the 1993 and 2003 schemes is minimised as far as possible.

The regulations specify the powers for cases to be closed. However, it should be noted that arrears will remain due and parents will not be relieved of their liability to pay unless those arrears meet the limited criteria for write-off. That could be, for example, where the parent with care no longer wants the arrears collected. Importantly, the continuity of maintenance payments to the parent with care will be protected.

I am sure that I speak for all members of the Committee when I say that any changes to child support must keep the welfare of the child as a key focus and priority. The regulations are designed to reduce any disruption in maintenance flowing to children and, in that sense, can be seen as a positive and protective measure.

In conclusion, the Committee for Social Development recommends that the statutory rule be confirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Storey: I thank Mr Brady, the Deputy Chair of the Committee, for his comments. I also thank the Committee for its work on this. I concur with Mr Brady's comment, which really follows on from what I said previously, that at the focus and centre of this is the continued welfare of children.

Given the difficulties and challenges that there were in the two previous schemes, I can well imagine the concerns and nervousness that there are in relation to that. That is always the case in any of these processes, when you move, in this case, from two schemes to one. However, I think that progress to date indicates that the central focus of what we are about is to ensure that the welfare of children is paramount. As well as that, the comment that I made earlier in relation to the segments and the way in which this process will be handled will ensure that it is carefully controlled. I will ensure that that is the case within the Child Maintenance Service.

The Child Maintenance Service is the one place that I have not had the opportunity to visit to date. However, plans are afoot for me to do so before Christmas. As Minister, I want to satisfy myself about this. It is very easy to come to the Chamber, read the prepared script and do what you have to do, but another part of our responsibility and duty is to ensure that we see at first hand the work that is being done, take on board the concerns that are expressed and continue to make progress on the issue.

We need to underline and emphasise that the statutory scheme should only be used where family-based arrangements are not possible. For that reason, it is important that all cases are managed on the 2012 scheme which, as we have said, is better for children and parents. Bringing all these cases under the one set of rules will, I trust, simplify the process for all concerned. Therefore I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Child Support (Ending Liability in Existing Cases and Transition to New Calculation Rules) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

Committee Business

Public Accounts Committee: Reports and Memoranda of Reply

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes to propose and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have 7 minutes.

Ms Boyle (The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee): I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the following Public Accounts Committee Reports:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report

and the following Department of Finance and Personnel Memoranda of Reply:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Members, the details of the motion give some indication of the wide range of work undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in its work of contributing to a better and more efficient delivery of public services. PAC reports have dealt with a number of important issues covering areas such as: contract management, procurement practices, the need for greater focus on efficiency savings, performance management, strengthening fraud investigative skills, valuing whistle-blowers and improving service delivery in the interests of our citizens, including our children.

Although there is not time for me to go into all the items listed in the motion, I will take a minute to remind you of the role of the Public Accounts Committee and the scope of the Committee's work.

1.30 pm

The Committee is a Standing Committee of the Assembly and was set up under the NI Act 1998 to:

"consider accounts, and reports on accounts, laid before the Assembly".

The accounts of all Departments and, indeed, of most public sector bodies are prepared and laid by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), who is the head of the Audit Office here. The Comptroller and Auditor General may also make value-for-money reports and reports on efficiency and effectiveness.

The Audit Office's role is to examine closely public expenditure from a position of independence from government. I commend it for the excellent support that it provides to the Committee.

I have in the past described the Audit Office as a natural scrutiny partner to the Assembly, complementing the system of checks and balances that are fundamental to a healthy democracy. That scrutiny role will be all the more significant in today's economic climate, as value for money in the public sector becomes even more important in these times of austerity.

The current budgetary pressures facing the Executive make the PAC's role even more critical, as every pound of public expenditure needs to extract maximum value. The PAC plays a key role in maximising value for money in public expenditure. By honing in on instances of public funds being spent unwisely, the PAC can then make recommendations for improvements, which, if implemented, can ensure that better value for money is achieved.

The PAC plays a constructive role in pointing out the lessons that need to be learned to improve performance. Whilst our inquiries tend to be specific to a particular Department or body and the issues pertaining to it, there are lessons to be learned throughout government. PAC reports this year highlighted a number of lessons that can be applied right across the public sector.

I wish to emphasise that the PAC's key role is to apply the lessons that have been learnt from our inquiries. It aims to be constructive in its recommendations and to offer guidance about what needs to change to avoid a repeat of those events.

In my time as Chair of the PAC, I have seen similar issues come up time and time again. That was the case with the report on improving pupil attendance, which highlighted the fact that very little progress had been made since an Audit Office report back in 2004 recommended an attendance strategy. In 2014, its follow-up report highlighted the fact that an attendance strategy was still outstanding. The PAC decided that that

was worthy of further investigation, and we have made recommendations. My Committee colleague Mr McQuillan will talk about it in more detail later.

Public financial government is at its most effective when all the participants are thinking about and striving for excellence. That means not just the Committee but the auditors, the accounting officers and the civil servants. There is a shared interest between the PAC and DFP in working in partnership on the stewardship of public money. I see that as an important principle that should underscore the relationship that exists between the two to ensure value for money in the delivery of our public services.

I welcome the recent work undertaken on drafting a protocol on the memoranda of reply (MORs) between the Committee and DFP. The PAC regards MORs as being an integral part of the public accountability cycle and monitors the Department's progress on the implementation of its recommendations. I therefore acknowledge the important role that DFP plays in working with Departments on the production of MORs to ensure that Departments respond to each PAC recommendation as fully and as positively as possible.

I have heard it said that the PAC has created a risk-chill effect in Departments. Some critics would say that that has resulted in Departments avoiding taking risks because of the fear of being called before the Committee, thus dampening innovation.

It is the Committee's job to hold Departments and accounting officers to account for their spending decisions, judging whether they have spent wisely and well. When the C&AG's value-for-money reports are selected by the Committee, the relevant accounting officer will be asked to attend to give evidence in open session on how and why decisions were made. Admittedly, this is an exposed position for a senior official to be in and therefore should be regarded as an incentive to Departments to prevent this arising.

However, it is not to create a risk-chill factor and it is not the PAC's primary focus to increase the capacity of bodies to innovate. The PAC primarily looks at expenditure that has been incurred and tries to ensure that where mistakes have been made, lessons have been learned. It will make recommendations which would support greater joined-up working.

I now wish to address the report that was published this year by the Committee in respect of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). AFBI is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's largest arm's-length body. AFBI carries out scientific testing for DARD and other public and commercial bodies to satisfy statutory requirements mainly around animal and plant health. The institute also carries out research and development for DARD and other clients. Between 2006-07 and 2011-12, DARD provided AFBI with £253 million in grant aid.

The Committee examined AFBI's performance since its establishment in the key areas of financial management; scientific testing undertaken for DARD; the programme of R&D work delivered for the Department; governance of AFBI; and oversight of the institute by DARD. Overall, the Committee was disappointed at the extent of shortcomings in AFBI and at the unacceptable delay in introducing improvements. The Committee formed the view that, until recently, DARD had abdicated its responsibility, as parent Department, for proper oversight of the institute.

The Committee found that proper costing systems were not introduced in AFBI until seven years after its establishment, meaning that the institute did not have the proper tools to measure its operational efficiency. Despite this, DARD continued to fund the institute to the tune of £40 million annually, with little assurance that it was receiving good value for money.

AFBI's corporate costs have been alarmingly high. Between 2006-07 and 2010-11, these amounted to almost £100 million, £51 million of which related to the institute's estate. The Committee was very concerned at the lack of action to reduce the high state costs in the 10 years since a project board had been set up to prepare for AFBI's establishment.

The Committee also identified poor management with regard to fees charged by AFBI for commercial work. Until 2011, AFBI calculated fees using a historical overhead rate, which dated back to at least 2003, with the result that at least £3·5 million income was lost. The Committee made recommendations which aim to ensure that AFBI's fees are set on the principle of recovering the full costs incurred in delivering commercial work.

Scientific testing for DARD is AFBI's most significant operational activity in both volume and cost terms. The Committee was therefore disappointed that very few unit costs had been calculated for this work. In the absence of costs, the Committee could not understand how DARD had any notion of whether it was receiving value for money for its significant investment in this area.

The management of the research and development programme delivered by AFBI for DARD can only be described as unacceptably poor. The Committee identified some alarming weaknesses in that area. The forecasting of the costs of individual projects at the outset was so inaccurate that 39 were not subjected to the required full economic appraisal. Projects examined by the Committee had overspent by almost £13 million. For many years, ongoing costs were not monitored, which left AFBI and DARD unaware of significant cost escalations for numerous individual projects. When DARD finally undertook a meaningful review in 2012, it immediately terminated 52 projects, which had cumulative costs to that date of over £18 million.

A range of enhanced governance measures have been introduced in AFBI, and DARD has strengthened its oversight of the institute. The Committee views the acceptance of its recommendations by DARD and AFBI as evidence that they recognise the need for improvement. However, the Committee considers that it took far too long to put such improvements in place. Indeed, the extent of shortcomings identified led the Committee to conclude that best value for money had not been achieved in the delivery of AFBI's operations. The Committee was particularly disappointed that many weaknesses replicated those identified by a 1995 Westminster PAC review of science service, which was AFBI's predecessor, and that the recommendations from that report were not implemented in the institute. Consequently, we intend to follow up on that area to gain assurance that improvements are being implemented and sustained in practice.

Go raibh míle maith agat. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Girvan: I appreciate that the Public Accounts Committee has sometimes come in for a certain amount

of flak in relation to the reports that we have produced. One that I want to speak on is to do with a whistle-blower's report associated with the Department for Regional Development and the appointment of a contractor to provide signage.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that some of the flak is justifiable? First of all, picking over the bones of some of the projects with hindsight can sometimes reveal things that were not apparent at the start. Secondly, the detail and the intricacies of some of the recommendations creates extra work for Departments. Thirdly, the sometimes unfair way in which the scrutiny is done introduces a chill factor, and that risks are not taken by Departments where sometimes they should be taken.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute, as well as having seven minutes to make his presentation.

Mr Girvan: Normally, most reports are brought about by whistle-blowers. Sometimes, that can lead to extra work for Departments. I appreciate there are occasions when you have to take risks to move forward and that risk-taking, sometimes, is removed.

The report that I am dealing with today involved a very clear whistle-blower. Some people might have perceived him to be a disgruntled contractor who basically did not get the crack of the work that he had won. It was identified that there were difficulties, but the Department's internal audit identified that no problem whatsoever was associated with the matter. As a consequence, the whistle-blower's concerns were not taken seriously by the Department. Between 2005 and 2010, the contractor was contacted by telephone on only one occasion and was interviewed once.

The Department's internal audit showed up nothing amiss. When a full investigation was conducted, however, it was identified that this contractor had lost out significantly as a result of what had gone on in the Department. The business went bankrupt and is no longer trading, whether as a consequence of what was going on or not. I appreciate that there was a contractor who received numerous orders prior to his contract finishing, which would have covered this gentleman's work over a period of time. That was demonstrated quite clearly in our evidence sessions.

1.45 pm

A recommendation was made to the Department of Finance and Personnel, and, to give it credit, it has already put in place a centralised service to provide expertise. Through the Northern Ireland Civil Service's centralised fraud investigation service, a mechanism has been put in place to ensure that what was identified at that stage will be flagged up early and that information will also be shared among Departments. Unfortunately, the report identified that not all Departments have the internal expertise to investigate potential fraud to the level that would be required by the PSNI to scrutinise investigations and present cases to be brought forward for prosecution, which possibly should have happened on many occasions.

The report also highlighted the difficulties for members of staff in those government bodies. They get used to using a certain contractor and are maybe not totally aware that they are no longer using the services of that contractor. That management issue needs to be identified. It needs to be ensured that, when tenders are won, certain people who used to get orders for that service are taken off the list and that a new contractor gets the orders. That needs to happen and to be disseminated to staff. The whole information-sharing aspect needs to be dealt with.

There was also a report on Northern Ireland Water, which brought out major problems. We will maybe not go into the details of what happened in many other areas, but this was to do with Northern Ireland Water's awarding of contracts for the supply of water meters and how that had been mismanaged. The report identified all sorts of problems whereby the people who were supplying the water meters were told to submit invoices for £20,000 or below.

If it is discovered that invoice slicing is or has been going on without a reasonable explanation, that is identified as being a potential or major fraud investigation. Somebody could be saying, "I need cash flow to keep my business going". That might well be the case, but there were major areas in which Northern Ireland Water was falling down in passing information through to the contractor who was supplying and fitting water meters. They were making numerous calls to areas. The information on when they could go to those locations to fit meters was available, but, unfortunately, that was not making its way back to the supplier of the meters. Sometimes, they were being paid umpteen times for visiting the same location.

The policing of that mechanism was not very good. Problems were identified, and invoice slicing was a big issue. Many recommendations were made. There was a clear weakness in the planned scope and methodology of the investigation. Despite references being made to the Department —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way on that point?

Mr Girvan: I will indeed.

Mr Wilson: I do not know the details of the case, but does the Member accept that, very often, the people who criticise Departments for invoice slicing, as he calls it, or cutting down the size of contracts are the very people in the Assembly who call, time and time again, for more work to be given to small local businesses? The way to do that, of course, is to break contracts down in the way that is suggested.

Mr Girvan: That is why I made the point about people getting payments as opposed to waiting on a very long contract and ending up with millions. The overall cost of the contract is what really matters. I do believe that —

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

Mr Girvan: — proper invoicing should be dealt with. I apologise, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for running over. I did not really get into detail on the second part. Thank you.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank your colleague.

Mr Hussey: May I remain seated, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Hussey: I begin by paying tribute to the Clerk and Committee support staff for their assistance throughout the past year. My party colleague Michael Copeland, an active member of the Committee, is absent due to ill health. I am sure you will join me in wishing him a speedy

return to good health and thank him for his participation in the Committee in recent years.

I wish to address the report published this year by the Committee on DCAL's management of major capital projects.

In the period 2008-2011, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure had an unprecedented target to deliver £229 million capital investment in the Northern Ireland culture, arts and leisure infrastructure. This resulted in the delivery of a number of capital projects, including the Grand Opera House, the Ulster Museum, the Crescent Arts Centre, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, the MAC and the Lyric Theatre.

The projects have undoubtedly enhanced culture and arts provision in the local economy. However, this has come at a significant cost to the public purse. The projects cumulatively ended up costing £103·4 million, 32% more than the original estimate of £78·5 million. The projects also encountered significant delays.

The Committee was concerned that despite the availability of extensive guidance, public bodies continue to make the same mistakes around planning, governance, project management and procurement that the Committee has observed and reported on over many years.

Approvals for projects were based upon business cases that were not robust and were overly optimistic about what could be delivered. That resulted in projects being re-scoped, which contributed to the significant cost increases and time delays. There is a clear lesson here that public bodies must ensure that robust project management arrangements are put in place so that projects can be delivered on time and within budget.

In total, £87·4 million — 84% of the £103·4 million investment — was provided by the public purse. Despite having a lack of experience and expertise in delivering capital projects of this scale, DCAL failed to seek technical advice at the appropriate time and provided grant recipients with too much autonomy in making key decisions. This is clearly unacceptable: public bodies must seek technical advice and use it to inform key decisions. All key decisions on projects of this scale should be authorised by the public body in consultation with technical advisers.

There was something of a furore when the Committee›s report was published. Many took exception to the Committee›s conclusions. It may be helpful if I emphasise a number of completely unacceptable departures from long-established principles of good practice that were made in awarding the Lyric Theatre rebuild contract.

A number of unexplained adjustments were made to the tender submissions. Despite £413,000 being stripped out from one of the tenders, that cost was later paid in full. The tendering documentation to support the tender decision was destroyed promptly after the tender evaluation meeting. The sponsoring bodies — DCAL and the Arts Council — or their technical advisers — the CPD — had no oversight of the tender evaluation process and were unable to assure the Committee that it had been completed in accordance with good practice. Finally, we discovered that the preferred bidder provided a donation of £150,000 to the Lyric Theatre. In light of this sequence of events, the Committee stated that it was left with a strong impression that the outcome of the tender process had been manipulated, and it remains of that view.

DCAL accepted all the PAC›s recommendations and has taken a number of actions. It now requires all capital projects to follow best practice project delivery arrangements as set out in ‹Achieving Excellence in Construction›. It has revised and updated a service level agreement with the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel, formally documenting roles and responsibilities. DCAL also intends to develop procedures to ensure that local operating agreements are put in place with the Central Procurement Directorate for all major capital projects and programmes.

In response to this report, the Department of Finance and Personnel committed to updating its guidance on the use of grant in procurement to ensure that all records of procurement associated with grant awards are retained in line with public procurement policy. Also, Departments and arm›s-length bodies will be required to obtain written confirmation from a centre of procurement expertise that procurement guidelines have been met and that a contract represents value for money before a grant recipient is permitted to award that contract.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Anna Lo.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Questions 1, 5, 7 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Commissioner for Victims and Survivors: Appointment

2. **Mr Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the appointment of a Commissioner for Victims and Survivors. *(AQO 7101/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): The deputy First Minister and I remain committed to providing the best services possible for victims and survivors. This includes ensuring that they have proper representation and a collective voice through their own commissioner. Unfortunately, the current process has not produced a sizeable pool of appointable candidates. We are looking at options on how to widen the pool of appointable candidates, and we will release further details of this very shortly. However, as this is still a live competition, it would not be appropriate to comment further.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the First Minister for his response. Clearly, there will be victims and survivors across Northern Ireland who are disappointed that we are not progressing this matter. First Minister, we do not want a rerun of the previous appointment that caused a lot of distress and discomfort to the victims. Can you outline to the House any time frame on going forward, taking the point that there have been delays? Is there any time frame in which you can assure the House that that will happen?

Mr P Robinson: I do not think that I can agree with him about there being any concern about the previous commissioner. Kathryn Stone was a first-class commissioner. I think that, perhaps, he may be referring to the appointment of four commissioners on a previous occasion. Some of them were slightly dodgy, I think, as the House will know. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please.

Mr P Robinson: I think there are lessons to be learned from all that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please.

Mr P Robinson: Sorry.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Sorry, I have to ask you to resume your seat. I will not accept any remarks from a sedentary position.

Mr P Robinson: I think that the point that he makes, nonetheless, is important. It is essential that we get this right. There are people relying on the commissioner to speak for them, and it has to be a commissioner they can identify with. That is what the deputy First Minister and I are working on. I think that the timescale is as soon as possible. We have to resolve the issue of whether we widen the pool and, if so, how we do it.

Mr Spratt: What progress has been made on severely disabled pensions, and will it seek to redefine "victim"?

Mr P Robinson: I think that many people have recognised that, when the initial assessments were made for victims at the time of the incident that affected their lives, in some cases, if not most, there was not the expectation that some of these victims would still have been alive today. That is the blunt truth. Therefore, I think that the assessments were less than were necessary for them to have a full life for a prolonged period. In that context, my colleagues and I have been consulting on a Bill that would come before the Assembly that would provide a pension for people who are severely disabled. I think that is important legislation, and I hope that it receives the support of the House. It would augment whatever previous settlement that there had been with them.

Nothing can compensate for the injury that has been caused to them, but we cannot leave people who have gone through that severe pain, anguish and a prolonged period of living with a disability without giving them the assistance that we can because they were not able to be employed and were not able to build up National Insurance and are, therefore, at a disadvantage from the rest of the community. It is an important piece of legislation for the House, and I hope that it will consider it sympathetically and support it.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will he outline which recommendations of the independent assessment of the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) have been implemented and which remain outstanding?

Mr P Robinson: There was a whole series of recommendations. My recollection is that we have implemented about two thirds of them. If the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister wants us to give the Member further details on that, I am quite happy to do that. However, very considerable progress has been made on the implementation of the recommendations.

Mr Nesbitt: I want to acknowledge the First Minister's admission that his party was complicit in appointing what he had described as a dodgy character as a commissioner. I am sure that government is not easy for the First Minister. Is the process that is being run giving a list of deemed appointable candidates? If so, how many people have been deemed to be appointable?

Mr P Robinson: I do not want to go into the details of an open competition, but I can assure the Member that the process is being monitored by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and is being held in accordance with its rules, regulations and guidelines. It will bring to us a list of those who are appointable.

There have been occasions — I will leave this issue to the side so that I can speak more frankly on it — when we have been left with very little choice. On one occasion, I recall being offered only one person to choose from. If the deputy First Minister and I are being asked to make choices, we would like a wide field that we can look at and perhaps agree on an outcome.

Corporation Tax

3. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on discussions on the devolution of corporation tax powers. *(AQO 7102/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Securing powers to lower corporation tax is a key priority for the Executive to promote the growth of our local economy. As part of our economic pact that was signed last year with the Prime Minister, the United Kingdom Government indicated their intention to make a decision on the devolution of corporation tax powers at the time of the autumn statement, which is on 3 December. That has involved discussions with the Secretary of State, and we also wrote to the Prime Minister to press him to come to a decision quickly and ensure the swift devolution of corporation tax powers.

The reply from the Prime Minister confirmed that the timescale remains the same. Officials have been told that, if a positive decision is made, a Bill could be introduced in the House of Commons very shortly afterwards, but before the election. The Executive's agreement will also be required to approve the devolution of corporation-tax-rate-setting powers and to lay a legislative consent motion before the Assembly. Officials are working to make the necessary arrangements in that respect.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Daithí McKay. My apologies, Michelle. Your supplementary question.

Miss M McIlveen: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to thank the First Minister for his response. Further to that, what does he say to those who oppose corporation tax, on the basis that it breaks up the fiscal union, and do not believe that the Executive has the competence to deal with those increased powers?

Mr P Robinson: Since devolution began in Scotland, we have seen the fiscal responsibilities being divided up between the Treasury and the devolved regions. The Government in Scotland, for instance, has had the power to reduce or increase income tax within certain limits, there are already proposals for various duties such as stamp duty and landfill tax to be devolved to Scotland and Wales, and we ourselves have the power over air passenger duty. That kind of tight fiscal union has already been made more flexible, and I do not think that that argument pertains.

We have very separate and unique circumstances in Northern Ireland. We have a land frontier with a country that has a considerably more attractive — ie, lower — level of corporation tax. We have also come through decades of conflict, and our economy has suffered as a result. Therefore, there is a strong argument that to rebalance the economy in Northern Ireland, which is lagging behind because of our history, we need something that grows the private sector and encourages growth in the economy.

No one has made a better suggestion than that of corporation tax, from which, it is viewed, something like 50,000 additional jobs would come over a period.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I now call Mr McKay.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Along the same lines, First Minister, can you outline what you believe the priorities should be with fiscal levers other than corporation tax? What conversations has your office had with the business community to ensure that it is part of the conversation, too?

Mr P Robinson: I will take those questions in reverse. One thing that you can say about the business community in Northern Ireland is that it is always ready and willing to give advice on those and other matters, and it has been doing so consistently. The overwhelming view of the business community is that devolving corporation tax will be good for business and that it will encourage growth, not just of foreign direct investment but of our indigenous companies, giving them a confidence for the future.

The Member asked about other financial levers. I think that I said at a previous Question Time that the Department of Finance and Personnel had looked at a range of fiscal powers to see which ones might be applicable to Northern Ireland, which ones might give us some ability to direct our social and economic policy, which ones we could afford to do and which ones the economy of scale would make it impossible for us to do. At the end of that exercise, we looked at the stamp duty and landfill tax powers that were being offered to Scotland and Wales. I might even add aggregates tax and corporation tax to that, as well as air passenger duty. Those seem to be the parameters within which we will probably have to work. Any of the others are of such complexity that a small area with a population of 1·8 million would find it very difficult to pay the cost of operating the additional taxes without having to increase the burden on its local community to pay for the cost of their operation.

Mr Kinahan: Does the Minister regret wasting time discussing the cost of devolving corporation tax with Her Majesty's Treasury, when the decision was always going to be a political one that would be made in Number 10?

Mr P Robinson: The Member has an imperfect knowledge of the issues that relate to corporation tax. Very significant discussions — indeed, the bulk of discussions with Treasury — have been undertaken on the basis of what the modus operandi of corporation tax would be. We discussed what arrangements would be made if any secondary benefits were to come back to Northern Ireland. We also discussed how we would deal with multinational companies with a base in Northern Ireland and their headquarters in GB and what would happen if they were to transfer their headquarters and attempt to get a larger profit base into Northern Ireland. A range of issues had to be resolved before the political decision could be taken, not least because it relates to how much of a reduction to the block grant there would be as a result of our getting the lever to set our own level of corporation tax.

Mr Agnew: Given the furore that his party has made about the £87 million that we have had to cut to fund welfare, how does the First Minister propose that we pay for a potential cut of £400 million a year if corporation tax is reduced to the level that he has proposed?

Mr P Robinson: He refers to a furore. I object to throwing money away. I like to invest money, and that is a distinction to be made between the two scenarios that he points out. Investing money in your economy to build and grow it seems an imminently sensible position to adopt. Of course, the distinction in all of this is that everybody recognises that, given Northern Ireland's very high dependency on the public sector, we need to rebalance our economy. Everybody has been bandying those words about for years. It has been the mantra of almost every political party. I wonder whether they recognised what it actually means. If you are going to rebalance your economy, you

streamline the public sector and grow the private sector. The kind of thing that we are going to be forced to do, because of what has been described as austerity, is offer a voluntary exit scheme to reduce our dependency on 212,000 people employed by the public sector for a population of 1·8 million. I think you can recognise that if you can reduce that level of dependency and, at the same time, grow your private sector, it is a better use of the funds that are available. I do not think that it will be as high as the Member is outlining, but even if it were, the amount of money that you would take out of the public sector for a very limited number of people that would be coming out, compared with the 50,000 that would be coming in over the years, on the balance books, shows that it would be good value for money.

2.15 pm

Mr Allister: Last week, one of the First Minister's party colleagues described devolving corporation tax as a gamble. On the same theme as that of Mr Agnew, how then does the First Minister reach the conclusion that it is safe to gamble with such a substantial, adverse impact on the block grant, particularly as we are now most likely facing further austerity and cuts in a new spending round review?

Mr P Robinson: The Member is not much younger than me, so he has been around in politics for a long time, and he knows that there are very few certainties in politics. To that extent, all that you can ever do is make your best assessment of what the outcomes might be. The fact that every significant commentator, economist and politician who has financial experience has indicated that the provision of corporation tax powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the consequent lowering of the level of corporation tax will bring tens of thousands of jobs to Northern Ireland seems to me to be a fairly firm basis for us to move forward. I have not heard any intelligent commentator indicate that it would not add to the number of people in employment in Northern Ireland. Our own Invest Northern Ireland very strongly supports it. It contains the people who are out on the ground right across the world and, particularly, in Northern Ireland. Therefore, they know best what the business community is looking for in order to increase investment or to bring investment to Northern Ireland. All that we ever do in all these circumstances is take the best advice we can from the experiences of others and the knowledge that we have, and we act upon it.

Gender Equality

4. **Mrs Cameron** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the actions taken to promote gender equality. *(AQO 7103/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The gender equality strategy 2006-2016 sets out an overarching framework for Departments, their agencies and other relevant statutory authorities to promote gender equality. The strategy provides a framework of objectives to direct action by decision-makers and policymakers in government to increase their awareness and understanding; to tackle specific gender inequalities, including the structural inequalities that can perpetuate them; and to ensure the promotion of gender equality across their policy areas.

The strategy and its supporting action plans bring together what government is doing here to promote gender equality and to enable government to demonstrate how it is meeting international commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action and, importantly, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A review of the strategy was undertaken during 2013, and, in January 2014, Ministers approved the development of the new strategy. Since that date, meetings have taken place with a range of key stakeholders and the gender advisory panel to update them on the progress that has been made and, importantly, to include them in the development of the new strategy. The current strategy will remain in place until the new strategy is developed and operational. The new strategy will require full public consultation and Executive approval.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Has he confidence in junior Minister McCann providing support for the domestic violence strategy, given the Máiría Cahill revelations?

Mr Bell: I think that Máiría Cahill was a particularly brave individual to come forward and tell a story of horrific rape that should never have happened and for which she can never be blamed. Child abuse can never, under any rational explanation, be blamed on the child. The House considered the motion, and I came to the correct decision and voted on it. My record is clear on that.

As somebody who has some experience of dealing with child abuse — I spent over two decades of my life in professional practice — I know that a paedophile will rarely, if ever, abuse only one child. I can give you a legion of research to confirm that. The important thing is that when anybody is aware of child abuse, they must immediately bring that to the attention of the police and social services. They do not have the option not to bring that to the attention of police and social services. It is not something that you should do; it is something that you must do. The reason why the criminal law is very clear in that you must bring that forward is because it allows the police and social services, under the joint protocol procedures, to act in a way that can take the criminal route and also the child protection route to protect any child. Whatever the abuse or the domestic violence, whether it is that of an adult or a minor, it is imperative that that abuse is reported immediately. Failure to do so is simply not an option.

Dr McDonnell: Although I warmly welcome the First Minister and the junior Minister's commitment to equality, how can the First Minister possibly reconcile the Executive's commitment to equality with the disgraceful, hurtful and insulting comments of his colleague Gregory Campbell at the DUP conference regarding the Irish language, and is he not aware that the —

Mr P Robinson: Gender equality?

Dr McDonnell: — Irish language community is much wider and deeper than the membership —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Can we have a question?

Dr McDonnell: — of any one or even two political parties?

Mr P Robinson: I am waiting for a ruling as to whether this is a question on gender equality or not.

Mr Campbell: It did not sound like it.

Mr Bell: My understanding —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Sorry; I seem to be being questioned. I hope not. The Minister knows fine well that he has the ability to answer the question or not.

Mr P Robinson: So, it does not matter whether the supplementary question is related to —

Mr Bell: I think the understanding was that the supplementary question would be based on the original question, and I think that most Members of the House are aware of that. Therefore, I will answer the original question, which was on the gender equality strategy, on which I do not think Mr Campbell said anything at that particular time.

We have a strong track record in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and a strong action plan on the actions that we have taken to promote gender equality. We have sought to find a gender balance on all Government-appointed committees, boards and all other relevant official bodies. The Commissioner for Public Appointments recognised that women, along with some other sections of the population, were under-represented, and it is working closely with Departments to identify and develop measures to address the under-representation among those holding public appointments in Northern Ireland. That is one thing that we have done.

With regard to Northern Ireland Civil Service actions, we are committed to achieving greater diversity in public appointments, and we have been consistent with the overall principle of selection by merit as a means of ensuring effective public bodies. We recognise that some sections of our society are under-represented and we are working to encourage greater participation. We have put measures in place to raise the awareness of public appointments and made it possible for people, and encouraged them, to apply for those posts. We have taken a number of steps, including an interdepartmental public appointments forum, to share best practice and increase diversity.

We have used the independent advice that will be provided to the public appointments forum by a senior academic with considerable experience in equality and diversity issues. Time does not allow me to go on, but those are the key, concrete actions that OFMDFM has taken on gender equality, which we are proud to stand over.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Before calling Mr Kieran McCarthy, I remind Members that we have dealt with only three questions. Can we have brevity from Members and Ministers?

Mr McCarthy: Does the junior Minister agree that it would be better for Northern Ireland if we had a single equality Act as soon as possible rather than trying to address equality issues piecemeal, bearing in mind that it is almost five years since GB introduced its Equality Act?

Mr Bell: I am not sure that whatever body we have would change the legislation. We have very robust legislation in Northern Ireland, which we are using to drive forward change and to increase gender equality. We are doing that in a range of ways, including by using best practice, advertisement, encouragement and setting an example in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. All those measures are using best practice to address gender equality. I am more interested in the outcome than the process. We have the process and the legislation. Whatever body we have will not change the legislation. The important thing for people who are living with inequality is that we address that gender imbalance, and we are using best practice to do so.

Together: Building a United Community

6. **Mr Cree** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of Together: Building a United Community. *(AQO 7105/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Work is progressing on all seven headline actions that were announced alongside the publication of 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC). On 2 July, the Minister of Education announced the first three successful projects to be taken forward under the shared campuses programme. A second call for projects has now opened.

We have successfully completed the first pilot of the United Youth programme, and a concept design call has attracted a high level of interest. A design team has been established to take forward development of the next stage of the programme. Stakeholder engagement is ongoing, with a view to commencing a further pilot phase in January 2015.

A significant number of summer schools and camps took place during summer 2014, and further schemes were delivered during the Halloween midterm break.

Stakeholder engagement is ongoing regarding the development of the first two locations for urban villages: the Lower Newtownards Road and Colin. Detailed project plans, complete with anticipated budgets, have also been developed for shared neighbourhoods, interface removal and cross-community sports programme headline actions. Work is continuing with the Departments to take forward work on the wide range of other actions and commitments arising from the strategy.

Mr Cree: I thank the First Minister for his response. First Minister, will you detail the actual spend in the current financial year and the projected spend for 2015-16 by Departments on T:BUC?

Mr P Robinson: The Member touches on an important point that is being raised in OFMDFM. These were new projects that were not baselined, and we have had to bid for funds. We have been able to get sufficient funds to carry out the pilots and the preparatory work that was necessary for the schemes. However, we need to identify where the funds will come from to deal with the 2015-16 financial year. We have not identified those funds yet. We will have further conversations with the Minister of Finance and Personnel — I put him on notice — to identify funds for those projects. I think that they are hugely important. We carried out a pilot on the United Youth project and put young NEET people into that project. We found that 84% of those who went through the project ended up in work, in training or giving support in some form of community or charitable organisation. That is a massive change. If one were to hear some of the transformational stories of the young people who were part of that project, I think they would convince the House, and I hope they will convince the Minister of Finance, that it is a project that is worth funding.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Unfortunately, that ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Gregory Campbell: Threats

T1. **Mr Hussey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they agree that the threats made against Mr Gregory Campbell MP MLA and those who are responsible for such irresponsible actions should be condemned. *(AQT 1781/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: I do, of course. We have been consistent on the issue, because there are Members from all sides of the House who have been threatened in one way or another. When there is a threat against anyone who represents the local community as a democratically elected representative, it is an attack on democracy itself. I trust that the early knowledge that the police have of the issue will help them to prevent anything arising from it, but I certainly condemn it completely. I thank the Member for his question, and I know that the Member for East Londonderry will not be deterred from doing the good job that he does for his constituents in East Londonderry, both here and in Parliament.

Mr Hussey: Does the First Minister agree that the history of the Irish language is associated very closely with the Presbyterian Church? In fact, the Presbyterian ministers kept that language alive. Does he agree with me that such an attack on Mr Campbell would make the support for the Irish language within the unionist community step back because of what they see as terrorism being associated with the Irish language?

Mr P Robinson: It certainly would be counterproductive. I have to say that I do not point the finger at those who have a real and genuine interest in the Irish language. I suspect that the culprit is someone who perhaps could not care less about the Irish language except for using it for political purposes. Yes, the Irish language does have a history that has roots in Presbyterianism in Ireland, as it then was. It is a perfectly honourable entitlement for anyone to advance the Irish language and speak it. Of course, we respect those who do. We really need to separate and recognise the difference between support for the Irish language and those who want to use the Irish language for political purposes.

Senior Civil Service: Gender Equality and Balance

T2. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, bearing in mind that although 53% of the make-up of the Civil Service is female, 100% of the permanent secretaries are male, even though 70% of Senior Civil Service staff at grade 3 are female, when there will be progress in finding equality and balance. *(AQT 1782/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: I very much encourage those within the Civil Service who are female and have the ability to apply for all the jobs that come up at the higher levels of the Civil Service. At the same time, we must always make sure that job appointments are made on the basis of merit. Of course, we have had females in very high positions, including that of permanent secretary, within the Civil Service. I hope that we can get back to that. My experience of the female participation in the higher echelons of the Civil Service has been a positive one. I hope that the Member is not indicating — and I certainly hope that it is not the case — that there is any glass ceiling within the Civil Service. It must be open to all on the basis of their ability to do the job.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the First Minister for that answer, and I find it encouraging, but of course the proof of the pudding is always in the eating. It is a situation that we have been looking at for a number of years, and we appear to be unable to make progress. Therefore, will he, through his position, take a personal interest in this, given that, across 11 Departments, every permanent secretary is male, and the situation is almost as bad at grades 3 and 5, which is wholly unacceptable? All of us should endeavour to ensure that when he says that there is no glass ceiling we can demonstrate and prove that.

Mr P Robinson: I take on board what the Member says. I entirely endorse the thrust of his remarks, but it will be a lot more difficult to end up with the outcomes that he refers to in circumstances where we are downsizing the public sector or, indeed, reducing the number of Departments, which would take out positions at each level in the Civil Service. However, I have no doubt that, as far as OFMDFM is concerned — I am pretty sure that I speak for the deputy First Minister when I say this — we repudiate anything standing in the way of full gender equality in positions at any level in the public service. We are happy to champion that cause, and there will certainly be no distinction on our part on the basis of gender. We look at who is the best person to do a job. I hope that that is a position that the various panels will exercise. We should also remember that these appointments are governed by guidelines and rules that forbid any form of discrimination.

Gregory Campbell: Insulting Remarks

T3. **Ms McCorley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister would consider asking Gregory Campbell to withdraw the remarks he made at the DUP party conference when he once again insulted the Irish language and Irish speakers, including thousands of children in Irish-medium education. *(AQT 1783/11-15)*

Ms McCorley: Ag comhdháil do pháirtí thug Gregory Campbell masla don Ghaeilge agus do Ghaeilgeoirí, ina measc, na mílte páiste atá ag gabháil fríd Ghaeloideas. Ar mhaith leat iarriadh ar Gregory Campbell a chuid focal a tharraingt siar?

Mr P Robinson: I think that we really do need to distinguish between lampooning those involved in a political campaign related to the Irish language and those who genuinely speak the Irish language. I have known Gregory Campbell for decades, and I know his dry sense of humour as well. I am pretty sure that he was pointing the finger at those who, in my view, politically abuse the Irish language. Frankly, they set back the prospect of acceptance of the Irish language among many other sections of the community.

I am fully supportive of those who enjoy speaking the Irish language, its richness and the culture surrounding it. They must be protected. However, when it starts to get drawn into the political realm, we start to undermine and dilute the importance of the language. As a matter of interest for those who are speakers, the more we can do to depoliticise the Irish language, the greater acceptance there will be of that language in the community.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. How can you claim to respect other

cultures and identities when you defend and echo the comments made at your party conference?

Mr P Robinson: We see evidence here of a supplementary question that was prepared before I gave an answer. I made it clear during my remarks at the party conference that this community will go forward only when there is a higher level of respect, understanding and tolerance. That has to be the way forward, but it has to be the way forward not just for the Irish language but for the unionist and Orange traditions as well. It ill becomes anybody to, on the one hand, feel offence when it is something that relates to the Irish language but, on the other, close their eyes and ignore the fact that there are people on the Benches opposite who have made comments about the royal family, the Orange institutions, parades in Northern Ireland and many other parts of the culture and tradition of the unionist community.

As I said at the party conference, it is essential that this is not a one-way street and that everybody recognises the importance of respecting, understanding and tolerating the other's tradition.

Gregory Campbell: Insulting Remarks

T4. **Mr Dickson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister, who described Mr Campbell's remarks on Saturday as "a bit of comedy", can tell the House who is laughing. *(AQT 1784/11-15)*

Mr Dickson: I join with others to clearly condemn the threats made against Mr Campbell today.

Mr P Robinson: When he first made the remarks in the Chamber, a lot of people opposite were laughing.

Mr Dickson: Does describing another party's proposals as toilet paper mean that the DUP has written off any chance of agreement in the current talks?

Mr P Robinson: I think that Mr Campbell was careful to use the term "wish list", as opposed to the serious agenda items that we are discussing in the talks process. I and the party are fully committed to reaching agreement on the wide range of issues that is being discussed as part of the agenda in the talks process. If we collectively fail in reaching agreement, it says little for the future of the Assembly and Executive, so it is very important that we reach agreement. That is why there has always been reluctance, on our part and, as I understood it, on the part of Mr Dickson's party, to stretch the agenda and deal with the wish list issues or the hobby horses, because all our political parties have them and we know that. There are key central issues that need to be resolved in the process, and that is where our focus and attention have to be.

Barnett Formula: Replacement

T5. **Mr Gardiner** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister has had any discussions with the UK Government on the replacement of the Barnett formula. *(AQT 1785/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: It has come up in a number of conversations. There is not a lot of enthusiasm in Northern Ireland for the replacement of the Barnett formula. If the Barnett formula is removed, I suspect that there would be massive political pressure from the north of England and from Wales for a recalculation, which would be to the detriment of Northern Ireland. If we have to cut up the cake differently, it will lead to us getting a smaller portion. That being the case, while it has been discussed, I was pleased that, as an outcome of the Scottish referendum, the Prime Minister indicated that he had no intention of replacing the Barnett formula.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the First Minister thus far. Will he outline the main arguments that he will use to keep Northern Ireland's block grant at the current level in the event of a redistribution of finance following the Scottish referendum?

Mr P Robinson: That comes close to the issues that we were arguing for in relation to corporation tax. We have come from a position where there has been massive division in our community. Our economy needs as much support as possible to be able to stand on its own two feet. For those reasons, the need factor is high in Northern Ireland.

I could easily make an argument for a higher proportion of that formula than we get at present, in terms of the distribution of whatever funds are available, but I can certainly make an argument as to why the amount that we are receiving in the block grant should be increased. In real terms, over the last four or five years, we have lost the equivalent of £1·5 billion of spending. All the difficulties that we are facing, in relation to the cuts that Ministers are having to contemplate, come as a result of the reduction in our block grant. Whatever the calculation and the formula may be, the overall pot needs to be considered, and there are issues that we have to deal with in Northern Ireland that are unique within the United Kingdom. Therefore, whatever the Barnett formula might be, I think that there is a very good argument for us to have Barnett plus.

Equality Commission: Ashers Bakery

T6. **Ms McGahan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the First Minister's recent comments about the Equality Commission and its role in the Ashers Bakery case, whether the First Minister can confirm that OFMDFM is fully committed to the work of the Equality Commission in identifying and challenging all forms of discrimination. *(AQT 1786/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: OFMDFM has statutory ownership of the Equality Commission but does not have any operational responsibility for it. The Equality Commission itself has a duty and remit that requires it to uphold equality for everyone. That has to include those who are Christian as well as those who are not.

2.45 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

1. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to open up the Chinese market for dairy-related products from Northern Ireland. *(AQO 7115/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am pleased to advise not only that the Chinese market is already open for dairy products from the North but that it is thriving. In 2013, 3,613 tons of dairy products such as butter, cheese and milk powder were

exported from the North to China. In 2014, 3,918 tons have already been exported, and I am very pleased to see that upward trend. Overall, dairy exports have increased by 30% this year, and my officials continue to work closely with our industry to facilitate this growing trade.

In addition, significant quantities of raw milk are used in the production of dairy products in the South that may then be exported to China. My officials have established an international trade dairy group with their counterparts in the South to ensure that trade in those types of products is facilitated. At the most recent meeting, officials agreed new processes that ensure that the support that we give to the industry across the island of Ireland is a lot more joined up.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her detailed response, which is most welcome.

Is the Minister aware that the Irish Government's Minister for Agriculture, Simon Coveney, visited China recently, bringing great hope to many food producers in the South? There is a hope and desire that our own Minister will also take the opportunity to visit China to promote the same concept and to increase the quantity and quality of produce that is going to China.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am aware of the recent visit of Simon Coveney and the delegation. The Member will be aware that I have actually been to China twice to explore the market and to make links with the Chinese Government and trade bodies. I intend to make another trip to China, hopefully very early in the new year, not just for the dairy industry, although that is obviously vital, but to look at some of the challenges that we are having in getting export certificates signed off with Chinese officials. I wrote to our friends in China recently and asked for some movement on that, particularly because the pork industry has been very disappointed by the continual cancellation of inspection visits by the Chinese vets. We are hopeful that we will get that progressed as quickly as possible. As I say, some work is being done to see whether there is scope in my going out in early January to pursue the market further.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister tell us whether any new dairy export markets are being considered?

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to note that a significant number of dairy export markets are already open for products from the North and, indeed, from across the island. That includes access to the new emerging economies of India and China. There is also a planned inspection in December by the Brazilians, who will visit interested dairy exporters in England, Scotland and Wales. Whilst our industry has indicated that it is not planning to export to Brazil, the inspection will hopefully provide a new, lucrative market for the industry in the future.

Mr Irwin: Given the current depressed markets for dairy produce across Europe, and given the importance of the dairy sector to the Northern Ireland economy, has the Minister met our three MEPs to look at a possible way forward?

Mrs O'Neill: I have not met with the three MEPs to talk about the dairy sector specifically, but my door is always open and I am very keen to engage with them, particularly given the discussions that happen in Europe. I am very aware that one of the MEPs is involved in the new dairy report, and at an official level we have already been inputting to that.

You are absolutely right that the crisis in the dairy sector is very real, as are the issues concerning price, managing cash flow and all the other issues that exist for the sector. My Department is certainly up for playing its role in whatever shape or fashion that may take to support the sector to grow. You will be aware that, under the Going for Growth strategy, there are a number of initiatives that will support the industry in going forward. It is so important that we tackle the underlying issues of profitability and look towards production efficiency. As I said, we in the Department are certainly up for playing our role to take that forward. We have done a lot of work around knowledge transfer, education and training. We will continue to do that over the next wee while.

Incidentally, I am meeting the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) tomorrow to discuss issues that are pertinent to the dairy sector. I look forward to that discussion. I also hope to have a conversation over the next couple of days with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Elizabeth Truss, particularly on the dairy industry. We are coming at trying to support the industry from a number of fronts in what is obviously a very difficult time, given that there was a 30% difference in prices this October from those from last year.

Mrs Dobson: Unfortunately, the Republic has been allowed to get ahead in building routes into the Chinese market. As Agriculture Minister in this Executive, can she give a commitment that, for the Chinese market, she sees the Republic of Ireland as nothing other than a major competitor? Ideology must not get in the way of standing up for our farmers and agriculture sector.

Mrs O'Neill: Those are typical nonsense-politics arguments. The reality is that what we need to do is work together across the island to get into these markets. That is the reality of the situation. The industry wants to see that. There is very strong growth right across the island. As I said in my initial answer, quite a significant amount of trade happens across the island, and that is why my Department works with our counterparts in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to assist the industry, North and South, to grow. Given the quota situation post-2015, there are absolutely opportunities for us to explore. I am certainly up for working with the industry. What we need to see is a dairy-led strategy. As part of that, we will be working right across the island.

I do not think that the Member should get hung up too much on ideological positions. This is, in fact, a trade issue on which we can work together quite successfully across the island.

DARD HQ: Ballykelly

2. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what private sector industries in, or related to, agriculture or rural development are being sought to complement the move of her departmental headquarters to Ballykelly. *(AQO 7116/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I can advise the Member that, as a result of the soft market testing exercise on the Shackleton site by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister earlier this year, over 40 expressions of interest were

received, principally from the private sector, although there was also some partnership and public sector interest. OFMDFM is giving consideration to uses for the wider Shackleton site as part of the plans to develop it.

Mr Campbell: I know that the Minister was initially somewhat lukewarm about the move to the site, but it is always a welcome development when a politician does the right thing. In doing the right thing, you should always keep doing the right thing, whether there are threats, online abuse or anything else. Keep doing the right thing. That is what I intend to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Can we have a question, please?

Mr Campbell: On the contribution that has had to be made from the public purse to the development of the Ballykelly site, will she now ensure, along with OFMDFM, that swift progress is made to try to utilise best the rest of the site?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is aware that I am very much committed to the project moving forward and have made headquarters relocation one of my principal priorities, which is why I made it a Programme for Government commitment. Since taking up office, I, like my predecessor Michelle Gildernew, have always been of the view that we need to move our headquarters to a rural location to bring us closer to our service users and to achieve all the knock-on benefits that we have always talked about. This is about a fairer distribution of public sector jobs and giving opportunities to those in the public sector to have promotion opportunities. The benefits speak for themselves. I have always been committed to the project. I have set out my stall to take it forward, and I will do so in the time ahead.

OFMDFM is the principal Department in developing the entire site. It is obvious from the expressions of interest that the move by DARD to the Ballykelly site will attract other people there. I am quite sure that that will happen over the next number of years. It will be a long-awaited investment in the north-west, which people there are entitled to, having been robbed of it for years.

Mr Byrne: Can the Minister tell us when the outline business case will be completed and the cost-benefit analysis conducted?

Mrs O'Neill: The outline business case has been cleared by DARD's internal assurance processes. Executive approval to proceed was given on 26 June 2014 by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. The business case outlines the options for relocating the headquarters to Ballykelly and was informed by a report by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) on the accommodation options available on the Shackleton Barracks site, an assessment of equality impacts of relocation and the modelling of the required staff transition to the new headquarters, while incorporating opportunities provided by modern ICT as appropriate.

The preferred option points to a phased approach to construction, with 400 workstations being completed in 2017 and a further phase of around 200 workstations being completed in 2020. The total cost of the phased option is £30·8 million capital and £14·3 million resource. The funding gap is £29·7 million capital and £11·3 million resource.

The current programme for the work at Ballykelly indicates that the tender award for construction will happen at the end of 2015. Prior to that, my officials will develop the outline business case into the full business case.

Mr Lyttle: Given the extreme pressure on public finances, not least on our hospitals and schools, will the Minister outline the total estimated cost of the project? Does she accept that it is not appropriate in such austere times?

Mrs O'Neill: No, I do not accept that. The principal point is about a fair distribution of public-sector jobs. It is about better promotional opportunities for the public service. It is about ensuring that there are opportunities right across the North and that we have a better distribution of public-sector jobs. That is key; it is the principle that should guide us when moving forward. I have set out our stall in relation to Ballykelly for the headquarters, fisheries going to south Down, Rivers Agency going to Loughry in Cookstown, and Forest Service going to Fermanagh. I am absolutely committed to taking those projects forward. I have set that out in budget plans.

We absolutely are in austere times; it is a difficult economic climate. You always have to put it in context of what we are dealing with, which is the onslaught on the Budget from the Tory Government. There are difficult decisions to be taken. I am absolutely up for taking the fairest and most balanced approach I can. I assure the Member that I am committed to those relocation projects.

Mrs Hale: Will the Minister tell the House whether the redeployment has taken into consideration the surplus staffing positions in the Department and the impending voluntary exit schemes?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. As part of the plan and in moving forward, we have been working very closely with the trade union side to make sure that staff are fully up to speed with all the moves that are happening and the implications for them. We are working with our staff. We have surveyed staff in headquarters and right across all elements of the Department. There has also been a wider public service survey. That has all fed in. We are very committed to taking forward the phased approach, which allows for any staff changes that may happen.

We still do not have all the details of the voluntary redundancy scheme, but that will become clearer from DFP over the next number of weeks. I am quite sure that a number of people, right across my Department and others, will want to take up that opportunity. We have to work our way through all that with DFP over the next number of months. It will be towards the middle of next year before we will know the numbers of staff from each Department who will go under the voluntary scheme.

DARD Budget: Savings

3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to deliver savings in her Department's budget in 2015-16. *(AQO 7117/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: My officials will be discussing all of my Department's Budget 2015-16 proposals, including savings, at the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee tomorrow. We aim to publish DARD's draft budget consultation document on our website on Wednesday. Full details can be viewed then.

Delivering savings of almost £30 million will be challenging for my Department. However, I have been engaging

with officials regularly over the last number of months to develop the most balanced approach to implementing any savings that have to be found. The approach focuses on the operating costs of the Department, including general running costs and staffing levels in all areas, as well as programme expenditure. I have also set targets to raise additional income to ensure the future sustainability of the key services delivered by my Department.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that there was a commitment from her Department in the previous Programme for Government to cut 15% from administration. Her predecessor managed less than a third of that. How does she justify a further £2·4 million being spent on administration from 2011 to the current year?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, every Department needs an element of administration, not least my Department, given that we administer almost £300 million of single farm payments to farmers. We need to make sure that we have the staff and expertise to be able to deliver that. I am absolutely committed to making sure that we protect the revenue that we receive — not just the £300 million but the rural development programme — for the farming and rural communities. We are looking across the Department at savings that may be found. I am working to try to protect front-line services as best we can to make sure that we look at how we deliver services and at whether we can improve things. That is constantly under review, as is the constant look at where we are duplicating services, where we can find efficiency and where we can do things better.

Mr Poots: When the Minister reviews all these matters, will she consider taking away from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) the authority for cross-compliance checking? It is carrying out its duties in such a way that it is damaging farmers' health and mental health, and it is driving farmers to attempt suicide. The anger in the farming community towards NIEA is palpable.

3.00 pm

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that the NIEA comes under the remit of the Department of the Environment, but, as I said in my earlier answer, if there are new ways of doing things, if there are ways to double up on inspections, if there are ways to improve efficiency, then I am absolutely up for that and open to it as part of the discussions that we are going to have, particularly in terms of the 2015-16 Budget, in the time ahead. Everything is there, and, as I said, I am very prepared to listen to views on how we can do things more efficiently.

I am also aware of the pressure that the farming community is under, particularly the dairy sector and the prices it is now receiving for its produce, which are 30% down on this time last year. That is very significant for farm income. There are severe cash flow and management issues for farmers, so, absolutely, all those things are putting people under pressure.

I would like to think that it is nobody's intention in any Department to go out and make things difficult for any individual or farmer. So, as I said in answer to your original question, if there are opportunities for us to be leaner and more efficient, and cause the least disruption for farmers, then I am absolutely up for that.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister's programme for tackling rural poverty and social isolation be affected by next year's Budget?

Mrs O'Neill: It is one of my policy priorities. I have said that I am absolutely committed to the Programme for Government commitments that we have made. But, tackling rural poverty and social isolation, is a key policy priority for me. We have to be real. This is the only Department that is serious about tackling isolation and poverty in rural communities. The pot of money that we have dedicated to tackling poverty and social isolation has levered in so much additional funding for rural communities. For me, this is a priority moving forward, and I intend to roll out the programme over the next year and, indeed, in planning for Budget post 2015-16.

Rural Crime

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the work her Department is doing to increase awareness of rural crime. *(AQO 7118/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The responsibility for combating rural crime falls primarily to the Department of Justice and the PSNI. However, I am personally very aware of the concern that farm-related crime causes among the farming community.

The Department works on a number of joint initiatives that aim to raise awareness of actions that farmers can take to reduce incidences of rural crime. DARD works closely with the DOJ, the PSNI and farming organisations on initiatives such as the Farm Watch, the freeze-branding initiative and the Crimestoppers campaign.

In addition, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) students who are on CAFRE programmes learn about appropriate responses to rural crime through input from visiting speakers, information leaflets and participation of the college farms in PSNI-led programmes such as Farm Watch. In addition, CAFRE has facilities available, which can be used by the PSNI for workshops, seminars and meetings aimed at raising awareness of crime prevention measures among the farming community.

I have also ensured that all of the DARD Direct offices currently stock rural crime leaflets at the front desk where members of the public can access necessary information in relation to this issue.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she outline what provision has been made in the white paper for rural communities to be part of the roll-out, the discussion and the consultation, particularly in relation to community safety?

Mrs O'Neill: The rural White Paper action plan contains a commitment by the Department of Justice to develop a new community safety strategy that will ensure that the needs of rural communities are taken into account. The Department of Justice has confirmed that the community safety strategy has been published, and action plans for each of the eight strands of activity detailed in the strategy have been developed and agreed by the Justice Committee. One of the eight strands is about reducing the opportunities for crime and includes outcomes on supporting safer rural communities and working in partnership with rural groups to prevent and reduce crime.

I hope to publish the second annual progress report on the rural White Paper action plan next month, which will provide an update on progress by all Departments in implementing their commitments in the action plan.

Mr Irwin: My constituency is in the greater Armagh area, which has the highest rural crime in Northern Ireland. Given the new rural development programme coming out next year, does the Minister intend to bring forward any grant aid to help make farms safer?

Mrs O'Neill: I totally understand the Member, in terms of the district he lives in. I think that E district and F district, which hold probably about 59% of all farms across the North, have the highest levels of rural crime. So, there is a particular focus on those districts, and rightly so.

I think that we should be creative about how we look at grant aid and certain items of assistance for farmers. Some of our initiatives for stamping items will make them safer and more traceable if they happen to be stolen. So we are exploring opportunities. I am keen to do that in the roll-out of the new grant programme.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answers. It is quite clear that effort has been put into trying to tackle rural crime. There is a perception out there that rural crime has, in fact, increased. Will the Minister confirm that that is so and why it might be so?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the stats on rural crime, given that that is a responsibility of the Department of Justice. Suffice to say that my Department, particularly through our enforcement and veterinary side, works with other agencies in trying to tackle rural crime. However, we have seen a rise in the crime stats over the last number of years. As I said in a previous answer, we have seen particular rises in the Clogher area, areas of Fermanagh and south Tyrone, and in E district and F district, so there are concerns. My Department will play its role in working with other agencies, but primary responsibility for tackling rural crime rests with the Department of Justice.

Devolved Administrations: Economies of Scale

5. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, within the UK budgetary framework, to outline the economies of scale she has achieved with other devolved administrations in the UK. *(AQO 7119/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: There are a number of examples in my Department of sharing the costs of research and, therefore, deriving economies of scale. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) collaborates with a number of research organisations to maximise the value of several publicly funded research projects such as a recent project on greenhouse gas emissions that was funded by DEFRA and the devolved Administrations.

Another good example of sharing the costs of research with DEFRA and the other devolved Administrations is the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute economic research project undertaken by AFBI. This project has been very important in providing an evidence base to support the negotiations and decision-making on CAP reform, in particular since 2003. Were it not for this sharing of costs, the Department would probably be unable to carry the full cost of this valuable analytical tool. In addition, AFBI is part of the Farming Futures strategic alliance with several research organisations in Britain, which has the aim of combining their respective resources to maximise value for money for additional research funding applications.

A further example of the Department achieving economies of scale is through its participation in a large multi-provider framework agreement that went live in October. This agreement will facilitate and deliver the provision of services of a veterinary nature to government across England, Scotland and Wales as well as here over the next four years.

The Department's Rivers Agency also has strong links with the devolved Administrations in relation to flood risk management, where economies of scale can be realised in the field of scientific research. The agency, for example, is a funding partner on the coastal monitoring and forecasting service. That allows the agency to avail itself of research on coastal flood warning.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister very much for her information thus far. Has she considered outsourcing special functions involving the administration of EU funding, for example, to units that could serve Scotland and Wales as well as provide money for three other places?

Mrs O'Neill: As the Member can see from the previous answer, we have worked collectively across the board on quite a range of issues. I am very open to working across the board in delivering services when that is achievable. We are looking at everything in the round. Given the difficult economic climate that we are in, we are looking at how we do it. We already work collaboratively as a paying agency that distributes EU funding. If the Member wants to write to me with any specific proposals of how we can take this forward, I am very open to receiving that.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin. Go nuige, chuir sí béim ar chúrsaí bia. I listened to the Minister as she talked about the emphasis being placed on agrifood research and the likes. Last week, I was in Brussels, where we heard of various sources of funding and particularly about where collaborative work can be done between various institutes, AFBI being one. Will the Minister give us some indication of the work that is being done with other regions in Britain, and, given the nature of some funds, it also has to be cross-border or between nation states? What work has been done in her Department to help to draw down those funds, particularly with the development of such projects in the agrifood sector?

Mrs O'Neill: I have tasked AFBI with ensuring that we increase our drawdown. One of the Executive's Programme for Government commitments is about drawing down additional money, particularly from Horizon 2020.

We have in the region of 30 applications with Europe for consideration, quite a number of them in collaboration with other agencies. AFBI came out to Brussels to get to know the people they need to be talking to out there. We have explored with them how they can be creative about how applications are put forward in working with their partners.

I am happy to provide the Member with the detail of all those collaboration projects. There are too many for me to detail here today. The work that has been done has been fantastic, but there is scope for additional money to be drawn down. That is why I tasked AFBI to increase our EU research funding drawdown.

DARD HQ: Ballykelly

6. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current condition of the proposed site of her new departmental headquarters in Ballykelly. *(AQO 7120/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed site for the DARD HQ building is approximately 14 acres of the upper part of the Shackleton site. Since being vacated by the British military in 2008, the site has become overgrown with undergrowth and larger vegetation. The site identified for my new headquarters has 17 old military buildings and stores, which are in varying states of disrepair. Each of those buildings has been subject to an asbestos survey, and preparations are in place to ensure their safe and efficient demolition early next year. Although the site has remained secure, a section of the perimeter fence needs maintenance, and arrangements are in place to carry out that work.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. During this process, though, the Minister has thrown out the rule book on proper process. She has shown contempt for ensuring public value for money and over-ruled concerns of accounting officials not only in her Department but in OFMDFM.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Do we have a question?

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister tell us, as we stand today, exactly how much the clean-up of the site, as well as preventing future flooding, will cost?

Mrs O'Neill: I suggest that the Member has got the wrong Department. She should put her question to OFMDFM, given that it is the owner of the site. I will make it very clear: I am committed to taking this project forward. So people can protest all they like. There is an Executive agreement to the project going forward. The Executive have signed off, as the authority of this Assembly, on the project going forward. I have put considerable work, as have officials, into making sure that we put the case together, work with staff and plan it in a phased approach to allow for the transition.

I am surprised at the Member, who is not supportive of taking public sector jobs into rural areas, given the constituency that she represents.

Mr G Robinson: Could the Minister give a rough estimate of how many much-needed jobs will be created when Shackleton Barracks is fully open for business?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give job figures for only my Department. We are talking about 400 in the first phase and up to 600 in the secondary phase. The scope and potential there for public and private sector jobs is absolutely enormous, given the size of the site. The fact that we have had such a significant number of companies enquiring as to the future of the site and registering their interest as a business that may want to come there is fantastic to see. I look forward to that coming to fruition.

It is up to us to lead the way in making sure that DARD headquarters are secure on the site and that that work starts. I think that will then open the floodgates for the other businesses that will come after it. The benefits of that for the north-west are absolutely tremendous in job creation, construction works and ongoing associated benefits.

Mr McCarthy: I hear the Minister's response in relation to this. I hear it in her voice that she is determined to see this through and she has almost reached the stage of arrogance. In view of the horrendous fiscal situation every Department is in, and how they have all had to cut back, why and how is she so determined that this will go ahead, mindful that others have had to cancel or postpone projects?

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure that the Member, knowing me personally, will know that arrogance is not in my nature, but I am committed to this project. I am committed to taking it forward. This has been worked on for a significant period. This is about the bigger picture. People need to see the bigger picture. For too long, public sector jobs have been centred in the greater Belfast area. That is not a position that we in the Assembly should continue to see.

For me, this is about the fair distribution of jobs. It is about the knock-on economic benefit that there will be for all those who live in the north-west in this case and from all the other relocation projects that I am taking forward. The money has been set aside in the Budget. It has all be budgeted for and taken forward through business case and all the different procedures. We have Executive sign-off on this project, which is why I am being firm in my position. This is about wider benefits, and people need to look at it in that way. It is not my intention to be arrogant; it is my intention to be forthright, because this is a policy priority for me.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to topical questions. Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Fishing Quotas: Ardglass and Kilkeel

T1. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what fishing quotas are likely to be issued for the south Down ports of Ardglass and Kilkeel. *(AQT 1791/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that the three main fishing ports are very dependent on the quotas that are decided upon in December. I will be going to Brussels in December to argue the case once again for the fishing community. As part of the lead-up to that, I will engage with the fishermen from the three ports. We had a large stakeholder event over the past month, and I intend to meet fishermen over the next number of weeks to discuss our priorities going into the December negotiations on our quotas for next year.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. At the meeting in the next couple of weeks, will the Minister be bringing forward any additions to the quota allocation that will help to develop the fishing industry in the North?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that decisions on quotas are very much based on a scientific analysis of the state of the stock. We will go to Brussels to argue the case for an increased quota, as we always do. We have to develop our position with the industry, and I will do that based on the science that we have. Obviously, nephrops — the prawn stock — are the mainstay of the fishing industry here and will continue to be our priority as part of the negotiation. I assure the Member that my approach to the negotiations is very much agreed on and discussed with the fishing industry and its stakeholders.

Avian Flu

T3. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures she has taken to counteract avian flu. *(AQT 1793/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: We are taking immediate and robust action in response to a confirmed case of H5N8 avian flu on a duck-breeding farm in eastern Yorkshire. A detailed investigation is ongoing into the possible sources of the outbreak. The infection has been recovered from one wild duck in Germany. Wild birds are suspected as the source, so it is imperative that the industry and all wild-bird keepers maintain a high level of biosecurity to prevent encouraging the spread of the disease from the wild to the domestic population.

My officials have asked specialist organisations to report and submit unusual occurrences of wild-fowl deaths. As a precautionary measure — and it is precautionary — DARD has, since Monday 17 November, imposed additional controls on the movement of live birds, poultry products and poultry meat coming here from parts of Britain. DARD has also introduced a ban on the movement of live birds coming to the North for bird sales and pigeon races. I have asked poultry keepers to be vigilant for signs of the disease and to report their suspicions early. I have also asked that bird keepers, as a precaution, revisit their contingency arrangements for housing birds, should that be required. We are keeping the situation and the veterinary risk assessment under review.

We in the North have well-tested contingency plans for dealing with avian flu outbreaks, which have kicked in over the past couple of weeks, once the case in eastern Yorkshire was confirmed.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for a very detailed response. Will she outline what communication has taken place with the local industry on contingency plans?

Mrs O'Neill: Given the significance of the poultry industry locally, we have had ongoing discussions with the industry. My officials are making sure that they are kept up to date. We also have a Q&A section on the website, which I encourage people to look at if they have any doubts.

I will be meeting industry individuals over the next couple of days to discuss the situation, because obviously there is a trade implication for them, given the restrictions that we have introduced as a precautionary measure. My officials are also working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in the South, because the fortress Ireland approach will be key in maintaining our status of being free from the disease.

Single Farm Payments: Remote Sensing Inspections

T4. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which four areas she has selected for remote sensing inspections and whether the farmers in those areas have been informed. *(AQT 1794/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: As I told the House last year on the back of the review that looked at the areas that were chosen, all the farmers who have been chosen for remote sensing will be informed in as speedily a manner as possible. I believe that has happened over the past number of weeks and that those people have been informed that they have been subject to inspection, not to remote inspection. I have set very clear targets for the Department, and we are striving to make sure that we will deliver on them. My objective is to have over 500 people, who have been subject to inspection this year, paid in December. That is a significant improvement on last year's situation. The ultimate aim is to have the majority of people paid by the end of the year, and I believe that we will reach our target.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that you are saying that the farmers have been informed, what are you doing to support the four areas so that the scenario of last year does not happen again, considering that you have recognised the increasing pressure that farmers are under?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely recognise the increasing pressure that farmers are under. As I said, the numbers of people who will remain unpaid at the end of the year will be low. However, if you are in that small category of people, you will be under pressure. So, we are working with the Department to make sure that we get these payments. The most significant thing that I can do to support this industry is make sure that all those payments are made ASAP. So my intention is to be as close to 100% as we can get by the end of the year. Remaining cases will be dealt with over January and February, but I believe — and I know — that we will be in a far better position than we were in last year. There will not be any comparison.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr John McCallister is not in his place.

Rivers Agency: Relocation

T6. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what benefits there are for the local community from the Rivers Agency's relocation to the Loughry campus. *(AQT 1796/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The issue has been well rehearsed in Question Time today. I am absolutely committed to taking that forward. Moving jobs to any location will bring inevitable benefits to the local community, including through construction and bringing a public service into the heart of rural communities. I am absolutely committed to taking forward the project. The planning application has been submitted for Rivers Agency. In the region of 80 posts will relocate to the Loughry area, so that will bring significant economic benefits to the Cookstown area through, as I said, construction, servicing of a building and the increased footfall that will lead to increased spending in the community. It is something that I know that the Cookstown community in particular is very keen to see, given the stop-start nature of the Desertcreat project. Whilst I am certainly committed to seeing that through, for me, Rivers Agency is a project that is certainly on the move. It is on target for delivery.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer. What is the exact time frame for this relocation?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, the planning application is in, and work is ongoing on the site. We expect that the move will be completed by March 2016.

Rivers Agency: Flooding Resources

T7. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that she will be aware of the recent flooding incidents in different areas of the Province, whether she believes that Rivers Agency is adequately resourced to deal with the problem. *(AQT 1797/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I think that you have to look at every flooding incident on its merits, considering where the floods are and the contributing factors. In Rivers Agency, after an incident, one of the positive things that we do is take a look at the contributory factors and what can be improved. That happens on an ongoing basis, and we learn lessons and improve things or change practices if that is what is needed.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for the answer. Does the Minister accept — I am sure that she does not — that, sometimes, it seems that Rivers Agency is more reactive that proactive? We are coming into the time of the year when there is a higher likelihood of flooding. Are you minded, Minister, to make it more proactive than reactive?

Mrs O'Neill: There is always room for improvement across every area of service. I absolutely accept that. I think that the Member will be surprised to know the detailed number of inspections, grid inspections, clearing of drains and all the things that the Rivers Agency does. It is very proactive in nature. As I said, there are, of course, always ways to improve things, and I am always open to that. Maybe it would be useful if I sent the Member a bit of background information on the type of work that it does all year round on planning for times when we have prolonged weather situations, such as that which we have seen over the last couple of weeks.

DARD: 2015-16 Budget Priorities

T8. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she has acted to protect her budget priorities for 2015-16. *(AQT 1798/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: As I said earlier, the draft Budget position is going to the Committee, which will fully discuss it tomorrow. We have entered a period of consultation, and I look forward to engaging with all stakeholders on their responses to my proposals.

I have clearly set out my policy priorities, particularly on tackling poverty and isolation and supporting those farmers who farm hard-to-farm land, particularly in LFAs and ANCs. I also want to make sure that we have rural development programme spend on the ground next year as soon as it is signed off by Europe and that we move forward with all the Programme for Government commitments. I will make sure that I come at any approach to the budget from a very fair and balanced position and will try, as far as possible, not to impact front-line services. That is what I resolve to do to deliver DARD's budget in the time ahead.

We are absolutely entering into a period of consultation with stakeholders. I look forward to the discussions with them. It is a difficult economic climate, not least because of the extent of the Tory cuts to our overall block grant.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. Minister, what further revenue-raising opportunities are available for consideration by your Department?

Mrs O'Neill: It is important that all Departments look at how they can raise funds, as opposed to just looking for savings. You have to have a combination of both. From my Department's point of view, we are looking at how we can increase our EU drawdown on research funding, and we have tasked AFBI to do that. We are also looking at the Forest Service and how we can increase our timber sales receipts. There are opportunities in the Department to realise additional funding. We will also look at whether there is any potential for wind farm development on Forest Service land and at how we can maximise income for communities and the Department.

We are exploring quite a range of things as part of revenue-raising proposals. I am keen to continue to explore those, as I think it is incumbent on Ministers to look at not just savings but revenue-raising opportunities if we have them.

DARD HQ: Ballykelly

T9. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she agrees that some Members of the House are frustrated with the Ballykelly proposal simply because, for once, the Northern Ireland Executive are making a significant investment outside greater Belfast. *(AQT 1799/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: There is certainly a lot of resistance to the move. However, as I said earlier, I am absolutely committed to taking it forward, and I see the bigger picture in the wider benefits and the fairer distribution of public-sector jobs.

Ms Sugden: Will the Minister reiterate the long-term benefits for the local economy that the Ballykelly proposal will have for the north-west and Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Given the size of the site, there is potential not just for my Department to move to Ballykelly but from the private sector investment that will come to the north-west as a result of one Department taking the initiative to move lock, stock and barrel to the Ballykelly site. The benefits of the DARD move are in the fairer distribution of public-sector jobs, the construction jobs that will be created, the footfall in the area and increased spending. So, in the DARD move alone, there are significant benefits, but those benefits are obviously relevant to all the other investment that will come from the private sector on the back of the move. I look forward to being able to take that forward. As I said, I am absolutely committed to taking it forward and have budgeted for it in budget discussions and plans.

EU Commissioner Hogan: Meeting

T10. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she proposes to visit Brussels to meet the new Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Hogan. *(AQT 1800/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that Mr Hogan will be here during the next number of months, and I will engage with him then. I have written to him on a few occasions and will work with him in his new position as Commissioner. We obviously have some issues that we want to pursue with him, and I wrote to him recently about greening because the Commission is dragging its feet in giving some clarification that our industry deserves and is seeking.

Mr A Maginness: I am glad that the Minister will meet Mr Hogan very soon. I know that she has written to him to congratulate him on his new position and was very helpful to him in the nomination process. Given the serious problems with the dairy industry, would it not be appropriate to meet him as soon as possible to try to iron out some of the difficulties with that industry?

3.30 pm

Mrs O'Neill: I can assure the Member that I am mature enough to do that. I may have my political views on individuals, but, in my role as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I will work with whomever I need to work with to secure the best outcome and to secure discussions on numerous issues across my Department's area of responsibility. That is a given. I will certainly be working with Commissioner Hogan and others in Europe who are relevant to the challenges that we are presented with. I will do that with our MEPs, the European Parliament, the Commission, Commissioner Hogan and his officials.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time for questions is up.

Mr McCallister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise to you, the House and the Minister for missing my topical question.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Your apology is noted. Members will take their ease for a moment.

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

Committee Business

Public Accounts Committee: Reports and Memoranda of Reply

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly takes note of the following Public Accounts Committee Reports:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report

and the following Department of Finance and Personnel Memoranda of Reply:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report — [Ms Boyle (The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I apologise, Members. I was slightly delayed.

Ms Lo: I thank the Public Accounts Committee for bringing forward the many important issues that were examined by the Committee, the reports of which are before us today. Given the time constraints, I will not be commenting on all the reports. However, if there is one lesson to be

learned from them, it is the need for greater openness and transparency. It is imperative for us to ensure that information is released to the public on where money is spent and on how well public services are performing. Not only does it let people hold government to account but it can help to improve efficiency, give people choice in using public services and contribute to economic growth.

I welcome the recommendations in the report on the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). Linda Ford's suspension after she alleged financial wrongdoing in the organisation was reprehensible. I agree with the Committee's desire to see the Department, the NIFRS board and senior management work together to move the service to a position in which its main focus can be on improving performance rather than on dealing with the legacy of past mismanagement.

We have talked a lot in the House about the importance of Departments not working in silos but working together to solve problems and share best practice. It is clear that those external to central government must also be included, where appropriate.

The 'Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint' only adds to my initial point. The Committee is to be commended for the reports, which bring further transparency, but it would be much better if transparency had always been there in the first place.

As not only the Alliance Party's spokesperson on culture, arts and leisure but also a passionate supporter of the arts, I was interested to read the 'Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects'. As the report clearly states, if delivered well, arts and leisure infrastructure can enhance the lives of and services for the public as well as improving productivity for the region. If delivered poorly, potential benefits are not fully realised and the taxpayer has to meet significant additional costs.

In the period 2008-2011, DCAL had an enviable budget to deliver over £200 million capital investment in the Northern Ireland culture, arts and leisure infrastructure. We saw the wonderful renovations of the Grand Opera House, the Ulster Museum and the Crescent Arts Centre and the new buildings for the Public Record Office, Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, the Lyric and the MAC. I am a frequent visitor of all those enhanced or new venues, except PRONI, and I appreciate how the facilities have greatly improved the arts and leisure provision in Northern Ireland. However, the PAC was quite right to criticise the overall project cost overshooting 32% of its original estimated cost of £78·5 million, ending up costing £103·4 million.

The projects also encountered significant delays, one of which was a delay of 31 months in the delivery of the Crescent Arts Centre in my constituency of South Belfast. The building badly needed upgrading for many years, and I am sure that the long delay in getting the work done contributed to its deterioration and the eventual additional costs for renovation. That said, the Crescent is now a very popular venue for performing arts, exhibitions, classes and workshops.

The Committee was also critical of the unrealistic cost estimates in business cases for projects and the Department's failure to seek timely technical advice and giving grant recipients too much autonomy in making major decisions.

A damning criticism of the Department was on the awarding of the Lyric rebuild contract. The Committee found a number of discrepancies regarding adjustments and payments. The report also referred to a substantial donation to the Lyric by the preferred bidder, which gave the Committee the impression that the outcome of the tender process was both "rigged and manipulated". However, the Lyric refutes the claims of the PAC's report, stating that the project was delivered on time, within budget and to specification. It is worth noting that the Lyric has the smallest proportion of public funding amongst all the other arts projects but has produced a world-class, award-winning building, having been named building of the year by the Royal Society of Ulster Architects.

The follow-up report on improving pupil attendance recommends that the Department of Education develop and implement an attendance strategy and encourage all schools to actively engage with parents and the community. As a governor of Cranmore Integrated Primary School, I am aware of the good work of the school in keeping parents on board using conventional and digital media — texting parents all the time, and I think that parents do not mind that — so that there is instant and effective communication between the school and the home.

It is important that the Public Accounts Committee does not let these reports gather dust but sees that the recommendations are implemented. I believe that there should be follow-up debates to monitor progress on the recommendations in the reports to see whether lessons have been learned to improve practices.

Mr Easton: The Committee examined the cost and extent of the use of temporary agency staff in the PSNI; something upon which the PSNI has spent £106 million since 2004. It was established that nearly 40% of those employed through an employment agency had previously left the PSNI with a severance package. The examination included whether there was a planned approach to controlling and managing the supply and demand of those staff.

The implementation of the Patten report, including the reduction of the overall size of the Police Service by around 8,000 officers, represented an enormous challenge for the PSNI. Like many organisations, it uses temporary staff to cover short-term vacancies and to meet skills and knowledge gaps. The use of temporary staff, if properly managed and controlled, can provide value for money; however, in this case, the PSNI did not appear to have tight enough control or monitoring on the use of agency staff and the numbers of temporary staff engaged at times appeared to be excessive.

At the peak in 2007, 800 temporary staff were engaged. Even the Chief Constable acknowledged that corporate justification for the numbers was not there. A much firmer grip was needed and, in light of that, the Committee could only conclude that the PSNI spent considerably more on temporary staff than it needed to. The Committee emphasised the need to ensure that there are sound operational reasons for the use of temporary staff and clarity on the skills sets needed, and noted that it is hard to justify temporary staff remaining in post for several years without any review or challenge.

The award and governance of the contract to provide temporary staff was also an area where the Committee raised concerns, with the current supplier being in place

since 2002 and competitive tendering being undertaken only once for those services, in 2008. For much of the period, the PSNI had no assurance that the contract was providing value for money, and it needed much better quality management information to monitor and manage the contract effectively. The Committee found that the PSNI's explanation for why a competitive tendering exercise was not carried out was astonishing. The Committee disagreed with the PSNI's contention that procurement guidance in the area was not explicit. The Chief Constable has since given an assurance that future contracts will be assessed differently to include full salary costs and will thus be subject to a competitive tendering process.

The Committee also found that a very significant extension to the PSNI's agency staff contract was signed by a member of staff for an amount far in excess of their delegated authority. The contract extension led to an increase in spending of £44 million over four years; however, the member of staff who signed off on the contract extension in 2004 had a delegated authority of only £100,000. In the Committee's view, that highlighted the lack of control operating at that time and a lack of knowledge of roles and responsibilities by certain staff. The Committee noted, however, that appropriate training has been introduced across the PSNI to ensure that similar mistakes are not repeated.

The Committee found that, even when a competitive process for the award of the agency staff contract was introduced in 2008, there were major failings in the procurement process. The PSNI was found to have not completed a business case for the tender exercise until the process was at an advanced stage. The business case did not include salary costs, despite the fact that those amounted to over 90% of the contract value and that their inclusion was a clear requirement of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006. That means that the full cost of the tender, which was more than £60 million of public money over four years, was never properly assessed. The Committee considered that to be unacceptable.

The Committee found a significant gap in the business case and concluded that the strength of the PSNI's procurement arrangements at that time was questionable. Before spending public resources, a clear business need must be established, options for meeting that need must be considered properly, and the total amount that the contracting authority expects to pay under the contract must be quantified.

3.45 pm

Mr Beggs: I wish to concentrate on the report published by the Committee on Account NI and, if time permits, also touch on the report on increasing pupil attendance.

Account NI provides a financial processing shared service for Northern Ireland Departments and 18 public bodies. It processes some one million transactions a year, which are worth over £10 billion. This was quite a high-cost project that cost some £213 million. One of the selling points of the shared services project was big efficiency savings. That has not worked out in practice with Account NI, and it is important that the Committee investigates projects such as this to identify lessons for the future.

The Committee recognised that Account NI has made some worthwhile contributions and achievements in improving the accounting process, such as through ensuring that companies providing goods and services to Departments are paid within seven days on average against a 10-day target. That is quite a remarkable target and quite a remarkable performance, but at what cost? Is it justifiable? Normal businesses operate on a 30-day cycle. So, what are we paying for that improved performance? We heard recently of supermarkets going the other way. I am not advocating that, but they are abusing their suppliers by stretching well beyond 30 days. The Committee also recognised that the introduction of a common accounting system across all Departments was a significant advance on the previous outdated system, but there has been a lack of focus on delivering efficiency savings, which was the fundamental purpose of the process.

There is an absence of key performance data, even five years after Account NI was set up. That is unacceptable. I notice that, in the memorandum of understanding, the Department is in the process of establishing proposals on benchmarking categories. Many years later, it is just identifying categories. There is a lack of urgency. In the absence of benchmarking, the Audit Office collated some preliminary benchmarking figures. Some might argue that they are not exact, but, in the absence of any being provided by the Department, it is good to have an estimate, especially as the Department never attempted to benchmark. It cost £9·73 to process an invoice, and it is estimated that £2·73 was paid to the IT company per transaction. That is a way of printing money.

Shared services centres were developed as a result of the 2004 Gershon review into public administration to achieve those efficiencies, but today some 45 public bodies could have chosen to join and perhaps create even more efficiencies but have not done so. Perhaps they are unconvinced of the savings and benefits, and there has certainly not been any evidence provided to the Committee and none shown in the report to demonstrate that savings are achievable and that there are significant benefits that would warrant buying into it.

As I said, the Committee considered that elements were extraordinarily high, and there really must be a detailed review of Account NI costs to identify potential savings. The total cost of the project will be some £213 million, and, given that huge investment of public funds, one would have expected to have seen clear evidence of the project delivering value for money. Again, that was not the case.

The Department has retained some staff to process payments, when all of the work should have been passed to Account NI. Account NI's staffing levels are higher than planned, though it has to be acknowledged that it has taken on some additional work. The Committee wants DFP to review staffing levels in Account NI and to work with other Departments to reassess their needs for processing staff to eliminate the duplication of work and unnecessary checking.

The Committee found little evidence to support the Department's claims to have achieved improved decision-making, which was among the wider benefits that had been indicated. It is clear that, in future projects, the Department must limit its non-financial objectives to a few key targets that are capable of being measured. Some 21 had been indicated but had not really been measurable, and it had not been demonstrated that they had been clearly achieved.

The Committee was concerned that, in 2012, only 55% of Account NI customers thought that it was a good or very good service. Departmental financial directors wanted better management information. That is after investing hundreds of millions of pounds. Clearly, that is not good enough, and improvement is needed.

The Department has accepted the Committee's recommendations, and the Department's memorandum of response details how these are to be implemented.

I will briefly touch on the report on improving pupil attendance at school. First, I welcome the fact that the report has been published and has highlighted the issue to the Department of Education, but it is astonishing that the Public Accounts Committee and the Northern Ireland Audit Office have had to deal with the subject. I declare an interest as a governor of Glynn Primary School and Horizon Sure Start. One would have thought, given the hundreds of people employed — senior officials within the Department of Education — that greater priority would be given to attendance at school. I have been asking questions on attendance in school since 2007-08. There are some worrying figures in my constituency, and some wards with 25% of pupils with less than 85% attendance at school, which limits their ability to achieve their full potential and contribute to society in the future. I welcome the report that has been published and the drive to improve school attendance and increase the opportunities that will be available to our young people.

Mr McQuillan: I would like to address the report published this year by the Committee on pupil attendance, but, first of all, I place on record my thanks to the Clerk and the staff for all the help and support they have given us during these reports.

When the Committee looks at value for money in the public sector, it does so in a rounded way and does not just focus on the pounds, shillings and pence spent. On the contrary, we also look at the service delivery and the extent to which our citizens get best value from the public services available to them. One of the most interesting evidence sessions last year examined the issue of pupil attendance in our school system. Pupil attendance and educational achievement are inextricably linked, and it is therefore vital that the education system does all that it can to ensure that children attend school regularly to make the most of their time in compulsory education. Children who do not attend school regularly are effectively forfeiting the value of their education. As a Committee, we therefore found it extremely concerning that unauthorised absence in Northern Ireland schools has increased from 27% in 2007-08 to 33% in 2011-12 and is double that reported in England.

The annual cost lost in education is estimated to be in the region of £22 million. The Committee was particularly concerned that the absence levels reported for some of the most vulnerable groups of young people, including pupils from socially deprived backgrounds, Traveller children and looked-after children, are much higher than the average. The Committee was not convinced that the Department had got to grips with the most deep-rooted issues, such as social disadvantage and unauthorised absence. We noted that, while the Department has taken steps to improve pupil attendance over the last 10 years, it was disappointing that it had not made more progress in implementing the recommendations in the Audit Office's 2004 report. In particular, the Department has still not developed or implemented an overall attendance strategy. We therefore considered the development of a coherent strategy to be the necessary starting point and recommended that that should be in progress urgently.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McQuillan: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member agree that it is astonishing that, in 2014, education welfare officers do not have full access to pupil attendance at school in their own office? We are only now carrying out pilots with a couple of officers to see whether that could be widened. Does he agree that that significantly inhibits their ability to do their work? Given the high levels of absenteeism in certain areas, does he agree that there is a lack of concentration from the Department and perhaps other contributing Departments on addressing the high levels of absenteeism in specific areas — generally socially disadvantaged areas — where action is needed?

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

Mr McQuillan: Certainly I agree with the Member. Those are some of the points that I will touch on later.

It is pleasing to note that the Department, in its memorandum of reply, has agreed that an attendance strategy is required and has undertaken to develop that over the next 12 months. The strategy will also address specified groups of children and young people who require additional support. The Committee is aware that there is already a plethora of good practice in our schools and that some schools have managed to overcome the problems associated with non-attendance, despite challenging circumstances. Indeed, we visited Millburn Primary School in Coleraine, in my constituency, and found that it has a very proactive approach to non-attendance. We find it very disappointing, however, that such examples are very much driven by individual schools, so we ask that the Department translate the dissemination of good practice into a coherent plan so that all schools can share expertise in a structured way.

The Department has recognised the need for a structured approach and accepted the importance of the Education and Training Inspectorate's role, with the result that the ETI is to undertake a good practice survey. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) is a specialist education support service that seeks to help young people of compulsory school age and their families to get the best out of the education system. The Committee was not convinced that the EWS was on top of the problem of non-attendance, and, as an organisation, it appeared to be more reactive. It lacks the basic management and information necessary to monitor attendance on a real-time basis and take pre-emptive action with vulnerable children. The fact that 16,000 pupils a year miss almost six weeks of school yet are not known to the EWS is extremely concerning. The Committee emphasised that that must be a priority for action and is reassured that the Department has agreed to commission a fundamental review of the EWS.

It is clear that tackling the problem of non-attendance, particularly persistent non-attendance, is highly complex, and, in certain cases, it may be necessary to involve a wide range of stakeholders. We recommend, therefore, that the Department's attendance strategy address

non-attendance at primary and post-primary school in a holistic and joined-up manner. The Committee expects to see a collaborative strategy that includes other relevant Departments and agencies, particularly in areas such as social services, social development and youth justice. The Department has accepted that recommendation, acknowledging that, alone, it cannot address the underlying issues of non-attendance. I support the motion.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I welcome this, my second Public Accounts Committee debate as Finance Minister. Before moving to the main business of the debate, I note the work of the Public Accounts Committee and the Northern Ireland Audit Office since last year's debate. Both have been churning out reports at a prodigious rate, which provides plenty of material for us to discuss today.

I would like to start on a positive note and, in doing so, create a context for the debate. I will quote from the Comptroller and Auditor General's (C&AG) most recent annual report, 'Financial Auditing and Reporting'. It deals with the accounts of Departments and their arm's-length bodies. In it, the Comptroller and Auditor General states:

> *"The prime function of financial audit is to provide independent assurance, information and advice to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the proper accounting for and use of public funds."*

He goes on to comment that the standards of financial reporting across central government remain high. The C&AG has made such a statement for at least the last six years, and we should all be proud of the high standards achieved by the vast majority of our central government public bodies, not just during this year but for many years. In the main, public money is being accounted for properly and to a high standard; that is something that we need to remember. It is important that we do not lose sight of that fact, because it is all too easy to note a critical media headline associated with an Audit Office or PAC report and assume that it is representative of what is happening across our public services: it is not.

During the past year, the Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have looked at and reported on poor practices and things that have gone wrong in specific areas of the public sector and rightly so. That is an important part of the accountability process and a way of effecting change and improvement for the future. However, many of the issues raised are organisation- or project-specific. They are not representative of the high standards that pertain in the wider public sector, and that is something that, I consider, we all have a duty to promote.

4.00 pm

On the issue of promoting our public services, I continue to have a difficulty with the fact that, on occasion, the publicity surrounding PAC reports is unbalanced and appears to seek to sensationalise certain aspects of the reports for maximum media effect. The Committee's reports on Account NI and DCAL's management of major capital projects are two examples. In relation to Account NI, the Committee sought headlines that focused on excessive costs for transaction processing based on a comparison with other public bodies. However, the comparisons were drawn from what proved to be a flawed Audit Office cost comparison, as they were not on a like-for-like basis, and, as the Committee is aware, I issued a press release to ensure that the correct figures were placed in the public domain.

On DCAL's management of major capital projects, there was intense media coverage following the PAC's report with regard to the tendering process for the Lyric Theatre and the PAC's conclusion that it was:

> *"left with a very strong impression that the outcome ... was both rigged and manipulated."*

However, both DCAL and the Lyric have provided assurances that there is no evidence to support that and asked the Committee for its evidence to support the allegation. None has been forthcoming. Let us be clear: the PAC suggests that there was fraud and makes these allegations publicly. It slurs organisations and, indeed, individuals, but, when asked to produce that evidence, none is forthcoming. In my view, the press releases that accompanied those particular reports were undoubtedly sensationalist in nature, were not evidence-based and sought to attract media attention to specific issues, rather than provide a fair and balanced view of the Committee's deliberations. The Committee should not seek such headlines or, indeed, allege fraud where there is no evidence for it to do so. If the PAC has evidence of fraud, the organisation it should speak to is the PSNI, not the BBC. I hope that the Committee notes my view on that issue and that it is not something that we will have to return to next year.

A number of issues and concerns that the Committee raised in its reports over the past year have been highlighted by Members today, and I will address them or at least some of them shortly. Again, I need to stress that they must be considered in context, which, at times, I think is an alien concept to some. When you have a public sector that spends in excess of £10 billion annually, it is unfortunately inevitable that things will go wrong, correct processes will not always be followed and things may not always be done as quickly as we would wish. The benefit of hindsight is, indeed, a wonderful thing. However, it is vital to consider the issues within the context of the bigger picture, and I consider the C&AG's comment on the high standards of financial reporting in the public sector to be that bigger picture in the context of this important debate. Maybe that is something that Members would wish to ponder.

Members who were present during last year's debate may recall that I purposely went out of my way to challenge the status quo and provoke what I considered to be a genuine debate about how things are done and why. The theme of my speech was reform and how we needed to do things differently. Shortly after the debate, I met the PAC's Chair and Deputy Chair, and I believe that we had a frank and constructive discussion. Since then, my officials have been working closely with the Public Accounts Committee, its staff and the Audit Office to agree protocols that will improve and streamline the processes that we use. They relate to the clearance of Audit Office reports and the production and consideration of the various memoranda of reply that we are debating. That work has been progressing well, and I want to comment on each of the issues.

In relation to the Committee's consideration of memoranda of reply, I acknowledge the constructive steps that it has taken to improve and streamline the process and commend it for that. The clearance of Audit Office reports is a challenging issue. The bottom line is that we all recognise the importance of a timely, accurate

and agreed Audit Office report as the basis of the Committee's evidence sessions. Departments should work constructively with the Audit Office to ensure that such reports are not unreasonably delayed by a protracted clearance process. My officials hope to have guidance on that issue agreed with the Audit Office in the very near future. However, there is one issue within the clearance process that creates real problems for accounting officers, and that is when the Audit Office seeks to force the hand of an accounting officer into agreeing one of its reports on the basis of meeting a printing deadline which, in turn, it appears, is driven by the need to fulfil a date in the Committee's evidence session programme. It seems perverse that the Audit Office can work on a study for a year with the aim of producing a factual, evidence-based report to be agreed with Departments and debated by the Committee but the process then culminates in accounting officers being railroaded into signing off on a report with which they do not fully agree.

I think that everybody would agree that that cannot be right.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister acknowledge that, on occasions, publication of reports has been excessively delayed as a result of what he is saying, that it appears that there is little probability of agreeing, and that there is still a need to bring such matters into the public domain to have them addressed and openly discussed?

Mr Hamilton: Just before I move on, I will say that I do not think that anybody wants to see excessive delay, and if there is blame at departmental level for that, it needs to be addressed. That is in part why my officials and officials from the PAC and, indeed, the Audit Office are working on a set of protocols to better address the issue. I think that we all agree with and welcome that.

I am raising a concern, which I think it is right to do, about the fact that, in the sort of circumstances that the Member outlined, accounting officers should not feel that they are being forced to sign off on a report that they do not entirely agree with to meet what is, in effect, an artificial deadline. That is not a carte blanche to accounting officers to sit on matters and to delay them unnecessarily, but if the Department and the PAC/Audit Office are seeking to hollow out issues on which there is no agreement, I think that it is only right and proper that, in the spirit of getting an agreed report and of trying to get the fullness of the situation outlined in the report, time is taken to do that and that accounting officers do not feel that they are forced to agree to, and sign off on, something that they do not entirely agree with.

I fully appreciate the need for reports to be completed on a timely basis, but as I said, that cannot be at the expense of an agreed report that is the cornerstone of each of the Committee's evidence sessions. Recently my officials have been approached by accounting officers about that, and therefore I have asked the Treasury Officer of Accounts to raise the issue with the C&AG as part of his wider work on agreeing more efficient clearance procedures for Audit Office reports. Maybe the Committee will also wish to consider that.

I will now turn to a few areas that illustrate where we can and do cooperate effectively in the wider interests of the public sector. The first and most important area is fraud. As we all know, fraud robs the public sector of very scarce and valuable resources, so it is important that we all work together to combat it. One of our key tools in the fight against fraud is the National Fraud Initiative (NFI). Northern Ireland Departments, agencies and other sponsored bodies are now in their fourth NFI cycle, with the Audit Office reporting in June 2014 that the first three cycles had cumulatively identified outcomes of almost £30 million in fraud and error. NFI has become a key tool in Departments' anti-fraud armoury, and we must all continue to work to identify further ways in which it can be utilised to protect the public purse. Public bodies are in continuing discussions with the Audit Office to explore how NFI can be further utilised to detect and prevent fraud and error, and a number of pilot exercises are being considered as part of the fourth National Fraud Initiative cycle.

In that context, I will also take this opportunity to advise Members of progress in establishing a group internal audit and fraud investigation service for Northern Ireland Departments. That was a commitment that was given to the Public Accounts Committee in response to its document, 'Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint'. We have now established a project board to oversee the implementation of the group service model. My officials are developing the governance and reporting arrangements for the new model and working with Departments to assess their level of fraud investigation capacity requirements. It is anticipated that the group service structure will become operational from April 2015 and that it will help to improve consistency and professionalism in internal audit and fraud investigations across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Again, I think that that is something we all can welcome.

Whistle-blowing has come to the fore in a number of the Committee's reports in recent years. The Committee will be aware that we have previously given an undertaking to provide additional guidance on handling concerns raised by whistle-blowers. The UK audit authorities have produced a good practice whistle-blowing guide for employers and employees, which the Northern Ireland Audit Office will launch tomorrow. Having seen and had an opportunity to comment on the draft document, we believe that it is a very useful piece of work. As a result, we intend to issue the guide to Departments and to highlight any further important issues and lessons learned from PAC hearings and reports.

Another example of good working practices that again takes the Committee's work forward is in relation to reducing bureaucracy in the voluntary and community sector. My Department, the Audit Office and DSD are working closely together on this important DSD-led project. That work has led to the development of a draft code of practice for reducing bureaucracy in the grant-funding process, and it is currently out for consultation. When finalised, it will help address many of the issues raised by the Committee in its report on the subject.

The issues that I have outlined are examples of our working together for the betterment of all citizens. The work should lead to more resources being available to spend on health and education as a result of reduced fraud; whistle-blowers

believing that they can come forward in the knowledge that they will be listened to and their concerns taken seriously; and those who work in the third sector being able to focus on the valuable work that they do without engaging in unnecessary bureaucracy. I believe that there is so much more than we can achieve together, and I look forward to doing so in a spirit of cooperation.

Before I address the specific issues that Members raised, I would like to bring you up to date with progress on the reform agenda, which was the main topic of last year's speech.

Over the past year, my officials and I have met and engaged with a number of practitioners in the areas of business improvement and policy development. Over the period, many steps, both large and small, have been taken to progress the vision of reforming the public sector and embedding the reform agenda in our business activities. Reforms have brought positive change in a range of areas, particularly in e-government, asset management, shared services and procurement. I believe that building on our existing achievements in e-government is a key aspect of the public sector reform agenda because it ticks both boxes — saving money and improving services.

I will now turn to some issues that Members raised during the debate. I will begin with those of the Chair, Michaela Boyle. Among many things that she referred to — I hope that I have addressed some of them — was the Committee's report on AFBI. I note that the Committee acknowledged the recent work undertaken to further enhance corporate governance in AFBI and oversight of the institute by DARD. I have been informed that arrangements are underpinned by proactive scrutiny by DARD, and a report to the Committee is expected by May 2015. On financial management, I understand that AFBI is now using its strategic costing model to establish the full cost of its operations and set revised efficiency targets. AFBI is also reviewing its fee-setting procedures to ensure that those comply with relevant DFP guidance. The AFBI accounting officer will provide his assurance on fee-setting to the AFBI board and DARD annually. In addition, I can inform you that DARD has identified the test categories for which it requires unit costs. AFBI has been asked to provide that information, including benchmarking, by March 2015.

Mr Girvan referred to the Committee's report on DRD's review of an investigation into a whistle-blower complaint. DRD has provided an assurance that it has learnt valuable lessons in the case, referred to under the Northern Ireland Water suspected fraud case. It has introduced new policies and procedures for whistle-blowing, wrongdoing and fraud. DRD has further implemented comprehensive arrangements for registering and monitoring the progression of wrongdoing and whistle-blowing cases, and it has developed and introduced an investigation checklist for initial inquiry and fact-finding through the formal investigation. In addition, new guidance has been issued to staff on handling complaints. The Department has also made significant improvements in its procurement and contract-management arrangements.

As I mentioned earlier, my officials will draw to the attention of Departments the Audit Office guide on whistle-blowing once it is published. Although it is written in the context of employees raising concerns, DFP will reinforce the point that the same general principles in handling cases should be applied, regardless of who has raised the concern.

I have also already talked about the new Civil Service group internal audit and fraud investigation service and can confirm that work that it will take forward on reviewing existing guidance will incorporate the key lessons that have been learnt from the cases in DRD and NI Water. My Department has asked departmental accounting officers to ensure that the Committee's concerns about codes of conduct and contractual breaches be adequately addressed in their existing guidance.

I now turn to the case that both Mr Hussey and Ms Lo raised when they referred to the Committee's report on DCAL's management of major capital projects. I welcome the contribution made by Ms Lo in particular. She acknowledged that, although there were issues around the procurement, the infrastructure that was referred to and dealt with in the report is excellent new infrastructure, much of it in her constituency, as she pointed out. It has transformed the tourism offering. In many respects, it has provided fantastic regeneration of parts of the city and, indeed, other parts of Northern Ireland.

DCAL has acknowledged that there were weaknesses in its appraisal and procurement processes in the context of a very ambitious capital programme, which, again, is something that Ms Lo acknowledged. DCAL has confirmed that it has implemented all the recommendations that were made in the Audit Office and PAC reports and is in the process of considering how best to engage relevant professional teams earlier in the process so that cost and time estimates are more robust. DCAL has further drafted its own capital projects guidance, which addresses the issues raised by the Committee. It is being reviewed by my officials and is also being circulated to DCAL's arm's-length bodies. My Department will provide revised guidance by next month that will address all the Committee's concerns on procurement in relation to grant recipients.

4.15 pm

On a wider note, as chair of the procurement board, in November last year, I established a subgroup to examine all stages of the commissioning and delivery of infrastructure projects. The subgroup has prepared an action plan designed to correct the number of significant issues, such as over-design and underestimating cost, that are reducing the likelihood of the successful delivery of infrastructure projects. While several Ministers have supported the plan, I am disappointed that some have reserved their position. I will continue to work with ministerial colleagues to convince them that that is a proper course of action. In the meantime, my Department is implementing the actions in the plan assigned to it.

Mr Easton referred to the Committee's report on the PSNI's use of agency staff. Although the Committee found that excessive numbers of agency staff had been employed for lengthy periods of time, it acknowledged that the introduction of a radical new structure for policing over the last 10 years represented an enormous challenge. The current procurement process for a new contract for temporary workers is on hold as a result of the current budgetary position and will not be progressed at this time. The existing contracts will lapse at the end of this calendar year, and the PSNI has confirmed that it will cease all current temporary worker assignments on or before that date. The Department of Justice has provided the assurance that any future contracts for temporary

workers will take the Committee's recommendations into consideration and will be managed rigorously.

Mr Beggs referred to the Committee's report on Account NI. Account NI is a cross-departmental shared service facility that is the envy of many other Governments. We should all be extremely proud of it. I have noticed that it currently pays over 90% of invoices within the allotted targets. It is — I have encountered this on my travels as Minister — the envy of many European states, including Estonia, which have very advanced digital delivery of public services and want to learn from what we have done in shared services. The Government of the Republic of Ireland have visited at ministerial level our shared services to inform their delivery of shared services. From listening to some of Mr Beggs's comments, it is clear that only in Northern Ireland would we be talking down something that is the envy of others.

The Committee praised Account NI in relation to its considerable achievement in paying invoices so promptly. It acknowledged that it is:

> *"a significant advance on the fragmented and outdated financial systems previously in place."*

The fact that it was able to accommodate relatively large organisations with complex requirements was recognised as a "significant achievement".

I will end by thanking all those who contributed to what has been a very lively and, hopefully, thought-provoking debate. I apologise to any Members whose issues I did not address. I hope that, above all else, unlike last year, I have not left Mr Dallat too shell-shocked to wind up the debate on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Dallat (The Deputy Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee): I assure the Minister that he has not left me shell-shocked, but he has come pretty close to it. I will deal with some of the issues that he raised. I was pleased that he started on a positive note by paying tribute to the Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee. I believe that the Assembly as a whole and all parties involved can be proud that they have a Public Accounts Committee and an independent Audit Office that can rise above party politics and all the quagmires that we have to deal with. I say that on a personal basis; I have no authority from anyone else. I include all the members of the Committee in that. We have done our best to ensure that the public get value for money. The Finance Minister will know this better than anyone: never has there been a more serious time for ensuring that every penny of public money is accounted for, both in where it goes and the value for money got from it.

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service was mentioned on a number of occasions, particularly by Anna Lo, who is not a member of the Committee but, obviously, is well-informed. That report touched the hearts of all members, particularly in relation to the disgraceful way in which Linda Ford was treated as a whistle-blower. It aggrieves me that the chairman of the Northern Ireland fire authority who presided over most of that is still in place.

The Committee discovered that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's accounting officer and the chair of the Fire Service were aware that a whistle-blower had been suspended and that they should have been alert to possible victimisation. Instead, both wrongly decided not to intervene. The Committee recommended that when a Department asks one of its arms-length bodies to investigate a whistle-blower's concerns, the Department has to ensure that there is a proper investigation. Where the whistle-blowing allegations relate to senior members of staff in the body concerned, the Department must retain ownership of the investigation. DFP has accepted the Committee's recommendations in this area, and we expect to see improvements in the handling of whistle-blowing right across the public sector. I was pleased that the Minister referred to that.

The Department's oversight of the Fire Service was poor. It failed to intervene to address either the extremely high turnover at senior management level or lengthy absences of key members of staff. The Committee found that proper succession planning had been ignored for too long. We were pleased to note that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety accepted our recommendation that it, the board and senior management work together to identify barriers to recruitment and to ensure that the organisation is well placed to attract quality internal and external candidates for future senior management vacancies.

The Committee found that the board in place at the time that these events occurred was extremely weak and had failed to challenge senior management. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety accepted the Committee's recommendations to strengthen the board; address areas of weakness; and improve its oversight by ensuring that its own team has the necessary skills and seniority to properly challenge senior management in the Fire Service. I hope that that comes as comfort to our very courageous and brave firefighters who, for many years, have been at the forefront during our difficulties.

The Committee considered a number of cases in which very senior officers in the Fire Service failed to recognise and properly handle significant conflicts of interest in procurement and recruitment. One case that particularly concerned the Committee was the acceptance by a senior officer of a sponsored Land Rover. I hope that I am not advertising one particular company, although I accept that they are very nice vehicles. That certainly did not do anything for the image of the Northern Ireland Fire Service. We accept that there was no evidence of personal gain, but the Committee found it worrying that this individual, who went on to become Chief Fire Officer before his retirement, maintained that accepting the vehicle was the right thing to do. The one thing that surely should be there is the ability to accept when something is wrong.

It was clear to others, including the Chief Fire Officer at the time, that this sponsorship deal would create a perception of wrongdoing that was likely to be extremely damaging to the Fire Service. The Committee considers that the actions of this officer demonstrated a lack of understanding of the responsibilities of an accounting officer and the standard of conduct expected of someone in that role. DFP has not accepted the Committee's recommendation in this area, distinguishing instead between potential and ongoing commercial relationships. The Committee is clear that any recurrence of conflicts of interest of this nature in the Fire Service or elsewhere in the public sector will not be acceptable.

In 2001 — this is important for other Members — the Public Accounts Committee reported on the Fire Service's predecessor body, the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland.

This was an extremely critical and hard-hitting report, and it is shocking that many of the recommendations arose again in our most recent investigation of the new body. I doubt that any Member, including Mr Wilson, would be brave enough to defend a situation in which an organisation was reported on and then, several years later, it was found that those recommendations were ignored and that the work of that organisation had been set back.

The Committee was appalled to hear evidence of the toxic working environment in the Fire Service's headquarters. When our report was issued in October 2013, there were 22 outstanding grievance cases, mainly in headquarters. Surely, that should have set the alarm bells ringing all over the place but it did not. It was clear to us that that situation could not continue. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Finance and Personnel graciously accepted nine of the 11 recommendations — not bad for a Committee that gets so many brickbats.

The Committee wants to see the Department, the board and senior management work together to move the Fire Service to a position where its main focus can be on improving performance rather than dealing with the legacy of mismanagement.

I thank all Members who contributed to what has been an interesting and informative discussion. I hope that we have given the Assembly, and the wider public, a good snapshot of the work of the Public Accounts Committee. This has been another productive year for the Committee, with eight reports published. These included large and complex investigations, which took time to complete, such as the inquiry into the PSNI's use of agency staff, which three of my fellow Committee members spoke on.

Completing these complex inquiries requires a great deal of commitment and cooperation on the part of the members of the Committee. I commend my colleagues on their work this year. Any inquiry into the Police Service could have created problems. Members rose above party positions and, I think, produced a commendable report.

The PAC's key role is to ensure that public money is used efficiently and effectively and that maximum value is extracted from each pound. This role is of even greater importance in the current economic climate given the significant budgetary pressures facing the Executive.

The PAC focuses on high-value cases where significant savings to the public purse can be made. The Committee always seeks to be constructive in its reports — I hope you are listening, Minister. Rather than merely pointing the finger and saying that we do not want to see x, y or z happening again, we make recommendations that offer guidance about what changes need to be made to avoid mistakes being repeated a number of years down the line. Evidence of the success of the Committee's work can be seen in the high levels of acceptance of its recommendations. During the year, 85% of recommendations were accepted, and although slightly down on last year's 87%, is still extremely high.

As Deputy Chair, I was pleased to see greater partnerships developing between Departments and the PAC during the year, in particular between the Committee and the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Minister made reference to that crucial meeting between the Chairman, me and his Department. I can assure the House that while there is a better understanding, there was no compromise.

The work of the PAC is supported greatly by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and I cannot thank enough the people who work there for their help throughout the year. It is interesting that people come from all over the world to the Northern Ireland Audit Office to get advice and training in how to put financial affairs in place. Many travel from parts of the world that had no accountability in the past.

Our Chairperson, Michaela Boyle, began the debate by talking about the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the largest arm's-length body of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. She highlighted the fact that there was poor oversight by the Department and that alarmingly high estate costs had not been tackled. She also spoke of poor management of the charging fees, with £3·5 million in income being lost, which is a tidy little sum if you were looking for it. The report highlights the fact that Departments need to maintain strong oversight of their arm's-length bodies to ensure that value for money is obtained in all cases.

4.30 pm

Mr Wilson, who is not here now, talked about invoice slicing. I want to make it perfectly clear that invoice slicing is not acceptable in any case. He seems to think that we could promote invoice slicing as it helps small and medium-sized enterprises. Invoice slicing can be an indicator of fraud, and I suspect that in many cases it is. So I make no apology for saying that the PAC takes a zero-tolerance policy towards fraud and cannot condone practices that are conducive to fraud. Invoice slicing is also totally at odds with public procurement, and there are strict rules on public procurement that we cannot ignore at national or European Union levels.

Many other people spoke in the debate, and I am sorry that I do not have the same amount of time as the Minister to respond. The Lyric Theatre got a hearing. It is a wonderful building and is an excellent part of the infrastructure of Belfast, and PAC members acknowledge that. However, the highest tender in the process became the successful tender, and accounts could not be produced. Indeed, when the PAC began to ask questions about that, we had extreme difficulty in finding witnesses, and it took months to get them before the PAC, which was not particularly satisfactory.

I will finish by mentioning attendance at schools. The Public Accounts Committee went out to schools that were good examples. We were all proud to go to schools in socially deprived areas, where the odds were stacked against them. Those schools found ways to improve school attendance and to give children who were from, let us say, difficult backgrounds a chance. Surely that is bound to make some contribution to reducing the 20% rates of illiteracy and innumeracy that we are struggling with.

I am extremely proud to stand here and commend the report, and I rebut any of the criticism that was made of the Public Accounts Committee or the Audit Office. The Assembly should be extremely proud of those from all political parties who are part of the PAC.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of the following Public Accounts Committee Reports:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report

and the following Department of Finance and Personnel Memoranda of Reply:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report

Private Members' Business

Paul Quinn: Anniversary of his Murder

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 in which to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the seventh anniversary of the murder of Paul Quinn; notes that the Independent Monitoring Commission states that current and former members of the Provisional IRA were responsible for the murder; demands that the leadership of the Provisional movement discloses all information regarding the murder of Paul Quinn to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána; condemns the Sinn Féin leadership for its false accusations against Paul Quinn; and further demands that Sinn Féin apologises to his family for making such accusations.

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Iarraím cead an rún seo a mholadh. Tá an ceart agat. Tá sé seacht mbliana ó dúnmharaíodh Paul Quinn I gContae Mhuinicheáin.

It is seven years since Paul Quinn was murdered just inside County Monaghan. Those who murdered him, according to the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC):

"included people who are members or former members, or have associations with members or former members, of the Provisional IRA."

The whole organisation of Paul Quinn's murder smacked of paramilitary planning and forethought to the extent that the scene was forensically cleansed afterwards, similar to what happened after Robert McCartney's murder, only probably better organised. The purpose of that was to ensure that any DNA evidence was destroyed and that detection would be made extremely difficult. Mar is eol dúinn, ní thig a bheith cinnte céad faoin gcéad I gcásanna mar seo. As we are aware, there is no certainty in these matters, and, as science develops, evidence that once yielded no information can tell the tale and lead to prosecutions and convictions. That may yet prove to be the outcome of this case. I hope that it will be and that those responsible will be brought to justice.

Paul was brutally murdered on Saturday 20 October 2007, as I said, in a shed just inside County Monaghan. I pass that spot several times a year on my way to football matches in Clones. Invariably, my passengers say to me as we pass it, "That's where young Quinn was murdered". I think of the scene that day; a gang of up to ten men dressed in boiler suits, armed with iron bars and nail-studded clubs, beating 21-year-old Paul until his life ebbed away. His mother, Briege, frequently says to me, "Dominic, they broke every bone in his body." The question is this: why? Why would anyone want to do that to a young man of 21? The reason is that those people wanted to show who was boss in the area. They wanted to show who had control of the area. Remember, Paul's death happened nine years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

The dirty war was over, but it seemed that a dirty peace was beginning.

I remember going to the hospital in Drogheda that night and meeting his mother, Briege, and his father, Stephen, who were distraught with grief and, with other members of the family, were gathered around his body. All attempts at resuscitation had failed. His family were adamant that the IRA was responsible. They had known that Paul had fallen foul of some them locally. This was the revenge.

As I said, the aim of Paul's murder was to teach others not to cross them, to show that they still controlled the community and to silence him. Although they beat him to death that night, ironically, his voice is still heard. His parents, Briege and Stephen, have continued to speak for him and to fight for justice for him. They are here today in the Public Gallery. I welcome them. They have refused to be cowed. They have refused to be silenced. They have continued to demand justice. They will not go away until they get justice.

It is to help them in their quest that I have tabled the motion before the House today. I spoke to them after the seventh anniversary mass in Cullyhanna chapel some weeks ago, and, afterwards, I gave them an undertaking that I would continue to support their campaign. I have tabled motions and spoken on previous motions about murders that were committed by the IRA and by state forces in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in south Armagh. That is all part of the history of the area.

Those who murdered Paul Quinn most likely still live in the local area and go about their daily lives there; the Quinn family believes that they are closely connected to Sinn Féin. After Paul's murder, Conor Murphy was quick to conclude that the IRA was not involved and said that it was the result of a row or fallout between criminal gangs. Previously, he had berated Seamus Mallon for suggesting that there was a criminal gang in south Armagh. However, when it suited him, there was not only one criminal gang but two; not only that, they were capable of murder.

Miss Fearon believes that RTÉ is responsible for sullying the reputation of south Armagh. The reputation of south Armagh has been sullied down through the years, but not by RTÉ. It has been sullied by those who engaged in murder, whether they were members of state forces, state forces colluding with loyalist paramilitaries, or republican paramilitaries.

I have lived in south Armagh all my life, and I am very proud of the local people; most of them did their best to lead normal lives in the midst of the mayhem around them. south Armagh was not run, as some would say, from a republican kitchen somewhere. It was run from every normal home in which parents attempted to feed their families and send them to school every day, and go to work themselves to earn a living. It was run by those genuine sporting and cultural organisations that attempted to give young people some form of recreation and some alternative to violence.

The accusation that Paul Quinn was a criminal, unsubstantiated as it was, added salt to an already deep wound that had been inflicted on the Quinn family. It was repeated by other leadership figures in Sinn Féin, including Gerry Adams, and was part of the usual whispering campaign that the IRA engaged in to smear their victims and justify their deeds.

The Quinn family has constantly demanded that Sinn Féin withdraw the accusation. However, not only did Mr Murphy fail to withdraw it, he compounded it on the record here in the debate in 2008. The Irish Foreign Minister, the Taoiseach, the British Secretary of State and the Chief Constable of the PSNI all set the record straight, and that has been of some consolation to the family.

Members of Sinn Féin who speak in the debate have the opportunity to withdraw that vile accusation, and I hope that they will do so. It would help the family if Sinn Féin withdrew the criminal slur on Paul's name, and I firmly believe that Sinn Féin can do more than that again: its members need to come forward and tell the PSNI and an Garda Síochána all that they know about Paul Quinn's murder. There must be no hiding place for murderers, and certainly not in the ranks of a political party. The denial of truth must not prevail.

At the end of the week, a report on the talks will go to David Cameron and Enda Kenny. The message in that report should be that those who seek to protect the state or paramilitary interests should not prevail. Nochtfar an fhírinne, luath nó mall. The truth shall out, sooner or later.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Irwin: The murder of Paul Quinn ranks among the most brutal executions that were carried out by the IRA. Despite the passage of some seven years since the public learned of this cruel act of barbarity, revisiting some of the published facts of the case makes for horrific reading.

We must not forget that there is a grieving family mourning the loss of Paul Quinn. Their pain has certainly not abated with the passage of time as they still firmly pursue justice for those who murdered him.

4.45 pm

The brutality of his death in the way he was lured to the farmyard by his friends, who had been taken hostage by the murder gang, and the manner in which he was beaten with pickaxe handles and iron bars, draws horrific comparisons with what is happening now in Syria and Iraq. When we look at our TV screens daily, we see the horrific brutality carried out by Islamic State fighters. I often wonder and find it impossible to comprehend how men can be so inhumane to their fellow man. We feel a certain sense of relief that such regular brutality does not happen in the Western World. However, the shocking murder of Paul Quinn, when studied in the cold light of day, is exactly the same brutal activity as many terrorists in the Middle East engage in as a matter of routine.

There is no difference in my mind between some fanatical jihadist who will beat a woman to death or chop off a man's arm for stealing a sweet and the ruthless group who lured this young man to the farmyard to exact some twisted form of retribution. There can be no justification in any sense of the word for what happened to Paul Quinn on that fateful day. Furthermore, the attempts by Sinn Féin to in some way blacken the name of the victim by referring to him as a criminal only adds to the smokescreen that was created by republicans in the area to try to deflect attention from this barbaric act.

The wall of silence that has fallen on this case in the community around Cullyhanna is also of huge concern. There is an immense burden of responsibility on those

who know what happened on that day and know who was involved in the crime to come forward and make the information known to the police.

The history of the republican movement, especially in the Newry and Armagh constituency, which I represent, is a sickening catalogue of pain and suffering visited on Northern Ireland. The late Paul Quinn is another name added to the list of callous murders carried out, as confirmed by the Independent Monitoring Commission, by current and former members of the Provisional IRA. The issue of republicans who know who carried out the murder coming forward with information is a key point in the debate. It is only by someone coming forward with the vital information that police on either side of the border can have any hope of bringing a successful prosecution. There may well be people on the Benches opposite who could have a snippet of information that may be useful to the police. I urge them to contact the PSNI or the gardaí without delay. That goes also for those in the community in the area who may have a snippet of information that would provide a vital link in the investigation in this case. I say again that that information must be given to the authorities.

This issue amongst other issues, such as the abuse of Máiría Cahill, the plight of the families of the disappeared and the campaigns under way by the innocent victims of the IRA's terrorist campaign, will remain an issue of great importance in the wider community. It is well beyond time that Sinn Féin and the republican movement revealed the truth and accepted the hurt and pain that their inextricable link has produced. I support the motion.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá. I would like to say a few words on the motion. First, through you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I place on record my condolences and extend my sympathy to the family and friends of Paul Quinn. I can only imagine the pain and suffering that they have gone through over the last seven years since the tragic death of their son, brother and friend. I condemn the manner in which that young man lost his life. There is no justification and there never can be for taking a life, certainly not in that manner. I sincerely hope that the family finds the justice that they deserve. To that end, I add my voice to those of my colleagues before me who have called on anyone with information on the murder of Paul Quinn to present that information to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána.

Sinn Féin has always been clear on that point, but unfortunately we have seen a sustained effort to politicise the issue as far as possible. In some quarters, it has been done not in any authentic way to try to assist the family in bringing those responsible to justice but as a means to try to make political capital out of this tragic event for political ends. The motion has been constructed, again, by the SDLP, in a manner that purposely sets out to be as divisive and inflammatory as possible. There is little disguising the fact that the motion has less to do with helping the Quinn family uncover the truth about what happened to their son than with trying to fashion some sort of political point. The pain of the Quinn family deserves better than the current approach being pursued by the motion. What has been diminished here has been an opportunity for everyone to call on those with any information to come forward to the authorities and an opportunity for us all to show sympathy and solidarity with the Quinn family.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: No, I will not give way. You will have plenty of time to speak. I am sure that you have got your name down.

Unfortunately, the people who are responsible for the construction of the motion seemingly prefer to see argument and division in this matter rather than —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way to me?

Mr Boylan: No, I will not give way to anybody. You had 10 minutes to speak.

They prefer to see argument and division in this matter rather than progress and assistance. In spite of such blatant efforts by political opponents of Sinn Féin to draw the party into dispute over the matter and cheaply to pitch the party at odds with the interests of the Quinn family, I think that most people will see those attempts for what they are. As a party, Sinn Féin holds nothing but sympathy and support for the Quinn family. Nothing should be allowed to distract attention from their fight for justice at this time.

Mr Kennedy: It is hard to think that seven years have now passed since the brutal murder of Paul Quinn, yet his family has yet to see any justice. Like many other families who have suffered at the hands of paramilitaries over the decades, they feel no closer to that justice. I truly admire the courage and determination of the friends and family of Paul, who have campaigned and continue to campaign for justice. For some — and some who sit in the Chamber — it is an uncomfortable truth that organised violence, serious crime and murder has occurred since the Belfast Agreement and other agreements.

Make no mistake about it: this was a murder ordered and directed from Northern Ireland and carried out in the Republic of Ireland. Paul was a young man who was lured across the border to his death by the offer of a few hours' work. The grief of those close to Paul was compounded by a very nasty campaign of misinformation by Sinn Féin and some politicians in the Republic. They did not want to focus on the IRA and Sinn Féin so soon after they had publicly accepted policing and justice in Northern Ireland.

When we look back at the comments by the then Secretary of State, Shaun Woodward, in response to a question in 2008 from Alistair Carmichael MP in the House of Commons, knowing what we know now about the OTR scheme, amongst other things, the words take on a different meaning. Shaun Woodward said:

> *"The choice for politicians in Northern Ireland is this: do we allow those who would be involved in crime or the sort of activity that led to the murder of Paul Quinn to determine the future of everyone in Northern Ireland? I do not think that we should."*

Although Shaun Woodward went on to say that they should be dealt with by the law, it seems, in one sense, to appeal for people not to make much public comment on the issue and asks them not to rock the boat.

That is exactly what Sinn Féin wanted — limited public comment and no rocking of the boat. My view is clear, and contrary to that approach. I believe that no victim or victim's family should be denied justice for political expediency or to sidestep such an uncomfortable truth. The murder bore all the hallmarks of sophistication and

premeditation. It bore all the hallmarks of the Provisional IRA. I, for one, do not believe that its involvement should, in any way, be a barrier to justice for Paul Quinn and his family. All local representatives should make the same acknowledgement and provide the same commitment to fight for justice for Paul.

We were told in recent days that the IRA has provided details to the gardaí of sex offenders that it relocated over a number of years. When it suits it, or when public pressure is so great, the Provisional IRA suddenly reappears and is able to assist with information. It is time that the same happened with the murder of Paul Quinn. It is time that the IRA acknowledged that its people were involved, in the same way that they were involved in abusing children. It is time that it acknowledged that it has information to provide on its own members, and it is time that it did so, because the murder of Paul Quinn is no less of a crime than the sexual abuse of children, and those responsible are no more entitled to their liberty.

Mr Dickson: From the outset, I wish to express my sympathy and that of the Alliance Party to the family and friends of Paul Quinn and our admiration for the bravery and courage that they have shown in the face of the despicable murder of a son and loved one and everything that has followed. I commend them for calling on anyone with information to give it to the police so that due process may be followed and justice done. Justice is what this family, like many other families in Northern Ireland, seek, and justice is what they deserve.

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

However, sadly, a question hangs over one party's commitment to pursuing justice in this case. Calls to go to the police with information seem petty, hollow and meaningless when the majority of people think that someone in Sinn Féin must know who is responsible. Interestingly, the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) report in May 2008, right before discussing the Paul Quinn murder stated:

> *"PIRA's commitment to following the political path has been further reinforced in the period under review with a number of people making the transition to positions in Sinn Féin and thereby engagement in democratic politics. Since the time of its announcement nearly three years ago PIRA's strategy has included the movement of members into political life and we view these changes as important further evidence of the move to a peaceful and democratic role."*

When the same IMC report stated that Provisional IRA members were involved in the murder, it seems absurd for Sinn Féin seriously to contend that no one in its organisation knows who is responsible. To make things worse for the family, Sinn Féin representatives, as we know in this debate, have branded Paul Quinn a criminal. Only a court can make such a judgement about a person, not murderers and not thugs, so it would be better for Sinn Féin to channel its energy into ensuring that all its members who have information give that information to the police.

I must say that it appears that Sinn Féin has a track record for trying to blacken the name of anyone who may cause its organisation embarrassment or raise difficult questions in or about that organisation.

As for many families in Northern Ireland, justice is long overdue. In 2007, 'The Guardian' said this of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness's call for the public to cooperate with the police on the matter:

> *"The unprecedented call marked another shift in the party's support for policing."*

That was in 2007, yet, just last month, Paul Quinn's father Stephen said that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness:

> *"could come to south Armagh and secure justice for us within an hour because it's prominent members of the provisional movement who murdered our son."*

5.00 pm

There is clearly a strong feeling in the community that members of Sinn Féin have not disclosed everything that they know about the murder of Paul Quinn. In the interests of justice, that needs to change.

Further lines of enquiry have been opened up by someone coming forward with information in the last month. I hope that more people do the same and that the police services on both sides of the border have success in getting justice for Paul and his family. No mother or father should have to go to hospital and see their son die in horrific and sadistic circumstances. If those who know have an ounce of human compassion or decency, today is the day to come forward. My heart goes out to Paul's mother and father. I met them briefly before this debate. His family circle, his friends, and his mum and dad deserve justice and deserve it soon.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé ag éirí chun labhairt in aghaidh an rúin seo. I rise to speak against the motion. I am conscious that Paul Quinn's family are in the Public Gallery, and I do not wish to say anything that may increase their sense of hurt or grief. So, from the outset, let me say that I completely condemn the murder of Paul Quinn. Those responsible should be brought before the courts and held accountable for their actions. Anyone who has information about that terrible deed should bring it to the relevant authorities, either an Garda Síochána or the PSNI. If either of those police forces has sufficient evidence, the culprits should be brought to trial. In any democratic society, that is how affairs of the criminal justice system ought to be conducted.

The Assembly is not a court of law, but, of course, it is right that we, as politicians, should give political leadership, standing together in the Assembly and condemning that brutal murder. It is also right that we should ask those with information to come forward and give it to the proper authorities, but what is not right is political parties using the privilege of the Assembly to try to carry out a witch-hunt against Sinn Féin.

What is happening today is the very antithesis of democracy. It is about some parties capitalising on the brutal death of a young man and using untruths and innuendo to try to score cheap, political points. If the proposer of the motion and those who have jumped on the bandwagon really cared about the victim in this tragedy, they would have brought forward a motion that would have commanded unanimous support. That is the best way to send a clear message to those who think that violence should have any part in a democratic society. But that is not what this debate is about. It is not about the victim. It is about trying to get some sort of political advantage from

the terrible murder of Paul Quinn. The contributions thus far have been long on rhetoric and short on fact. So, let me state this fact: Sinn Féin has no information about the murder of Paul Quinn. If it had, we would bring it to the authorities. If anyone else in the Chamber has information, let them do likewise.

Mr Attwood: First of all, I apologise on behalf of Dolores Kelly, who is meant to be speaking now. She is unwell. Even though she is not here, I have some sense of what she might have said. The first thing is to again acknowledge the strength, dignity and resilience of victims and survivors, who regularly speak forth of their search for truth, justice and accountability.

In my view, it is the victims and survivors who, unlike some in the Chamber, are again demonstrating the best standards for people on this island. My colleague said earlier that Paul Quinn, whilst he went to his death that night, has not been silent since. The voices that have been speaking up, in particular those of his mother and his father, are in stark contrast to the voices that we heard from my right earlier today.

Mr Sheehan said that he would not want to do anything to deepen the "sense of hurt" of the family of Paul Quinn, yet his entire speech was littered with further attempts to hurt victims and survivors by portraying what they and those who stand in solidarity with them are doing as other than an effort to get to the truth and have accountability. Mr Sheehan said:

> *"Sinn Féin has no information about the murder of Paul Quinn."*

If Sinn Féin has no information about the murder of Paul Quinn, why did his colleague come into the Chamber and, on the record in Hansard, say that the murder of Paul Quinn was the result of a dispute between criminal gangs? Can Mr Sheehan explain why, if Sinn Féin now claims that it has no information about the murder, Conor Murphy made that comment? Can you explain it to me, to the people in the Public Gallery or to anybody in any county on the island of Ireland? Can you explain that?

If you are not willing now to stand on your feet and explain that comment, will you now stand on your feet and answer the question put to you and your colleagues by Mr Bradley? During this debate in this Chamber, will you correct the public record and the Assembly record and withdraw the allegation about the character of Paul Quinn and the good name of the Quinn family? Are you prepared to stand on your feet, three minutes into my speech, at 5.10 pm, and say that to everybody who is in the Chamber at this time? Otherwise, what you and Mr Boylan have been doing in your speeches is what you did in the Chamber when faced with another victim and survivor who sat up in that Public Gallery: you again denied the truth. You resist justice, fight against accountability and face down the people whom the debate is about — the victims and survivors, wherever they might be in this society.

If I were Gary Hart, the British Government, the Irish Government, or some of the parties in the talks at the moment — I say "some of the parties" because recent words by some of them give me no confidence about where we are going — I would have little confidence, as we go into this pivotal week in the talks process, in what is said in a document that Sinn Féin put into the talks process. It states:

> *"combatant organisations should tell the truth"*

just as the political parties, MI5, the army, the police and anybody else with information should tell the truth. However, when it comes to those words in the talks process —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Attwood: When it comes to the truth of those words, nobody is convinced.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Dúnmharaíodh Paul Quinn seacht mbliana ó shin, agus go dtí an lá seo ní raibh éinne os comhair na cúirte mar gheall ar an dúnmharú sin. Ba mhaith liom ár gcomhbhrón a dhéanamh le tuismitheoirí Paul Quinn agus lena gclann; tá siad inár smaointe fríd díospóireacht an lae inniu.

Paul Quinn was murdered on 20 October 2007, just over seven years ago. To this day, no one has been held responsible for his murder. I am very conscious of the grief and pain that his family endures. As we speak in the debate, I am conscious that they are in the Public Gallery. We have to be mindful that their journey for truth and justice will continue beyond the debate. From the outset, let me say again on behalf of Sinn Féin, echoing the comments made by Pat Sheehan and Cathal Boylan, that anyone with any information on any matter relating to the murder of Paul Quinn should immediately bring it to the proper authorities, be that an Garda Síochána or the PSNI. We will assist the Quinn family in any way we can as they continue in their search for justice.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I am not giving way on this sensitive issue for very obvious reasons.

That has been and remains our position: anyone with any information should bring it forward.

I turn now to the motion tabled by the SDLP. The murder of and search for justice for Paul Quinn has been debated in the Assembly before. Indeed, Alex Attwood referred to a contribution from Conor Murphy that day but was inaccurate. If he goes back and reads Hansard, he will find that out. At that time, we stated that the motion was selective and divisive: so is this motion. It is selective and is designed to create division on what should be a motion that commands total and absolute support in the Assembly; that is, a universal declaration that anyone with information should bring it forward and those responsible for Paul Quinn's murder should face due judicial process. I ask this: why is that not the objective of the motion? Indeed, to seek anything less, in my opinion, leaves it open to question.

The motion is premised on an assumption that has no basis in fact. It is obvious from the contribution of the proposer of the motion that he cannot offer any substance to the claims made in his motion. That is because neither he nor anyone else can offer a single shred of evidence that somehow, as the motion tries to suggest by coverall but meaningless titles, members of Sinn Féin have evidence in relation to the case that they are deliberately withholding. That is simply not true and is designed to create division. If Dominic Bradley or anyone else has any

information that any member of Sinn Féin is withholding information in relation to the case, they should by now have passed it on to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member make his remarks through the Chair?

Mr McCartney: For people to come here and put forward the position outlined by the IMC, rather than that of the PSNI and an Garda Síochána, is also questionable. The IMC had no role or remit as an investigative body. Indeed, it permitted itself, time and again, to be guided by untested and unknown intelligence sources.

Conor Murphy, as MP for Newry and Armagh, is on the record from 20 October 2007 as saying that Paul Quinn was murdered and that anyone with any information should bring it forward. He has offered to meet the Quinn family to assist them in any way that he or Sinn Féin can to ensure that those responsible face the full rigours of the judicial process. This remains his position and that of our party. In the same debate in February 2008, Conor pointed out that there were those using this death for their own narrow interests, be it those who are opposed to the Sinn Féin political strategy or those who are trying to use it for political or electoral advantage. He pointed out that the campaign for justice for Paul Quinn was used by some —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCartney: — to mount attacks, both physical and verbal, on other innocent people and on homes and properties. He cautioned against that, saying that it did not serve the interests of those seeking justice and, indeed, stood in the way of it.

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

Mr McCartney: The interest of justice is not served by half-truths and innuendo.

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

Mr McCartney: Indeed, they serve only to undermine it. Evidence is not the baseless allegations of untested intelligence sources.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member's time is up. I call Tom Elliott.

5.15 pm

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for permitting me to take part in the debate. I congratulate and thank Mr Bradley for tabling the motion.

I remember 20 October 2007 quite clearly, but it must surely live in the memories of Briege and Stephen Quinn, their entire family circle and, indeed, their friends and colleagues. It is hugely frustrating to be back here, six and a half years after the last debate, with little progress in the case. The brutality of Paul Quinn's beating and murder is a continuing and chilling reminder of the sickening mindset of those who carried out that murder and assisted in it. This was not a spur of the moment attack but a pre-planned, orchestrated attack and murder, carried out by bloodthirsty people.

Somebody talked about a witch-hunt against a political party: I have no vested interest in this, apart from seeing justice for the late Paul Quinn and his family. That is my only vested interest. I have no witch-hunt to pursue against anybody. What about the witch-hunt against Paul Quinn on that fateful day? This debate is about the victim, Paul Quinn, and his family. It is about attempts to get justice for the family; it is not about any political party, whether it is the SDLP, who tabled the motion, the Ulster Unionists, the DUP, the Alliance Party or, indeed, Sinn Féin. This is about doing what is right, something that a lot of people have failed to do.

Some of the calls here today from Sinn Féin for people to bring forward evidence and information ring hollow in my ears. They would do much better to withdraw the remarks that they have made previously, but we still fail to hear that, even though there is a plea — it is not even a call any longer, it is a plea — to do justice to the memory of Paul Quinn. No, they cannot even bring themselves to do that.

For almost 40 years, the borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have suffered death, harassment, intimidation and fear. That was directed equally at the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities, unionists and nationalists — it did not matter. If the IRA wanted to murder you, it murdered you. If it wanted to wreak fear and havoc in those communities, it did so, because that was its mentality and psyche. Unfortunately, it is doing it through a different means now by not providing information.

I hope that people will recognise that those calls ring hollow. I do not know where we can go or whether we will be back here in another six and a half years. I certainly hope and pray that we are not, for the sake of the family of the late Paul Quinn and for the good of society in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. I hope that people are brought to justice, and there are people who can assist with that. Given the numbers that were involved in that brutal murder, surely there are people who have much more information than they are telling us.

I go back to a point that I made in the last debate. A former Member of the House at one stage claimed about the IRA that:

> *"They haven't gone away, you know".*

Unfortunately, Members, that is still right; they have not gone away. Not only did they bring death and destruction to Paul Quinn and his family, but they continue to wreak that havoc now by not giving the information —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Elliott: — and by not withdrawing the terrible remarks that they made some time ago and that they have the opportunity to withdraw today.

Mr Allister: The murder by the IRA of Paul Quinn was truly horrific, and it instantly gave rise to totally brazen and disingenuous spinning by Sinn Féin. At the time that that horrific murder occurred, it was, as it still is, politically inconvenient. It is politically inconvenient not only, of course, for Sinn Féin but for the DUP in this House. Immediately it happened, Mr Conor Murphy, who was, if you please, then a Minister, declared that it had nothing to do with republicans and that republicans were not involved in it. He gave that assurance because he said that he had been to see the IRA leadership in south Armagh, which had given him "solid assurances" that republicans were not involved.

I remind the House that Gerry Adams once told us that he was given solid assurances that the IRA was not involved in the murder of Frank Kerr at Newry post office and that he was given solid assurances that the IRA was not involved in the murder of Detective Garda Jerry McCabe. That is mere whitewash and cover-up as far as Sinn Féin is concerned. A Minister of this House proclaimed that he had been to see the IRA leadership. I do not know whether he went in his chauffeur-driven ministerial car. A Minister of this House having the audacity to state that has been excelled today only by Sinn Féin's audacity to talk about the motion as the "antithesis of democracy".

I will tell you what the antithesis of democracy is. It is a gang of those with death and murder in their hearts and minds luring a 21-year-old to a lonely location and beating him cruelly and relentlessly to death. That is what is the antithesis of democracy. Those who sit on the Sinn Féin Benches are those who seek to whitewash with all their weasel words today.

This murder is also politically inconvenient for the DUP, which today could muster not a single Front Bench spokesman but only four minutes of contribution about a murder that, as I will remind them, Jeffrey Donaldson was clear about back in 2007. He said that if it was the IRA, the DUP would not sweep it under the carpet. If the IRA was involved in the murder in those circumstances, the DUP would act and would not run away from it. He went on:

> *"If the IRA is involved — whether it's individuals or — and there was a gang involved here — if there were a number of IRA members involved in this murder then that's the actions of the IRA. We are not here to dance around this issue".*

That party knows that the IRA was involved. What did it do about it? Nothing. That is because this murder was equally politically inconvenient for those who sustained and who still sustain Sinn Féin in government. This debate is politically inconvenient, hence the dearth of contribution from the DUP on this pivotal matter. That is because it goes to the heart of the con that was wrought on the people of Northern Ireland that meant that, suddenly, the IRA and Sinn Féin had signed up to supporting the rule of law, when here we had, within months of the Executive taking office, the IRA still being in the business of murder. Of course it has been swept under the carpet.

It is quite clear to me that Paul Quinn was sacrificed on the altar of proving that the IRA had supremacy and control in south Armagh. I fear that it is also sadly true that the police investigation and justice —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Allister: — have been sacrificed on the altar of the peace process. That is what adds another chilling dimension to this chilling case.

Mr A Maginness: I thank everybody who contributed to the debate. I just want to add a comment to what Tom Elliott said when he talked about the horrific and bloodthirsty nature of that murder. I emphasise to the House that the reason why it was so brutal and bloodthirsty was to send a very strong message; that is why the brutality was such. The message was: "We are in control. We are in charge. You will not defy our authority — the authority of the Provisional IRA." That was the message that was being put across.

It is disingenuous for anybody in this House to say that, in fact, this murder was not a paramilitary murder; it had all the hallmarks of a paramilitary murder. It was carried out by 10 men in boiler suits who forensically cleansed the scene of the murder. In many ways, it is similar to Robert McCartney's murder in Belfast, when there was a cleansing of the scene of the murder. It is different from the murder in Belfast because this murder was coldly calculated, whereas the McCartney murder was not. This one was preconceived, meticulously carried out and, as I say, forensically cleaned up afterwards. Can you imagine a criminal gang going to those lengths? I cannot. Why would a criminal gang take a young man and beat him mercilessly? Why would they do that?

We still have answers to receive from Sinn Féin. It has been said here by members of that party that, "We are really the victims here because you are all ganging up on us and there is a witch-hunt against us." It is similar to the Máiría Cahill case when, again, we were all ganging up on Sinn Féin: they are the victims, not the family of Paul Quinn. Those members disingenuously say that they would give information to the gardaí or the PSNI if they had any. Well, they have had plenty of opportunity to do so and they have not; they have signally failed to do so. What has Conor Murphy done with his information that this was, in fact, the result of rivalry between criminal gangs? Has he given that information to the gardaí? Has he given the details of that? If he does not have that information or if it were merely an assumption, why then did he comment? He did not just comment initially, but in this House in 2008. Why has he consistently said that this was the result of some sort of criminal gang fallout?

It is not acceptable in this House, or indeed outside it, for Sinn Féin to pretend that they are victims and also to pretend that they do not have information. If they do not have information, how do they know that it was not the IRA? How have they come to that conclusion? We have heard that Conor Murphy went to the leadership of the IRA. Could he give the gardaí or the PSNI information on the people whom he spoke to so that they could interview them? What would be wrong with that? Why has no one else in Sinn Féin questioned Conor Murphy and said to him that, "If you have this information, why not go to the police?" instead of standing up in this House and disingenuously saying, "Well, you know, people should go to the gardaí and the police." There is obviously information in the Sinn Féin organisation, and that information should be given to the police or the gardaí. There is no other way to behave in a decent fashion.

5.30 pm

This is all about preserving the integrity of Sinn Féin and preserving its political support. It is not about advancing justice here in Northern Ireland. It is about maintaining support and maintaining the lie that the Provisional IRA were decent people. We have heard that recently from none other than the president of Sinn Féin. Do decent people batter to death a young man in pursuit of maintaining their sovereignty in an area of south Armagh? Is that really what this is all about?

We have been told that we, in the SDLP, are wrong in bringing forward the motion today. It was brought forward

with the support of Paul Quinn's family, so, if you are criticising the SDLP for bringing forward the motion, you are implicitly and, indeed, explicitly criticising the Quinn family. They want to find justice, and they believe that this is an appropriate forum in which we can put pressure on Sinn Féin, the republican movement and those who have knowledge so that the assailants of Paul Quinn can be brought to justice. That is the right and proper thing for us, as legislators and public representatives, to do. Indeed, it is the duty of Dominic Bradley to come to the House and place the motion on the record of the House because only in that way can people be influenced outside the House who may have information in relation to that horrendous murder. Thus, it is important for us to have brought forward the motion today and to debate it. There is no witch-hunt here. There is a hunt, but it is a quite proper hunt for justice. It is demanded by the Quinn family and by every civilised standard that should permeate the workings of the House and all political parties in the House.

I support those who have spoken today in favour of the motion. Not once did those in Sinn Féin give an apology for blackening the reputation of Paul Quinn. Not once have they expressed any sorrow whatsoever in relation to defaming the good name of Paul Quinn. Not once has any Member of Sinn Féin said, "Paul Quinn was not a criminal. He was blamed in the wrong by Conor Murphy". Not once have they shown any contrition in relation to the campaign of denigration against Paul Quinn. Of course, that was similar to the campaign that was carried out in relation to Robert McCartney in the aftermath of his murder. It is similar to the campaign carried out against Máiría Cahill in relation to her allegations against Sinn Féin.

We see a repetition of the approach that Sinn Féin has taken in relation to a series of criminal actions; two murders and other criminal actions. That is not good enough. It is right for the House to demand that Sinn Féin comes clean, that they apologise, that they cooperate with the police and the gardaí, and that justice for Paul Quinn is finally achieved.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before I put the question to Members, I wish to address the issue of extending the sitting this evening. The business in the Order Paper is not expected to be disposed of by 6.00 pm, so in accordance with Standing Order 10(3) I wish to allow the business to continue until 7.00 pm or until the business is completed.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 64; Noes 24.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, 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, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, 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 Boylan and Mr Sheehan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly acknowledges the seventh anniversary of the murder of Paul Quinn; notes that the Independent Monitoring Commission states that current and former members of the Provisional IRA were responsible for the murder; demands that the leadership of the Provisional movement discloses all information regarding the murder of Paul Quinn to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána; condemns the Sinn Féin leadership for its false accusations against Paul Quinn; and further demands that Sinn Féin apologises to his family for making such accusations.*

Post Office Network

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have up to 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the important contribution made by the post office network to communities and the local economy; recognises the need for increased support from the Executive to ensure the viability of the network in the future; urges the Executive to take action to help sustain these vital services with the availability of more public services through the post office network and establish a post office diversification fund, similar to those which have existed in other regions; and supports the Keep Me Posted campaign, which champions the principle that consumers and businesses have a right to choose how they receive bills and statements without being penalised for requesting such information in paper format.*

I propose the motion as a member and former chair of the all-party group on postal issues. I think the group has made a positive contribution to this issue and is now under the chair of Pam Cameron MLA. It has given MLAs the opportunity to listen to Post Office representatives and sub-postmasters and increase our awareness of their excellent work and the vital services that they provide in our community.

I pay tribute to post office workers in Northern Ireland and the support that they give to citizens and businesses across our community.

With approximately 480 branches, the post office network is the largest retail chain in Northern Ireland and offers unrivalled access to a vast range of services, including mail services, pensions and benefits, government services and bill payments. An important aspect of the network's role is the support that post offices offer our rural communities, with 68% of branches in rural areas. The local post office is often the only link to important services for many rural communities and areas of deprivation and for older people and people with a disability, and it is vital that we work to sustain that access.

The post office network is also vital to our local economy and to businesses. Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) studies show that 88% of SMEs in the UK use a post office for mail services: 47% more than once a week and 20% every day. As we experience another round of bank closures, it is clear that the post office is increasingly bridging the gap for local, face-to-face access to banking services for people in our community.

The most recent survey of the satisfaction of Post Office customers in Northern Ireland, which was carried out in 2010, found that 93% thought that it provided a good or very good service and that 78% felt that it played an important part in the local community. That demonstrates just how important the post office network is to Northern Ireland and how seriously the Executive should take the need to help to sustain it. I hope that the all-party motion sends a clear message to the Executive that the Assembly demands support for our post offices, our sub-postmasters and the communities and businesses that they serve.

A 2012 report by the Consumer Focus Post titled, 'A "Front Office" for Government Services', recommended that the Northern Ireland Executive take a lead role in encouraging public sector organisations to deliver services through the Post Office and work with the UK Government to establish a clear role for them to play with the post office network in Northern Ireland. I have submitted questions to all Departments on what services they make available through the post office network, and the responses were underwhelming. Indeed, some of the services listed are delivered by other providers. That indicates that the Executive are failing to deliver on the recommendations made in the report, which is very concerning.

The Executive have also failed to establish a post office development fund, which has been introduced in other regions in the UK and appears to be improving the sustainability of post offices. In Scotland, the post office diversification fund, a £1 million investment overseen by the Enterprise Minister in 2010-11 and 2011-12, has helped post offices to diversify into new business activities and improved their sustainability. In 2009, a diversification fund was established in Wales to help local post offices to expand their business and provide new services for the community. With grants totalling around £6·6 million, the fund has helped around 442 Welsh post offices to strengthen their role in the community. An independent evaluation of the fund found that it had improved the sustainability and commercial viability of post offices and positively impacted on local economies and communities by improving job opportunities and increasing consumer spend. In 2013, a new scheme for post offices was launched by the Department for Communities and Local Government in England, with additional funding from the Cabinet Office and Post Office Ltd. The community enterprise fund gave grants of up to £10,000 to 25 post offices for innovative schemes to allow them to provide additional support to communities and other small businesses.

Having highlighted the positive impact of government investment in post offices in other regions and the cross-party support for the motion, I find it disappointing that no Executive Ministers are stepping forward to respond to these matters. In March of this year, I raised the issue with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the Assembly and was informed that OFMDFM was taking the lead on cross-cutting issues for the Executive. Despite cross-party support for the motion, we seem no closer to the relevant Executive Ministers standing up for our post offices and post office staff in Northern Ireland. Therefore, I call on the Executive to take a leaf out of the Post Office's book and start delivering on the issue. I hope that they will give serious consideration to a diversification fund to help post offices in Northern Ireland.

I also call on the Executive to address the other key recommendations of the " A Front Office for Government Services" report by actively encouraging our public sector to identify opportunities to deliver services through the Post Office in Northern Ireland and to work more closely with Westminster to support our post office network. This should include working to ensure the future of the Post Office card account further to March 2015. It is a service that is used by 10% of households in Northern Ireland, the highest of any UK region and one of the important income generators for our post offices.

The motion also calls on the Executive to support the Keep Me Posted campaign. The campaign is a partnership of post offices, charities and businesses working together to ensure every consumer's right to choose, without disadvantage, how they are contacted by banks, financial service companies, utility companies, media companies and other service providers. Independent research has demonstrated that 81% of adults want to choose how they receive important information such as bills and statements. It also reveals that the people who often have the greatest need are the older generation, the disabled and those lacking internet access and digital skills. It is our duty to safeguard the interests of such groups and to ensure that all citizens have the right to choose how they receive bills or statements without being penalised for requesting this in paper format.

The Keep Me Posted campaign calls on the UK Government and regulators to promote consumer choice through clearer regulation. It has a six-point pledge that can be accessed via its website and which I urge all Members to sign if they have not already done so. I also ask that the Executive write to the UK Government to express their support for the Keep Me Posted campaign.

In 2007, the Assembly was required to establish an Ad Hoc Committee on local postal services further to the closure of a number of post offices. This was a reactive response to a serious public concern for our post office network, and there is now, I believe, an urgent need for the Executive to get proactive in their support for our post offices if we are to help to sustain their future viability.

Mrs Cameron: I rise as chair of the all-party group on postal issues to support the motion. I welcome the fact that it has gained cross-party support in recognising the significant role that the post office network plays in Northern Ireland.

In the UK, 93% of adults live within a one-mile radius of a branch, with 92% having visited the branch in the last year. A staggering 20 million people — half of the UK adult population — have visited their local post office in the last week to avail themselves of diverse and wide-ranging services such as passport application checks, vehicle tax services, rates payments and collection of benefits and pensions through the Post Office card account. The post office is so often at the heart of communities and provides an intrinsic social service that the vast majority of us will use in one way or another in the course of our daily life. In order that we retain and build on the postal service that we all rely on, it is vital that we view the services that it provides in a strategic and long-term manner.

The introduction of the post office diversification funds in Scotland and Wales has enabled post offices to establish new business activities and become more sustainable, providing long-term economic return and perpetuating their strong social purpose. Post office diversification funds are designed to ensure that post offices remain a hub of services in communities, with priority given to offices serving deprived or isolated areas. Following a two-year roll-out in Wales, where 318 grants of between £5,000 and £20,000 were awarded, 65% of businesses reported an increase in non-post office turnover, with 60% reporting an increase in profits. That is a huge 83% of grantees that reported that their business had increased in commercial viability. The Scottish scheme provided similar successes, and the potential for increased economic activity alongside greater post office use cannot be underestimated.

It is worth noting that some Departments — OFMDFM, Regional Development, Employment and Learning, Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Education, Culture, Arts and Leisure, and Justice — do not use the post office network in any way. The remaining Departments that use the network do so in a very limited way, with Social Development the only Department to use services in any real way to administer benefits and pensions.

6.00 pm

Mr G Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Cameron: Yes. No problem.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Member agree that local government should make more use of the post office network?

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

Mrs Cameron: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wholeheartedly agree that it is vital that local government uses the post office network in any way it can to support and continue the success of the network and ensure that we have it into the future.

I urge that consideration be given to the introduction of a post office diversification fund for Northern Ireland to grow the post office network and increase its long-term viability as a core part of our community.

As consumers, we are changing the way in which we shop, bank and manage our finances. It is vital that the post office network adapts to those changes to remain relevant. One example of how the system has reflected a change is seen through the ability of post office counters to maintain banking services for customers whose bank branch has closed. In the last few days, another example of that was seen as the Ulster Bank announced the closure of branches across Northern Ireland, including the branch in Randalstown in my constituency. That is just one small way in which the Post Office has reacted to changes in the community to sustain a service for its customers. Other examples such as handling housing benefit claims, reporting a change of circumstances for benefits and paying fixed penalty notices have all been identified as ways in which the Post Office can provide greater cooperation with local authorities and offer community-based facilities.

Whilst it may be the case that we are largely moving towards greater technological integration, it is important to remember that 5·2 million households in the UK do not have Internet access. The post office is often described as a digital bridge for the elderly and vulnerable, and we must ensure that those people do not lose their access to postal counter services or their right to receive bills and communications from companies through the postal service. The Keep Me Posted campaign seeks to ensure that customers continue to be offered the choice of how to receive their bills, that there are no charges or penalties for receiving paper bills and that paper bills are taken away only with customer consent. With 40% of adults in the UK stating that not receiving a paper bill would seriously affect their ability to manage their finances, it is vital that we continue to press companies on that issue to ensure that that is carried forward.

I put on record my praise for the Northern Ireland postal network and am very much looking forward to visiting

delivery offices in my constituency as normal over the coming weeks in the run-up to Christmas. The service that we receive is often taken for granted, yet we would sorely miss it if we did not have it. I am pleased to support the motion.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin seo. I will speak in favour of the motion.

I commend the work of the all-party group on postal issues and wish the chair success in her new role. I speak from the point of view of working in the delivery side of the postal service for a number of years. It is a very important service, especially in rural areas, and, but for the likes of post offices, those areas would not be serviced at all. In moving the motion, the former chair said that 68% of post offices were in rural areas; I certainly experienced that when I was on delivery.

People tend to forget the number of services that are available in post offices and that can be delivered through them. Most post offices are a hive of activity, from the construction worker who comes in in the morning to get a cup of tea or a paper before he goes to work to a little old lady who goes in to get her pension. Post offices deal with pensions, tax credits and loads of other services. We should support the motion.

I express my thanks to all the postmasters who are doing a terrific job in supporting local communities.

I want to pick up on the points in the motion. Like the proposer of the motion, I was a wee bit disappointed with the response that he got back from some of the Departments. More could be done in relation to working with Departments to deliver services through the postal network. I thank the research team for its paper. Having looked through the paper, I saw the number of Departments that responded and their one-line responses. That does not encourage you.

Pam Cameron took an intervention on councils from her colleague. I looked through the services that the councils could support and deliver by supporting post offices. They could certainly do a lot more. I see Belfast and, thankfully, Armagh City and District Council, which is in my area, and Limavady Borough Council. However, I think other council areas could do more. There are a number of services, and I think we should be working and supporting and encouraging Departments and local authorities to use the postal network to deliver those services.

The motion also urges the Executive to establish a diversification fund. I see that Wales and Scotland can certainly make big changes and gains in capital, revenue and resource, for a small amount of money. So, I certainly support the motion's proposal to ask the Executive for a diversification fund. The paper clearly shows the results, how some businesses have grown and how well some have done with support. That is to be supported.

Obviously, I have signed the Keep Me Posted campaign. I know that it will sustain jobs. Having been in the delivery of the postal service, I know that it will certainly sustain jobs. People should have the right to receive paper bills if they so wish. I am certainly in favour of that, but there is one thing that people do not recognise. Once again, I will champion the rural cause here. A big percentage of people cannot access online services. It is as simple as that. There is no broadband coverage. Surprisingly, there are still areas in the rural North that have dial-up connection. I know that there is funding to try to address that issue. In the absence of all that, I certainly support the Keep Me Posted campaign.

I put on record my thanks to the all-party group, the postmasters and all who are trying to provide services and do their best to support communities, particularly the rural communities. I support the motion.

Mr Dallat: Once again, I am delighted to take the opportunity to speak in support of our post office network. In the past, I stood in the Chamber and spoke of my admiration for postal services and its storied history of penny black stamps, dangerous highwaymen and rumbling carriages roaring through the countryside to deliver. I spoke of how crucial it is for the Assembly to recognise our continuing need for a universal postal service, and I called on the Executive to ensure the viability of our local network by protecting it from Tory interference. Today, I reiterate that call.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will not draw your attention to the fact that we are not quorate at the moment, but I say this to all 108 Assembly Members: anything that we get in Northern Ireland, we have to fight for. It is a feature of modern democracy that people make their voices heard.

I am not foolish enough to suggest that the Post Office of today is as vital for communication as it was in the 1840s. It would be even more foolish for us not to recognise the importance of its continued contribution to local communities, local business and the local economy.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. In accepting the vital role that post offices have to play, particularly in many of our rural communities, I am glad that the Member touched on communication, because it is vital. The Post Office has a huge range of services, but it does itself a tremendous injustice by underselling the range of products and services that it has. Does the Member accept that?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. It has been drawn to my attention that we are not quorate. Therefore, according to Standing Order 9, I ask that the Division Bells be rung.

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.

House counted, and, there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Deputy Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member now continue?

Mr Dallat: That is what I get for drawing the Deputy Speaker's attention to the fact that we are not quorate, but, to be honest, I am not sorry for doing it.

Other Members referred to the number of banks queuing up to close their branches. The most recent was the Ulster Bank, which closed the last bank in Portstewart, which is one of our premier seaside resorts. A lot of elderly people purposely retired there, and they will now have to bus it to Coleraine, where, I know, the bank will end up as nothing more than a showroom.

We are very lucky in this part of the country. I will give credit to the Assembly because, in the past, we stood up

for the post office. In fact, one of the first pluses for this Assembly was to set up a pilot scheme promoting a one-stop shop. That was tested out in Coleraine many years ago. The post office that we have today would not exist had it not been for local people getting the message out loud and clear that we are not going to go down the road of 60% of medium-sized towns and villages in England where there is no post office and no bank. Northern Ireland cannot afford that.

The people of Northern Ireland have been loyal to the post office and have continued to support it; 70% of our population will visit a post office at least once a week. Post offices are a lifeline for many of our communities, and they have adapted: you find them now in pharmacies, supermarkets and other places that remain open at night. I pay tribute to those in charge of the post office network. They have endeavoured to be flexible and innovative to ensure that the service is not eventually flogged off to rich Tories who want to control transport and public utilities, which should remain in public service.

The post office, to me, is the last of the utilities that we can save. I picked up on an intervention from George Robinson that the new local authority should support the post office, but let us start at home. The Assembly has not been particularly good at supporting the post office and has not availed itself of it as a means of distributing its information, leaflets and all the things that the public need to find out about. I appeal to the 11 or 12 Departments today to get serious about this, put your money where your mouth is and start helping to save the post office from annihilation. Please do not allow the post office to go down the same route as the bank without intervention.

We are largely a rural community, and many of our urban communities are in socially deprived areas where there is a sub-branch of the post office where people can do their business, avail themselves of its benefits and whatever. Can you imagine if there was a further culling of post offices and the cost that there would be to ordinary working-class people to have to go into town centres to do their business? I hope that all Members, including those not in the Chamber this evening — I accept that they probably have very good reasons for not being here — feel that the debate this afternoon stimulates an urgency because we cannot sit on our hands, we cannot daydream, and we cannot sleep if we are going to ignore this issue.

We should learn from experience that we should make our voice known.

6.15 pm

I will finish with this. Recently, I was in Hungary and saw 40,000 people marching, and it scared the wits out of me. What were they marching for? They were campaigning against tax on the Internet: a simple, everyday issue. They appeared on the second day with 50,000 people, and by the next day —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Dallat: — the Government acted. The Government gave in. I hope that we do not have to take to the streets to ensure that the post office remains.

I know that I am pushed for time, but since there was not an awful lot —

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

Mr Dallat: — of demand, I have abused my privilege.

Mr Kinahan: I am very pleased to speak on the motion, although, having listened to the Member who spoke previously, at one stage, I thought that we were going to get a rendition of Adam Ant's 'Stand and Deliver'. Then we got the bells — the bells from Quasimodo. To be serious, I am very pleased to be here to support the motion. I congratulate Mr Lyttle for pushing it through.

I remember speaking — I think it was six years ago — on another motion, which was six steps to saving our post office. After that, I then concentrated on asking questions, as Mr Lyttle has, and getting many answers. When I went back with the answers to the organisation that had been pushing us, I found that that campaign had waned and gone. What I am really leading up to saying today is that the onus is on all of us here and our colleagues in our parties to make sure that the same does not happen this time.

I wholeheartedly support the motion and, like others, want to acknowledge the tremendous contribution made by the post office network. If you think about it, you realise it is very much behind our health and our happiness as a nation, both in the past and in the future. If any community knew that their post office was under threat, you would find all of them crowding and supporting it in the future. So, let us make sure that we wind this up nicely so that everybody is supportive and works hard to keep the post offices.

I am the fifth Member to speak, so you have heard most of the arguments and the points that have been made. However, I will say that the post office network has faced significant challenges in recent years, including the decline of the high street and the advent of the Internet. We can all tell our own stories of post offices closing in our constituencies over the past decade, both in rural areas and in towns. Whether planned or simply because retiring sub-postmasters have not been replaced, the story, at one level, seems to be one of terminal decline. However, it does not necessarily have to be so. Let us all here ensure that that does not happen.

I want to highlight a recent report commissioned by the Post Office and produced by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA). In 2013-14, the RSA ran a project on post offices as community enterprise hubs. The resulting report, 'Making the Connection', asked how post offices could provide services that support their local communities while also contributing to the bottom line. The report concluded that post offices have great potential to act as community enterprise hubs and that huge opportunities exist for post offices to offer support with everything from universal credit to business advice. The Scottish and Welsh have recognised it, and we should be following their examples.

When looking through the research and on the Web, I was intrigued to see that the United States was also meeting the same difficulties, and I am sure that it is happening worldwide as the Internet and everything changes matters.

The network's future could be transformed by supporting branches to become more entrepreneurial and for branches to experiment with new business models. Let us see that diversification fund there helping them.

In the context of a new trend in the UK towards the local, characterised by growing a microbusiness community

and the development of community-based approaches to public service reform, it could be argued that post offices are ideally placed to become community enterprise hubs, which, for instance, could provide business support to make communities and also meet the needs of the UK's ageing population and address the isolation felt by older people. When we look at the wider picture and the challenges faced by our town centres and rural villages, which has already been touched on by many, we see that there have been bank closures, threats to libraries, public houses and Citizens Advice, and police station closures or reductions in opening hours. Therefore, it is now time to take a more strategic view on all of those under-threat services. I feel that the Executive, all Departments and, as the Chair suggested, all councils should work together, not just on post offices but on town and village centres. The post office is just one of the keys.

In the various briefs that we all received for today's debate, numerous Departments responded that they have passed nothing to post offices. Let us keep the pressure on them all. Let us make it work, and let us see them do it. We can all do it through our Committees. Whether it is DVA-related, passports, banking, dog licences, tickets, housing benefits or many of the matters that we have raised already, the post offices could do it if we had a joined-up initiative from the Executive that worked downwards, with someone appointed to drive it from there. Then we probably need someone in every super-council area to do the same.

We could plan the future of our towns around those features. Think about what features will definitely survive. We know that we will always need the key shops such as the grocer's, the butcher's and the newsagent, and we know that we need the schools. We have the pubs and the coffee shops. You have Internet cafes, probably temporarily as fashions change. You have the transport hub in a town or village where the buses stop. If we sit down and look at each town and think how we can work that town better, we can place the post office better into the middle of it and maybe share its workload and, if you use the diversification fund, help it benefit the town or village.

I, too, will talk about Randalstown, where the bank closed last week. I make it clear beforehand that I do not believe that the post office is under threat.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Kinahan: The library has had to be cut back. There is the ideal place to work with: get the post office working with the library. All of us in here should be looking at each town and village, finding the focus and helping it work.

Mr Agnew: The post office has already done a great service today in bringing our politicians together, but, more importantly, on a regular basis, it brings our communities together. Post offices act as community hubs and, historically, have been a key part of our communities. Indeed, they continue to be so.

A number of Members have spoken about bank closures. Recently, Ulster Bank announced that it will close its branch in Donaghadee, leaving my constituents in that town with no local shopfront banking service within six miles. That is regrettable, but at least we have the post office, which will continue to provide banking services. Whilst banks and other profit-making organisations will make such decisions based on numbers, a post office is a public service, and public services should not be based on numbers coming through the door but on the need of those who come through those doors.

It is important that we sustain the post offices. As Danny Kinahan said, many of our post offices are not under threat — many are thriving — but those that are and that provide those important services, often in rural areas and areas that have no walk-in banking services, provide a vital resource to the community.

In my previous role working with the homeless, I witnessed the importance of the Post Office accounts. Many of the residents in the hostel where I worked could not get a bank account. The identification threshold to open a bank account was too high and the security checks were too high, and they could not get a bank account in which to, in many cases, have their benefits lodged. The post office again provided that service, which may not have been commercial. The banks did not see those people as important enough in terms of their number, but a vulnerable group in society was serviced by the post office, and it played a vital role in those people's life.

The report 'A "front office" for government services' has been mentioned, and I will echo some of what has been said. We need to use what is there. We were responding to budget difficulties by cutting staff, but how can we potentially make genuine efficiency savings? One of the ways in which we can do that is to use the services that are there, use the post office and work with it to help it deliver new public services, whether those be advice services, benefits or housing services. Can we, through DSD, get our social security offices working with our post offices to see how they can bring services together, and likewise with other Departments and their provisions?

Finally, the diversification fund of £1 million in Scotland was referred to. Earlier today, I questioned the First Minister on the proposals to cut the rate of corporation tax, which would take approximately £400 million out of public funds. I was told that that was an investment in companies. Today we call on the Executive to make an investment in our communities, whether that be £1 million or £500,000. That investment in our post offices would be an investment in our people. I commend Mr Lyttle for tabling the Adjournment topic and thank Members for uniting around the issue. I call on the Executive to take notice of the Assembly today and act on the issue.

Mr Lyttle: I thank every Member who has contributed to this important debate. We have had a unanimous call for support for our post office network in Northern Ireland and our post office sub-postmasters. That is an important call to be sent to the Executive today. I welcome the contributions that have been made. Pam Cameron, as chair of the all-party group on postal issues, made a vital contribution, making us aware that 20 million people will have used the post office in the past week. She set out the important services that are available from our post office and gave her support to a diversification fund.

With a helpful intervention from George Robinson, she reminded us of the importance of encouraging local government to participate in the process as well and, although recognising that post offices need to adapt, set out just how many households — 5·2 million — have no Internet access. She said how important our post office is as a digital bridge for those people. She helpfully reminded

us to support our post offices at the busy Christmas period, and I am sure that MLAs will be making Christmas visits to send our support to the workers at this time.

Cathal Boylan stressed the importance of post offices to rural areas, acknowledged the work of sub-postmasters and gave his support to a diversification fund and the Keep Me Posted campaign. John Dallat expressed his admiration for postal services here in Northern Ireland and his support for the universal postal service. He also highlighted the fact that 70% of the population will visit a post office at least once a week. He emphasised the importance of post offices as a lifeline to our communities and acknowledged that many of them have adapted to changes in communication requirements at this time. He also urged, as many other MLAs did, that we understand the urgency of the issue.

Danny Kinahan referenced the six steps to saving our post office network. That is an important campaign that makes a vital contribution to the work that we need to do as an Assembly and Executive. He also recognised the contribution of the post office network to the social fabric and the health and well-being of our community. He put out the call that states clearly, "Let's not wait until we're facing any further closures". Although many post offices are thriving, we know that there are many sub-postmasters who are under significant pressure.

In a positive vein, he said that we should recognise the centrality of post offices in our community and use that to build and create community enterprise hubs, where not only benefit assistance but business advice and other services could be delivered to our communities.

6.30 pm

Steven Agnew emphasised that, whilst banks are profit-making services and have made decisions in that regard in recent weeks, we must continue to support post offices as a public service that addresses need and must be protected. Indeed, he emphasised the importance of the Post Office card account to the vulnerable in our community. He also referenced the report, 'A "front office" for government services', and called on the Executive and the wider public to make sure that we use the services that are available through our post office. He emphasised that a diversification fund, such as that in Scotland, which is in the region of £1 million, would be an investment in our communities, which every MLA today has supported.

In closing, I welcome the clear cross-party support that we have achieved today for out post office network. A very clear message will go to the Executive on some key points. There is support for a diversification fund. We have seen the Enterprise Minister in Scotland deliver that, as well as the Local Government Department in England. We have seen a £6·6 million investment of that nature in Wales. Another clear message is that we want to see government services provided through our post offices, at regional and local level, and clear support for the Keep Me Posted campaign.

As I mentioned, the task is to gain Executive commitment, and we need Ministers to step forward and act on the call that they have received today. We need them to take responsibility on the issue and not pass it from Department to Department but act in a joined-up manner, for once, and stand up for post offices and postal workers in Northern Ireland. As vice-chair of the all-party group on postal issues, I will continue to work with the chairperson, Pam Cameron MLA, and other MLAs to ensure that we keep the issue on the agenda. I hope that we see substantive, tangible action from Ministers to ensure that we are proactive on the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the important contribution made by the post office network to communities and the local economy; recognises the need for increased support from the Executive to ensure the viability of the network in the future; urges the Executive to take action to help sustain these vital services with the availability of more public services through the post office network and establish a post office diversification fund, similar to those which have existed in other regions; and supports the Keep Me Posted campaign, which champions the principle that consumers and businesses have a right to choose how they receive bills and statements without being penalised for requesting such information in paper format.*

Adjourned at 6.32 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 November 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Can you inform the House whether, to your knowledge, the deputy First Minister and leader of Sinn Féin in this place has given any indication to your office that he will come before the Assembly to explain, clarify or apologise — or all three — for the remarks made by the overall leader of Sinn Féin and former Member of this House, Gerry Adams, last night in Enniskillen, when he talked about breaking people in my community?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I did allow you to elaborate. Quite clearly, it is not a point of order. We will proceed.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Is there any indication of a statement from OFMDFM as to the integrity of its equality policy, given that, for one part of that Department, it is a Trojan Horse?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member knows very well that that is not a point of order. He is particularly well equipped to know the difference. It is not a point of order. I do wish that he would desist from abusing the procedures of the House. I am paying careful attention to that abuse. It has been going on for too long and should stop.

Executive Committee Business

Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46(1)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

> *That the draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46(1)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

This draft order seeks to amend section 46(1) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 in respect of the list of organisations that the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland has the power to inspect. This follows a review of the organisations that are currently listed. Since section 46(1) was last revised in 2010, the criminal justice system has evolved, resulting in some changes affecting relevant organisations that require the current legislation to be updated. As a result, this draft order seeks to amend section 46(1) to ensure that the legislation remains relevant and meaningful.

The role of chief inspector of criminal justice is to ensure the inspection of all aspects of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, with a view to promoting effectiveness, efficiency and even-handedness. Following an inspection, the chief inspector will prepare a report for me, as Justice Minister, which I will arrange to be laid before the Assembly.

Since the introduction of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, section 46(1) has been amended on a number of occasions to reflect the evolving operating environment of the criminal justice system and, in particular, the various changes that have impacted on the organisations working in it. The changes relate to organisations that have been added to section 46(1) due to the type of work carried out, organisations that have been omitted and organisations requiring their titles to be amended.

The draft order has been produced following a review of section 46(1) carried out by my Department. The key factors behind initiating the review were the closure of the Compensation Agency, which brought its work within the core Department of Justice, and a proposed private Member's Bill from Robin Swann, which sought to add DARD's central investigation service (CIS) to section 46(1). Following a consultation with Mr Swann and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, that measure has been included in the order.

As part of the review, ministerial colleagues were asked for their views on section 46(1) in relation to their

Departments and arm's-length bodies. Consequently, a few further amendments to section 46(1) were identified as being necessary. Therefore, the draft order proposes the following changes to section 46(1). The Compensation Agency will be removed as it ceased to exist as an agency of the Department of Justice on 1 April last year, and its work has been brought within the core Department. The central investigation service in DARD is to be added to section 46(1) due to the type of work undertaken. CIS investigates allegations of fraud, breaches of scheme conditions and non-compliance with legislation referred by other business areas in DARD. CIS also plays a vital role in the prevention and deterrence of fraud by performing a range of counter-fraud functions, including training in fraud awareness, investigation procedures and court skills. The Veterinary Service enforcement branch, which is also in DARD, is to be added to section 46(1) due to the nature of the work it undertakes, which includes enforcing compliance with legislation relating to animal health and welfare and public health. The description of the health and social services boards and health and social services trusts will be amended to the Health and Social Care Board and health and social care trusts to reflect a change in the description of those organisations. Finally, the description of the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency will be amended to the child maintenance and enforcement division to reflect a name change.

The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice has been consulted on the proposed amendments to section 46(1), and he is content. Should the Assembly approve the draft order, the updated remit of the Chief Inspector will come into effect from tomorrow. I thank ministerial colleagues and, as usual, the Justice Committee for their consideration of the proposals. It is with their support that I bring the order before the House today. I also acknowledge and thank Robin Swann for his contribution towards bringing forward the order.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Ford: Well, not that much.

The draft order will help to ensure that the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland has the appropriate remit to inspect the various organisations working in the criminal justice system and to identify areas in which there is potential for improvement. I commend the draft order to the House.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I am pleased to speak very briefly on the motion today on behalf of the Committee for Justice. The Committee considered the proposal for the statutory rule in June this year and the statutory rule itself more recently at the meeting on 22 October 2014. As outlined by the Minister, the rule provides for a refresh of the list of organisations at section 46(1) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 that the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) has the power to inspect.

The Committee noted that the list of organisations at section 46(1) had become outdated and therefore required amending by the Department of Justice to reflect the title changes of some organisations, remove organisations that no longer exist and, perhaps most importantly, add those organisations carrying out work related to the criminal justice system that are not listed in the legislation. The Committee was also aware that Mr Robin Swann intended to pursue a private Member's Bill, with the purpose of adding the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's central investigation service to the list of organisations that must be inspected by CJINI. The Department of Justice advised the Committee that the statutory rule could be used to make the change, which was supported by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Committee was content with that approach, which avoided the need for primary legislation. I outlined that the Committee agreed that it was content with the revised list of organisations and the statutory rule, so the Committee gives its support to it.

Let me briefly, too, commend Robin Swann for his initiative in pursuing this item with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. We have been able to expedite it in a fashion that achieved what he wanted. So I commend the Member for those efforts.

CJINI is an organisation that many of us have a lot of respect for because of the way in which it goes about its work in carrying out inspections. It is important that there is public confidence that all these organisations are doing the job appropriately, and CJINI can provide that assurance to us as elected representatives on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. I think that it is right that we update the list today and support the statutory rule before us.

Mr Swann: After endorsements from both the Minister and the Chair, it would be remiss of me if I did not inform the House and put on record why I brought a private Member's Bill to include the Central Investigation Service in the list that can be inspected by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

The first question that the Minister raised was why CIS was not on the list, and I found that quite strange when I started to investigate. The reason that DARD gave was that CIS was not on the list in section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act because it did not exist in 2002. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, that is correct. CIS did not exist in 2002; it was called the Fraud Investigation Unit. Its name was changed in 2002, so it fell outside the Act. That was one of the concerns that started to alert me to why this unit needed to be included under Criminal Justice Inspection.

Also, when you look at the efficiency and proficiency of the organisation in investigating fraud, there was something that raised concerns. Over a five-year period between 2009 and 2014, CIS investigated 1,286,000 cases of potential fraud; over that five-year period they brought in the region of 66,000 successful prosecutions. That is a success rate of 5.15% on the cases that they looked into. The cost of the unit over that time was £733,000, so it did not look to be an efficient unit when running at its best.

The Minister referred to the fact that part of its remit is in fraud training, and CIS says that that is one of its main concerns. Something that concerned me was that we have a unit in the Department of Agriculture providing fraud awareness training to DCAL, DARD and OFMDFM, yet the approved DFP provider for fraud awareness training in Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments is the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. It is not actually CIS, although it claims that that is its core reason for existing.

Here we have a unit in the Department of Agriculture that is training other Departments in how they should investigate fraud, but in DARD's 2010-11 Resource

Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011, the Comptroller and Auditor General stated at paragraph 22:

> *"I am concerned that most of the suspected fraud cases referred to CIS during 2010-2011 had not been reported to me as required by Managing Public Money Northern Ireland."*

So here we have a unit in DARD providing training to other Departments on how to investigate and manage fraud not following the procedures that it was training other Departments to use.

In the round, and the Minister indicated this in his explanation, CIS is a fraud investigation unit in the Department of Agriculture. That is correct; that is where the unit sits. However, it has investigated fraud in the Department of Agriculture, in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and in the Department of Health; it was the organisation that undertook the inquiry into the whole-time recruitment, overtime and expense claims of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. It investigated fraud in OFMDFM and is reportedly the unit that found that a fraud investigation should be carried out on Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR). It did not actually undertake the investigation, but it was responsible for it.

As a unit sitting within our Agriculture Department, it also had the responsibility to investigate fraud within the SEUPB. So, it gave it a remit to investigate fraud cases in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. However, the main issue was that, when I met departmental officials in regard to that, they were unaware that the service level agreement for one of their units actually allowed it to act outside Northern Ireland.

10.45 am

The main reason why I became interested in this unit was not because of what I have outlined; it was because of a Deloitte report that came about because of the operations of the unit. Out of five investigators who were employed at that time, three used whistle-blowing protocols so that they could highlight their concerns. I will raise some of those. They are from Project Rainbow. At 4.16 of the report, it states:

> *"In summary, Mr Murphy had claimed for £51,000 of funding for the construction of a farm building under FNMS. However, Grants and Subsidies Inspection Branch had identified that the building that Mr Murphy was claiming for was not at the required stage of completion by the date of the scheme's deadline. Nevertheless, DARD made an advance payment to Mr Murphy of circa £25,000."*

The report goes on to state:

> *"However, prior to conducting an interview, the Head of CIS decided to close the case."*

And:

> *"An additional issue for the whistleblowers with regard to this case was that Mr Murphy had political connections and had been lobbying the Minister for DARD. The whistleblowers were therefore concerned that the case may have been dropped due to political pressures."*

Deloitte could not find any written evidence of that, so it was included in the recommendations that that protocol should be strengthened.

Paragraph 4.25 of the Deloitte Rainbow report refers to a McDaid case. It states:

> *"This relates to allegations made by the whistleblowers that the Head of CIS acted unlawfully by not following the law on disclosure and investigation procedure in the following ways:*
>
> - *allowing a defence solicitor unaccompanied access to the McDaid investigation file; and*
> - *fabricating investigation notes."*

The report goes on to state:

> *"It was evident from our review that the particular diary entry of 14 April 2005 had been made retrospectively by the Head of CIS as it made reference to McDaid, although he had not been identified as a potential suspect at the time. This raises concerns that the notebook entries may have been completed retrospectively rather than contemporaneously. This could have had a detrimental impact on the case for the prosecution had it gone to court."*

Those are two cases that were raised by the whistle-blowers that were investigated by Deloitte and put forward in Project Rainbow back in 2010. There was no move made by any other body or group to investigate these cases to find out what had been going on.

When I pushed DARD on whether it followed the 10 recommendations from Project Rainbow, it said that it had implemented most of them. The one that it did not implement was the final one, which is at paragraph 4.36:

> *"Once all the above issues have been suitably addressed, consideration could also be given as to whether CIS should be subject to an independent review by an appropriate external party to ensure that the arrangements in place within the branch are 'fit for purpose' and aligned to good investigatory practice."*

Unquestionably, the Agriculture Department, the Department of Justice and both Ministers indicated that they were willing to engage with each other, but they never seemed to actually get over the line. That was the reason why I brought my private Member's Bill.

I thank the Minister for engaging so quickly in bringing CIS under the remit of the Criminal Justice Inspection. Following the introduction of this statutory rule and CIS being brought under CJI, and on the back of Project Rainbow and the concerns that were raised, did he contact CJI and ask it to move to an investigation of CIS?

Mr Ford: I repeat my thanks to the Committee Chair for the work that the Committee did in considering this rule. One of the key points that was made was when he referred to the respect with which CJINI is held among those of us who work across the justice system. There is absolutely no doubt that, sometimes, the reports produced by the Chief Inspector make uncomfortable reading. That is why they are so valuable. We know that we will get an accurate picture from the work that CJINI does and that we will not get anything that has any suggestion of a cover-up. We will always see the full warts-and-all picture. That is why it is

important that we ensure that the list in section 46(1) is up to date. Mr Swann eloquently explained the concerns that he had about CIS within DARD and why it needed to be included. The point the Chair made about the confidence and respect that we have for CJINI is the answer to those concerns and will ensure that things are done.

I do, however, have to be cautious of his final request that I should ask CJINI to move. He referred to allegations of political pressure and, as ever as Minister, I need to be careful that I am not pressuring the normal procedure, which is that suggestions come from CJINI for a work programme that I approve.

I will be in communication with the Chief Inspector after this debate on the presumption that the House is about to pass the measure. I believe that the measure will, as was outlined by Mr Givan, Mr Swann and myself, facilitate the Chief Inspector in properly considering an appropriate list of organisations as it stands. Section 46(1) will be the appropriate and up-to-date list that will enable the Chief Inspector to consider his work programme. On that basis, I ask Members to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46(1)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

Private Members' Business

Dalriada Hospital MS Respite Centre: Closure

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 wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Swann: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the decision to close the regional multiple sclerosis respite centre at Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle until March 2015 and transfer the service to the independent sector; further notes the importance of appropriate respite provision for patients and their families; believes the decision to be entirely wrong and one which makes no financial sense; fears the decision will result in the permanent closure of the centre; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reverse the decision and immediately reinstate the service at Dalriada Hospital.*

Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I suppose it is with disappointment that I have to move this motion. The content of the motion, as read by the Clerk and drafted by us, is nothing that I have not heard from the community, elected reps and pressure groups in regard to Dalriada.

It was Nye Bevan — I suppose, the father of the NHS — who said no society could legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person was denied medical aid because of a lack of means. I want to follow on from that with a quotation from one of the users of the respite centre at our first meeting at Bushmills, and Mervyn Storey was there that night. Robert Weiner, when he heard of the closure of the respite centre, said: "I thought of death, I thought of self-harm and I thought my life was ended". That was one of the most moving contributions to this whole campaign I have heard since it started.

It has been an incredible campaign, from the public meetings at Bushmills, Cushendall and Ballycastle, to a petition that I am sure now has over 20,000 signatures, to a tractor run, white-line protests, public protests, a religious service of hope last night in Sheskburn, and a campaign to Stormont last week.

The motion is a cross-party one, and there is nothing in its sentiments that the political representatives have not expressed at some stage during this campaign, which finished, of course, with the Minister's visit on Friday. I personally thank the Minister for taking the time to visit the unit so that he could see at first hand exactly what an excellent facility it is, and the services there. One of the benefits of devolution is that we have Ministers who can make these decisions and go and see at first hand what is happening.

I said at the last public meeting at Ballycastle that I knew the Minister was hearing the message but I was hoping that he was starting to listen to what it meant. I get the feeling from him that he understands from the people of Ballycastle the importance of the unit and what it has been delivering. Minister, I hope that you are listening to the people and not just to the information that has been provided by the trust, because, on the numbers presented about the costs, counterarguments have been made.

The Minister has said in the past that the decisions coming forward are the least-worst options and certainly not the best ones. I could not agree more, Minister: it is definitely not the best option to close any part of Dalriada.

I will set out my understanding of the process, and the Minister can correct me or update us later. The trust made recommendations to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on how to save the money. The Health and Social Care Board then made those recommendations to the Department, and the Department made those recommendations to the Minister. In the words of the trust, some were accepted and some were not. Those that were accepted were passed back to the trust to implement.

The Minister has asked us to give alternatives, but perhaps he can explain to the House what the alternatives to the closure of Dalriada were. Is the closure of Dalriada acceptable compared with the alternatives? The words "temporary closure" have been used — a temporary closure until the end of March. However, the Minister has warned that "temporary" may mean "permanent" in some cases. That is where we are at.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. He is making a very compelling case for Dalriada. However, does he accept that it is not simply a case of batting this back to the Minister, because any alternative is likely to affect those of us who represent constituencies in the Northern Trust area? It is therefore is important that, if there is to be an alternative to Dalriada, there be some input from local representatives. That is why the Minister is quite right to say, "Let's hear what you want instead of the closure of Dalriada".

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his contribution, but that is the point that I made earlier. There was no engagement with us, as public representatives, prior to the closure of Dalriada, so we did not have an alternative. As I said, the trust made recommendations to the Health and Social Care Board, which then made those recommendations to the Department. The Department then made those recommendations to the Minister, and some were accepted and some were not. I say to Sammy Wilson —

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: I will give way.

Mr Wells: In case this runs as an argument, that was not the case. There was no second division. We asked the trust to come up with a series of savings, and it came back with a list to meet the target. No alternatives were given, and there was no decision by me that favoured one over another. The list that I have is the entire list, and the Member has it. There are no other options on the table.

Mr Swann: You need to question the chief executive of the Northern Trust, then, because that is what he told me and a number of my party colleagues yesterday in front of witnesses. He said that there were alternatives put, of which some were accepted and some were not. As I said earlier, if the Minister is taking the word solely of the trust in this argument, that is a fine example of the trust telling you one story and telling other people something else.

This is not about point-scoring, Minister. I know that you have a tough job to do. You have asked us to provide alternatives, but we were told yesterday that you had been provided with alternatives to the closure of Dalriada. If that is not the case, it is something that you have to take up —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: I have given way already, Peter. I do not want to use up too much of my time by taking interventions. You will have time to speak later.

Minister, you have talked about the use of consultation and about wanting to consult, which is what Sammy Wilson referred to. We were led to believe yesterday that, after the closure of Dalriada on 30 November, the trust intends to go out to consultation on the temporary closure. Following that, it could go out to consultation on the permanent closure. If that is the consultation that the Minister is talking about when he says that he wants to consult, that concerns us, the public, the people of Ballycastle and everybody who has been involved in the campaign. We are looking at a decision that has been made and approved, and we are going out to consultation for the sake of it.

Some people have talked about us closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. I do not want it to be the case that we close the door of Dalriada after the service has been removed.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: Briefly.

11.00 am

Mr McKinney: Thank you for your indulgence: I know that you are under pressure of time. A lot of these considerations are around finance. Does the Member agree that there is a risk that there could be further, raised costs because, according to the MS Society, inadequate respite provision can lead to declining health?

Mr Swann: Having met the MS Society, I know that that has raised great concerns; the support should be there as well.

Alternatives were proposed regarding two care homes. The Minister said, and much was made of the fact, that those homes were visited by two of the users and a member of the MS Society. Minister, you are relying on the fact that those people visited those homes, but what has been made very clear to me, and very clear to us yesterday, is the fact that those people went in good faith to see the facilities. They were not there to endorse them or give any sort of recommendation that they were better than Dalriada; they went in good faith to see what could be offered. I hope that the Minister does not take that to be an accepted alternative by the users of the respite centre at Dalriada Hospital.

I find it hard that, when we talk about the health service and Bevan's ideal, it all comes down to numbers. Minister, you answered a question that I asked a couple of weeks ago. You said that, out of 4,000 MS sufferers across Northern Ireland, only 69 had used the centre. Minister, there are trusts that do not use Dalriada because they have halted their contracts with the Northern Health Trust. That is why there is nobody going there from other trusts. They are given a budget to manage MS respite centres; how are the other trusts using that money? Are they using it well or efficiently? Dalriada provides a regional service. If those trusts have removed that service, surely it is up to the Minister to provide a regional service and coordinate the trusts?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I have been generous with my time, and there is a lot more that I could have said and wanted to say. Minister, I do not believe that this has been an honest fight.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up, I am afraid.

Mr Swann: The trust has been standing on Dalriada's neck whilst it claimed to be holding its hand.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. You were very generous with your time, and you handled interventions with some skill and forbearance, but this is obviously a topic about which people are very engaged and anxious, so I suggest that remarks are addressed through the Chair. You handled it particularly well, but, for the general management of the Assembly and discussion, all remarks should be made through the Chair, please.

Mr Storey: It is sad that we stand in the shadow of comments made that somehow bring into question our own personal legitimacy, but no comment can be made to deny that there is a legitimate concern about the future of the provision in Dalriada.

I have lived in the constituency all my life. The hospital was opened in 1963 by Terence O'Neill. There is no doubt that the campaign that has been mounted over the last number of weeks is a credit to that community. Yes, it is disappointing that comments have been made as an attempt to politicise the issue, but they were not made by those who organised the protests and the campaign and who have been very focused on one thing: ensuring that they reflect the concerns in the community of Ballycastle and the wider area. I commend the Member for bringing the motion to the House.

I think that it would do us all well to consider a couple of things. First, we need to have a clear understanding of the services that are provided at Dalriada. It is not only a criticism of the trusts today but also a criticism of the trusts in the past that a hospital that was built to the highest spec in 1963 and was one of the most modern hospitals to be built in Northern Ireland was not allowed to be fully developed over the years. The Member wants me to give way.

Mr Swann: I will pick up the Member's point. MS respite services were put there specifically for that reason after Peter Stott Martin House in Cullybackey was closed.

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

Mr Storey: Thank you. I am going way back before that. Let us remember that Dalriada is the only hospital provision in the North Antrim constituency. Coleraine, where the Causeway Hospital is, is in East Londonderry, and Antrim Area Hospital is in South Antrim. So, I believe that, in the past, there was, unfortunately, a failure to address the needs of our community in terms of hospital provision.

Mr McKinney: Thank you very much indeed for giving way. Will the Member accept that, despite that, there has now gathered an accumulated excellence around the care of MS sufferers and that to dissipate that will have wider financial and health implications?

Mr Storey: That is the point that I want to come to. As I have said, we now need to have an understanding of the services we provide and that are provided in that hospital. It is not just about the step-up provision, and that is a very important role. It is about the MS provision. I pay tribute to the MS Society and to Patricia and those who are in the Public Gallery today, including Pat Crossley, who is a long-standing friend and colleague. I am delighted that they are here, but coming to the Assembly today and hearing from me what it is that they have all done will not be enough to ensure that the community is convinced that there is not a plan that, ultimately, is about the removal of that service.

This morning, we are going to hear from all Members about alternatives. The Minister —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, Sammy.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member share my concerns that, for some time, there has been, across a number of trusts, a desire to remove and close down certain facilities and that the current financial situation is being used as a cover to do something that may well have been, as he is describing, a long-term plan anyway?

Mr Storey: That is the point that I was going to come to. Let us look at MS provision. Those who represent the MS Society will know that this is the case. For a long, long time, since I became an elected Member in North Antrim, this has been a concern. Clearly, there was a devised mechanism that was about ensuring that people were not being referred to the facility, and I think that the Member has made reference to that. That has been part of the reason that has created one of the difficulties.

However, there is another alternative, and I want to make this point. This is not a cheap political point but a call to every Member in this House of every party. All of the political parties in north Antrim have coalesced around the Save the Dal campaign, but we all know when we come through those Doors on occasions in this House, we are asked to support and endorse the spending of money on projects that bring little financial or economic benefit to the people we claim to serve. I say to Members that this is the challenge for us all if health is a priority. Yes, the Health Minister has got additional money, and, yes, the matter of how you feed that large machine is difficult.

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

Mr Storey: Here is the challenge to us. Can we ensure that, as a priority, health is put at the top of that list and we then collectively ensure that the Health Minister is given the resources that he needs so that we are not put in this position on a repeated and recurrent basis?

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The front page of today's 'County Antrim Post' sums it up quite well. It says: "D-Day for Dalriada", and that is the view of the community in Ballycastle and the north coast. It is that today is the decision day, and they expect a decision and a firm opinion on the future of Dalriada from the Minister today.

The past few weeks have been fantastic in terms of the campaign that has been mounted by the Save the Dal group. It is quite clear that the MS unit has been run down. It has been run down deliberately.

Social workers have been told not to make referrals to the Dal. Of course, the MS unit is not just for the people of the north coast or Ballycastle. It is for people with multiple sclerosis across the North.

The civil servants and the Northern Trust need to be challenged, and the Minister does not need to be let off the hook altogether. At the end of the day, he has to be accountable for the actions of all those in his Department.

There has clearly been an agenda to run down the MS unit and the Dalriada, and a lot of that has to do with those at senior levels in the trust. The treatment of staff, patients and the entire community by the Northern Trust over the past two weeks has been absolutely shameful. I spoke to staff last week, and they were informed that they would start to be moved out of the Dalriada yesterday — Monday. I contacted senior officials in the Northern Trust, who told me that staff would absolutely not be moved on Monday and that that was false information. I went back to the staff, who told me that they had not been told otherwise, and I then went back to the senior officials, who told me that they had got it wrong.

Something is going on, and I think that there is and has been an effort by Northern Trust officials to try to pull the wool over the eyes of elected officials of the community on different issues over the years. The Minister needs to get to grips with that issue and with the board of the Northern Trust. Indeed, when it comes to savings, the board and the Northern Trust never look at themselves or at the amount of money that is spent on their wages, yet they are quite happy to turn to front-line services.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Mr Wells: I think that I was first. Even if I accept the Member's premise, and we did lay off management — 90% of our management costs are on staff — we would not receive any savings for three years. So that suggestion would not get me out of the intense difficulty that I am in. I have to find £70 million by the end of March 2015.

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

Mr McKay: Thank you. Part of the problem is that those things have not been done. They were not done two, three or four years ago to ensure that we have the savings now for front-line services in the Dalriada.

Every time that savings have to be made, they seem to come from front-line services. They especially seem to be made from services in rural areas, and this decision was not rural proofed. The Dalriada was seen as a soft touch by the Northern Trust and an easy option that would not get any resistance from the community. What we have learned and what we already knew is that the Dalriada is a gold standard hospital that is absolutely at the heart of the local community.

I received correspondence from one constituent, who outlined his experience. Of course, the Minister will have got a number of similar pieces of correspondence in recent times. I want to read from that letter:

> *"My father lost a leg in 2003. His operation took place in Musgrave. He thought he was finished. The longer he stayed in Musgrave, the lower he got. This was the first time that I ever saw my father cry when we were leaving him after visiting time. Then a bed became available in the Dalriada. From the day he arrived in the Dalriada and started receiving visits from the locals, his whole life began to improve. He improved to the extent that he eventually got home. He then got his artificial leg and learned to walk again. He started driving and taking an interest in the livestock again. This would never have happened if he had had to stay in hospitals in Belfast. He was a countryman.*
>
> *Shortly after this, my mother developed Alzheimer's. She was able to manage at home with my sisters looking after her and my father keeping an eye on her when they were not about. When the bed was needed in the Causeway Hospital, when she was admitted to the Causeway Hospital, she was moved back down to Dalriada. My father was able to visit her twice a day. He was able to talk to her and keep her company. She was in pain. She needed nursing care. She could not come home. With Alzheimer's, she did not know why she was sore. The nurses were the only ones that could move her. With no beds in the Causeway, where would she have gone if the Dalriada had not been there?"*

I know that I am short of time, but he went on to conclude:

> *"We are a rural community, and we need our rural hospital."*

The fact of the matter is that the economics and the financial case do not stack up. We know that the beds in the Causeway Hospital are starting to fill up at over £2,000 a time. The Dalriada beds are still there. They are being blocked; no admissions are being made; and they cost some £800 a time. It is a false economy. The facts are there, but they are not being presented by the Northern Trust. The Minister needs to challenge his officials —

11.15 am

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

Mr McKay: He needs to challenge the trust, and he needs to robustly challenge the agenda —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Fearghal McKinney.

Mr McKay: — that is being put forward by the Northern Trust.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to join those supporting the Dal campaign and welcome them to the Public Gallery. I support the motion calling on the Health Minister to reverse the Northern Trust's decision.

I was delighted to see the strength of support here at Stormont last week. I think that all parties joined those who campaigned and brought those 20,000 signatures to Stormont. I also attended the Bushmills rally last Tuesday; it was packed to the gills. It is clear that the facility is prized and valued by those who use it and the local community, and it has political backing. It provides high-level care for people with MS. We must recognise the extent to which that illness puts severe pressure and demands on the individual and their family. Respite provision there is all the more important, as is a respite centre of excellence.

It is important to look at the context of what has happened. We all know that the health service is under severe pressure and that there are financial pressures; we have to be mature about those things. However, it is how cuts are being administered that is a real concern. The House will

be aware, and I have reminded it many times, of the plan at the heart of the health service — Transforming Your Care (TYC). Given the context of TYC, which is putting care into the community, you might think that facilities like this would be the last to be cut and that people would start to think in the long term.

I have listened to the new head of the Health and Social Care Board. While these have been described as temporary cuts, nothing that was said in a recent interview with her convinced me that some of these will not end up being longer-term cuts. The picture presented in Ballycastle is being replicated in Bangor, Armagh and Down. Services that have the potential to take the weight off the more expensive side are being cut, as I said, in a short-term context. We are also concerned that they are being cut against the backdrop of trusts' bottom lines.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKinney: I will.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree that Members cannot possibly sit on their hands and allow the most vulnerable people in society to have their rights taken away from them? Given that this is a week in which the Assembly has got bad publicity, is there a golden opportunity, this morning, to send out a positive message to wider society? I am sorry that the Minister is grinning, because I am not grinning. I have been at the public meetings —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Through the Chair.

Mr Dallat: — and I know the feeling in north Antrim. Does the Member agree that there is an opportunity, this morning, to send out a message from the Assembly that we really care for those who need our help?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute. I remind the House that all remarks should be made through the Chair. I will insist on that.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for his very helpful intervention. Mr Dallat's pedigree in promoting rights is well established. We understand that in the terms of rights and in the terms of caring. We need to ask questions about TYC. Are any of these plans consistent with TYC? What longer-term impact will they have on TYC ambitions? Where is the consistency in trusts' decision-making?

I have a paper on how the Department understands it will take on unscheduled care. It is based on the views of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). What does the RQIA say about the need for trusts' decision-making processes to be improved?

The paper talks of the need for better regional coordination, better information-sharing between trusts, better planning across and between trusts, and a clear strategic vision set by the Minister. Coordination, better sharing, better planning and a vision — can the Minister please tell the House where those ambitions are in terms of these cuts? It looks as if we will have one plan that aims to streamline things and which has a forward-looking and long-term ambition at its core, and another short-term plan that will undermine that.

There is another plan, and, once again, it is a contradiction. Apparently, according to the Minister last week, in a specific answer to our leader Dr Alasdair McDonnell, there was little danger that any of the trust's decision-making was going to impact on the centre, but they found £5 million. The Minister said:

> *"I hope that the extra £5 million that has been allocated will assure the Member that that will not happen." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 99, p237, col 1].*

The question had been about whether one trust decision would impact on others. So, they found extra money. Could they not take some of that extra money and give it to the trusts and allow the longer-term plan to continue?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that the Minister should instruct and stand over the trust to conduct full impact assessments on these very basic front-line services?

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for the intervention. I do not know whether we will have time for that. I think that the Minister needs to make an announcement today that he will stop the cuts. The individuals who find themselves vulnerable, with their back against the sea in Ballycastle, have thrown themselves in the courts of public opinion and political opinion, and they have substantial support in both. Minister, please stop these cuts.

Mr McCarthy: I fully support the comments made by Fearghal McKinney. On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the motion. Any proposed reduction in health service provision for our community causes real concern. It is right and proper that the community and elected representatives speak up loud and clear in the hope that officials in the Department get the message.

The closure or, indeed, temporary closure, as we have been told, of the excellent facility is, on the surface, a reflection of the in-year financial pressures that continue to be experienced by the Department of Health, notwithstanding the generous reallocation of budgets to the Department through the June and October monitoring rounds. The fact that the situation has arisen raises questions regarding the financial management or mismanagement and planning over the last few years and begs questions over the future sustainability of the health budget in coming years.

As has already been said, over 4,000 people across Northern Ireland suffer from multiple sclerosis. Respite to give some essential support to carers is absolutely vital. I note that this is a regional facility offering a service to all the people of Northern Ireland. We hope that the Northern Trust can find the shortfall to keep Dalriada open, given that we are only talking about £600,000. However, it appears that the trust has very little room for manoeuvre.

If any immediate salvation is to come, it is more likely that the resources can be found from the Department. I acknowledge the situation that the Department finds itself it, but if there was an epidemic, God forbid, in the morning, I can assure you that the Department would find whatever money it would take to get on top of that. We acknowledge that it will not be easy given the pressures that the Department is under, but we must make an effort.

Many questions have been asked about what will happen from April 2015 onwards. Surely, there is greater scope to restore funding in that context. That, in turn, begs the question: what wider reforms or savings can be undertaken to ensure provision of resources for Dalriada Hospital's regional multiple sclerosis respite centre? Reaction against

the closure has been strong, and rightly so. I believe that it is a combination of the loss of the facility and a scepticism over the reliability of the alternative provision offered. That is an ever-increasing concern with respect to Transforming Your Care.

The Transforming Your Care document is the journey that we are all on. We have supported it up until now. It is a fundamentally sound policy intention, but it has been undermined in the absence of a significant and transparent transfer of resources into community provision and primary care.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: I will at the end, John, if I have time. I believe that there is a requirement for the new Minister to give a clear sense of direction as to how he intends to strategically plan and manage the future provision of health and social care as we move forward.

We know that the available resources are not going to keep pace with the growing levels of demand. Therefore, some tough and radical decisions will have to be taken in relation to ensuring that there are efficiencies and less waste throughout the entire health service. That will entail a stronger focus on public health and primary care and on ensuring that resources are invested in the community and in a consolidated acute service provision. That should free up resources to ensure the long-term sustainability of the MS respite centre at Dalriada, which should continue to provide that service, for which demand will only increase.

Every Member will be aware of how crucial respite care and respite breaks are for MS patients and, indeed, their carers. It is simply a lifeline that contributes to the well-being of all concerned. Without respite provision, MS patients can experience declining health, which inevitably leads to costly hospital admissions. That is exactly the opposite of what Transforming Your Care advocates. Surely the officers at the Northern Trust and, indeed, the Minister, who is with us today, must appreciate that cutting this respite facility will lead to much more being spent, because MS patients will be admitted to hospital. Let us retain Dalriada. It simply makes sense.

Mr Frew: I support the motion and, indeed, the wider campaign. It has been an absolutely tremendous campaign that has not been fought by one union against another or managed by one union but managed by the people. It has been managed by the people of Ballycastle, the northern glens area, Rathlin Island and everywhere in between, coming right down into the very heart of Ballymoney, Limavady, Coleraine and much further afield.

When you look at the tremendous campaign on Facebook and Twitter, you will see that this issue has gone global. It has gone to the very western shore of the United States and even to the Middle East and further afield. That is because people genuinely support Dalriada Hospital. The people of Ballycastle and the other areas know exactly what Dalriada means to them and to their community. Make sure, Minister, that, when these decisions are made and the trusts put forward propositions like this, there is not simply a closure and that is the end of it. I am still hearing on the doorsteps of Ballymena that we lost provision in that town to Antrim. I still get that at the doors in my constituency. It will hurt for generations if this hospital is to disappear.

There are challenges in the health service. There is no denying that. Those challenges have not been helped — let us face it; my colleague Mervyn Storey raised it — by people in the Chamber campaigning for Tory cuts or by Members of parties in the Chamber campaigning on, holding back or delaying agreement on in-year monitoring and Budgets. But we are where we are. Let me say that the campaign has been fought with the parties all fighting and singing from the same hymn sheet. Can I just —

Mr McNarry: I thank the Member for giving way. Let me tell him that, in Strangford, we too very much support the Dalriada campaign. My question to him is this: does he agree with me that what is happening in Dalriada is causing great worry and concern to carers throughout every constituency in Northern Ireland because of the respite problem? Does he also agree that if Dalriada can be fixed, there will be great relief to carers throughout the country?

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

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Member for his intervention. It is a valid point that I will come to very shortly.

The parties have worked well together — some more than others. Nonetheless, every party has done its own thing and has played its part in this campaign. At every public meeting, rally and protest, we have been united because we know how important this facility is for MS respite to our people and to wider Northern Ireland. It is clear that, throughout many years, the trust not only failed to promote the unit but actively engaged in demotion. That is the problem that we face: the actions and agendas of the Northern Trust. That is the case in not only this sphere of health but all spheres.

There is no doubt in my mind that social workers have been told not to mention Dalriada and not to refer patients to Dalriada. I have no doubt that doctors, GPs, surgeons and other specialists have been told, "Do not mention Dalriada. Do not write letters of support. Do not mention Dalriada at public meetings. Do not mention it at all". They have been gagged by the Northern Trust, Minister.

11.30 am

In my opinion, the actions of the Northern Trust have been anti-health, and that is no reflection on the specialists in our hospitals at the side of patients' beds. They do tremendous work under great pressure, but their organisation fails them day in, day out. It is failing the patients in those beds. When will the trust stop talking about the empty beds and start caring about the people in the beds, who need tremendous care and support? Is it right to send people aged between 30 and 40 with MS to residential homes to be in the company of people in their 70s, 80s and 90s? I say no. This is exactly what we want: we want specialisms in one place to care for the people who suffer —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Yes, I will.

Mr McKinney: Can the Member point to any effective costings that have been put forward for the alternative provision?

Mr Frew: That is a very valid point. The trust's figures do not even add up. Even when we look at the figures

— let us keep this very basic — the cost of a bed in the Causeway is £2,000, as my colleague across the way Daithí McKay mentioned, while in Dalriada it is £800. That economy has to be looked at and scrutinised, and the trust has to be scrutinised for its figures —

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

Mr Frew: — and how it uses its money. Thank you for my time, Mr Deputy Principal Speaker. I support Dalriada Hospital 100%.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I preface my remarks by saying that health was protected. In fact, we were quite central to its protection. Do we need more? Of course we need more, but we should reflect on the fact that £200 million was allocated to health, and it was the only Department that was protected. Hard decisions have to be taken, and we need to know whether the budget goes in the right direction. There are many, many questions around the current spend in health. I welcome the opportunity to support the motion, because the decision to close the facility is, at the very best, short-sighted and, at the very worst, counterproductive.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. I am glad that she has recognised that priority was given by the Executive and the Assembly to the health budget. She said that the important thing is whether the money is going in the right direction. That is a question that we need to ask. Does she have any suggestions to make about the incorrect way in which money has been allocated and where the Minister ought to look for the savings that would enable the issue to be dealt with?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for his intervention. Quite simply, the answer is yes. When Members and those in the wider world look at scenarios in which £34 million goes to senior consultants as bonuses, when they reflect on the fact that between £55 million and £65 million goes to the independent sector every year and when they consider the fraud and waste that the former Health Minister by his own admission acknowledged, they will see that spend is clearly going in the wrong direction.

I return to the point that this decision is counterproductive. It is counterproductive because it is contrary to the very vision and implementation of the Transforming Your Care agenda. The Health Minister stated in the Chamber:

> *"The decisions that I have to take are not long term and strategic". — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 99, p34, col 1].*

How can decisions that are not strategic provide better health outcomes for patients and families across the North?

The Northern Trust has indicated that it will save £600,000 from the closure of beds in Dalriada. That is a mere drop in the ocean when we look at the current spend on health. As has been stated by a number of Members, the MS regional unit at the Dalriada Hospital is the only dedicated respite unit across the North, and, as Members have said, it provides much-needed support and specialist care — that has been acknowledged — that enables people suffering from MS to have an enjoyable and, importantly, a safe, short break. It is important to reflect on the fact that 75% of people with MS in the North of Ireland receive unpaid care. That is an important commentary. The cost of carers to the economy in the North of Ireland is £4·4 billion. The respite unit is an essential service, as has been well documented, and it allows MS sufferers and carers to receive that specialist care, which, in turn, importantly, enables them to continue to live independently. Again, that is a key component of the Transforming Your Care agenda.

Last week, we debated a motion to ensure that full equality impact assessments are carried out. I accept that the motion today calls for the reversal of this decision. That is right and proper, but the Minister also has a duty to ensure that local trusts are following his direction in terms of the protection of front-line services. That motion was not passed in the House. How then can the Department advocate the protection of front-line services when trusts are cutting the very services that are needed to protect and deliver those functions? Last week, the Minister announced, in response to a question from me, that £18 million will be allocated through the monitoring round to deal with trust pressures. I suggest that there is an alternative: use that money to ensure that the Dalriada facility remains open and that the important respite care for patients and families continues. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr D McIlveen: The problem with speaking late in a debate is that most of what can be said has been said. There is little that I can add. I support entirely the comments that have been made by Members who spoke previously in support of the very important facility in Dalriada.

In the strongest possible terms, I echo some of the words condemning the actions of the trust in this regard. I believe sincerely that the Northern Trust has been found wanting in the way in which this whole sorry scenario has been handled. I say that for three reasons. First, the Minister's point is well made, and I accept entirely that, when there is a reduction in middle management in any trust, it will take at least three years to absorb any savings that come from that. However, five months into the existing Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition, George Osborne was very clear that there would be cuts across all the devolved regions of the United Kingdom. Therefore, in my view, the Northern Trust has had four years to put its house in order but has failed to do so. It is entirely unfair that the pressure that is now being placed on our community is being done at this late stage, when there was plenty of advance notice for the trust to deal with that and to put its house in order.

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for giving way. He makes a valid point. In the case of Bangor and the South Eastern Trust, we were told that four months was not enough to plan a strategic action. In fact, it was admitted to be non-strategic. We now know that the budget figures were known in summer 2013 and that nothing was done until summer 2014. Perhaps the Minister could comment on that.

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

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I am sure that the Minister will respond to that.

The second reason why I am extremely critical of the trust is its handling of the release of this information. I received a press release, along with all Members I am sure, on 30 October this year. I do not want it to appear in any way that this side of the House is backing its Minister and the other side of the House can take a pop at him. That is not what it is about. This transcends politics, and we have to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people we represent and their needs. There is absolutely no ambiguity in the press

release about who was proposing the change of services in Dalriada.

The trust chief executive, Dr Tony Stevens, said:

> *"We have delivered substantial year on year savings ... We remain focused on minimising the impact on frontline services ... In order to achieve this, temporary service changes will be put in place in non-acute hospitals that will allow staff to be redeployed to the acute hospitals sites."*

There is absolutely no ambiguity around where the proposals came from. They came from the trust and the chief executive. Indeed, it is on the written record that that is the case.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am sorry; I will try to do so at the end, Stewart, if there is time.

The third reason that I am critical of the trust is that it sought to overrule a previous ministerial decision. I have a letter dated 18 April 2014 that was sent to me about a constituent I was working with in relation to respite services in the Dal. The letter told me that all purchased bed days and respite bookings have been honoured and will continue to be honoured in the facility — not in the Northern Trust but in the facility, meaning Dalriada, which the original letter related to. However, we were told later on, in the press release of 30 October, that the multiple sclerosis respite centre would also temporarily close from 30 November 2014.

It is my understanding that there are purchased beds in place until the middle of February at least for MS respite care, so the view of Dr Tony Stevens in that press release entirely contradicts what the Minister told me in April this year.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: Jim, I will try to give time at the end if I can.

I have to say that there is little trust in the north Antrim area towards the Northern Trust at this moment in time. Therefore, I propose and would like to see a root-and-branch review of Dalriada Hospital that is independent of the Northern Trust and is based on figures from before 30 October this year.

There is a sign as you drive down the main A26 that states, in very simple terms, "Don't let the Dal die". From the day and minute that the press release was issued, that is what the Northern Trust started to do, in my view. It started to let the Dal die. It failed to allow any new admissions, and therefore, on that basis, there is very little trust in what the Northern Trust is telling us.

I will conclude very quickly. The point was made about how good it is to have a devolved Minister. I ask the Minister to comment on how many people have made use of our devolved Minister since the press release. How many people have actually spoken to him about it?

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. For over 20 years I represented the glens area on Moyle Council, and in that time I have seen at least three attempts to close the MS centre at the Dalriada. This is nothing new. This is a sustained attack on the unit. When the latest one came about, it was no surprise to me, but I have to give credit to the campaign that is being waged by the people of Ballycastle, the glens, the whole countryside and those who are in the Public Gallery today.

What we are seeing today is a campaign driven by the trust on budget. It is not patient-driven at all. The question I have to ask today is this: who exactly is running the trust? Is it you, Minister, or is the trust dictating to you the terms of what it does? I had a meeting with Tony Stevens here yesterday afternoon.

I asked him to put to an end the campaign to stop the closure of the Dalriada, and he told me that he took the advice of his management. Management told him that, in a strategic plan, somewhere had to close to balance the books, and its advice was to close the Dalriada. This is budget-driven not patient-driven. Out of your budget of millions, you cannot find £500,000. As my party colleague the Chair of the Health Committee, Maeve McLaughlin, said, of the £18 million that has been given to you, £500,000 could be found to keep the Dalriada going.

11.45 am

Mr Dickson: I really appreciate the Member giving way. Mr McMullan referred to the statements made by the trust about the issue and the relatively small sum required to continue to deliver the service. The words "temporary closure" were used in the press statement. "Temporary" is Civil Service-speak for final closure; let us get that on the record as well. These people will not just be making this a temporary break. They intend to close the facility.

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

Mr McMullan: I totally agree with the Member. He is quite right, and I was coming to that point. When the closure was made, it was made on a temporary basis. Why? It was so that there would be no consultation on it, because it is temporary. When I asked the chief executive yesterday to carry out a full equality impact assessment and consultation on the provision, the answer was a stark no. However, when the Dalriada is closed, the trust will then embark on a consultation on the provision of health care in the Northern Trust. He wants to split the trust into four hubs of excellence, after closing a unit of excellence.

Shame on you, Minister, and shame on the trust. Your whole thing is to care for the patient, not to be driven by a budget; £500,000 could be found in your budget. Why are you doing this? Why is the chief executive taking the word of his management without a plan having been drawn up? Where is the consultation? The Member for North Antrim Mr Storey quite rightly said that we come to the Chamber to make very hard decisions on budgets — quite rightly. However, at least all the decisions that we make on cuts and budgets go through a consultation period. In this decision, we are not allowed that. We are given the temporary closure and told that a consultation will then be embarked on. How is that fair?

Members of the MS Society have bared their soul and told us about some of the most difficult parts of their life to fight for this unit. Last week, when the deputy First Minister received a deputation from the MS Society, Mrs Philomena McKay, from Cushendun in my constituency, said to Mr McGuinness, with tears in her eyes, that her husband is more like a carer to her than a husband because of what is happening today. Is that where we are going? Health is being driven by a budget. When we put out Transforming

Your Care, health was to be the priority, yet you do the very opposite. Minister, I put this to you: do you control the trust? In answer to Mr Swann at the start of the debate, you said that you did not know, but the trust is saying something different.

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

Mr McMullan: Somebody is telling lies.

Dr McDonnell: I am delighted to be able to take a few moments to discuss the temporary closure of the Dalriada Hospital. I must say that this is a habit that has happened repeatedly. We have temporary closures, without consultation, that become permanent; that trick has been used right across the health service.

I do not condemn or attack the Minister or his predecessor. We have to be very clear about this; we must be united. I reflect on the very wise and sensible speech that our colleague seated across the Chamber, Paul Frew, made on the issue. The Assembly needs to be united in resisting the closure and the plans of the Northern Trust.

Dalriada Hospital has served the Ballycastle and district community very well in many shapes and forms over 50 years. I remember it opening with great aplomb when I was a child. It did an excellent job as a community hospital. In recent years, influenced by changing trends and demands, it became a vital resource, both as a respite space for MS patients from a wide area and as a step-down or intermediate-care facility — a halfway house, if you like — for those who did not need to be in a high-cost acute hospital bed but who still needed some degree of low-intensity hospital care. Much of that was appropriate for people recovering from orthopaedic surgery.

It was always, and still is, a great example of how Transforming Your Care could work and should have been allowed to work; it was a great pilot project launched with great gusto as a flagship for Transforming Your Care and its ethos. Yet, all my information is that the Northern Trust strangled and smothered it; the trust did not want to sell it or promote the project. Social workers, medical and paramedical people who could have encouraged and promoted the facility were told to keep quiet and turn a blind eye.

For many with whom I talked last week the question is: where will the patients go for respite? MS patients have a difficult enough struggle and life without making it any more difficult. Where will patients who require intermediate-care beds go? Will they remain in high-cost beds in the Causeway Hospital or wherever else? This is a flawed, knee-jerk decision by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that will have a massive impact on patient care.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: Yes.

Mr Dallat: The Member has appealed for unity across the Floor, and I totally agree with him. Does he agree that, if the Minister were to reverse this decision, he would unite the Assembly in a way that it probably has not been united in recent times? I put that question to Dr McDonnell as a medical doctor and also as a person who was reared in the glens of Antrim and who knows the immense feeling of the people in that area.

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

Dr McDonnell: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. As someone who grew up not very far away and who is familiar with the Dalriada Hospital, I certainly agree with him. The passion, emotion and commitment that I felt from the deputation that was here last week was palpable. It knew neither political nor religious boundaries, nor any others. People were united, and I feel that the community campaign has made it very clear how detrimental this cut will be, not just to Ballycastle but to a much wider area in terms of MS respite. They must all bear the brunt of the situation that the closure of the Dalriada Hospital would bring about.

As far as I am concerned, it is a cut too far, and I appeal to the Minister, as my colleague suggested, to find some other option on this occasion and reverse the decision of the Northern Trust. He would unite the community.

I commend my colleague, the chairman of Moyle District Council, Donal Cunningham, and others around him, for the tremendous campaign that he has led and orchestrated along with the broader community. They have my full and unequivocal support, and indeed the support of much of north Antrim.

I am gravely concerned that we will have other occasions like this. The draft Budget has a very detrimental effect on front-line services. I think that we will have to move and take every effort to protect front-line health-care services. While savings and efficiencies are necessary, patient care needs to be protected as well.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Dr McDonnell: Benefits could be gained from many other options. I talked about all-island options for saving money. We are aware that the cost of health-care provision has risen.

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

Dr McDonnell: I appeal to the Minister to recognise the reduced cost of Dalriada and how it would help to save money.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. I want to call the next Member.

Mr McGimpsey: I appreciate that I have limited space to speak. First of all, of course, I support the motion. MS is a cruel and merciless condition. We need to do whatever we can to alleviate the situation for patients and sufferers. A reasonable service for this condition at Dalriada was one of the remedies that we had.

I have to say, however, that this situation was predictable. The result of a Budget that was voted through this House three and a half years ago by many of the people who have been on their feet speaking today is that not enough money has been put into the health and social care budget to run the service. That was clearly demonstrated. The Budget was actually a real-terms cut of 2·4%. This is just part of a general malaise in the health service. We have seen that year after year, whether it be the pressures in A&Es, pressures on waits or closures at Bangor, Whiteabbey and Armagh.

We can all talk about these difficulties that we are having. This House has to be prepared to fund the health and social care Department and fund properly the Northern Trust. I do not blame the Northern Trust or any of the trusts for the steps that they are taking. They do not have enough money to run the services that they have now. We can all point at efficiencies. We can all say, "Save money here, save money there", but the Northern Trust does not have an adequate budget to adequately provide services so that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I must call the Minister now. The time has been set by the Business Committee.

Mr Wells: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. First of all, I want to say that I may not be as liberal with taking interventions as I might normally be, because I have an important point to make at the end of this particular contribution.

I thank the community and the Save the Dal campaign on the north coast for the understanding and respect that they have shown for me. I have absolutely no argument whatsoever with the way in which I have been treated. I appreciate that, in a situation where of course they feel exceptionally strongly about the issue.

I have listened carefully to Members' contributions throughout the debate. I want to say to Mr Dallat that I apologise if I did smile during the middle of a contribution. I take this issue terribly seriously. I dare not tell him how many sleepless hours I have had over this particular decision; this decision has been exceptionally problematic for me.

I much regret that the Northern Trust has had to consider this action as a consequence of budget pressures. No one in this entire debate has told me that we do not need an extra £70 million to balance the books or that we do not have to save that money. The difficulty is that I am not getting any options on the £70 million or the decision on the Dalriada.

The pressures facing health and social care were substantial in 2013-14 and included a wide range of services, such as domiciliary care, acute services, safety and quality, emergency department unscheduled care and children's services. Since summer 2013, the Department has explored and implemented opportunities to curtail and control this expenditure.

As I have said before, my priorities are to ensure that the services provided by health and social care trusts are safe and effective and that my Department achieves financial balance, as is required of all Ministers. To achieve these aims, health and social care trusts have provided a range of contingency plans to secure financial break-even, which is an obligation that is required of all Ministers. I have to be absolutely clear here: I asked the trust to come up with a series of savings, and it gave me a list. I did not make a choice on those savings. I was given a list that it believed was necessary.

12.00 noon

Mr Swann: I appreciate the Minister giving way. I know that he said that he is generous with his time. Will he clarify with the chief executive of the Northern Trust the process that he outlined to me and members of the Ulster Unionist Party yesterday? He said that he made recommendations to the trust, which gave them to the Department, which gave them to the Minister, and they then came back down the chain again.

Mr Wells: I assure you that I did not have other options to consider. It was not a question of me picking out Dalriada in preference to taking some other difficult decision. I was given enough money to make the savings, and that was that.

The temporary closure of the respite beds and intermediate care beds in Dalriada Hospital will result in a significant saving of £0·6 million. Should the measure be proposed to be made permanent, I have been explicit that a full consultation exercise will be carried out.

The Northern Trust has affirmed that it will endeavour to minimise the impact on front-line patient care. It is important to note that everyone who wishes to receive respite care will continue to do so. The trust is committed to continuing to meet people's assessed need appropriately. However, it believes that it can be more cost-effectively provided elsewhere. Alternatives being discussed include direct payments, local independent sector provision for individuals or local bed-based group provision to facilitate groups of friends. In the case of individuals assessed as requiring respite care in a hospital setting, arrangements are being made to assess the Robinson Hospital in Ballymoney. In-reach services provided to service users while they receive respite at Dalriada, such as podiatry, dentistry and physiotherapy, will continue to be provided in the alternative setting decided on.

The trust provided an assurance that there will be no change to the booking of anyone who had been booked into respite care in November. That commitment will be honoured. I acknowledge and appreciate the commendable service that the MS respite centre provides for service users and their families.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: I certainly will.

Mr Allister: Is the Minister saying to the House that the trust, of which he has oversight, proposed the closure — I think that we all know that it is closure, not a temporary discontinuation — of the Dalriada without knowing or, it seems, caring where the services then provided there would thereafter be provided and is only now scrambling around to look for alternatives? Does that not say to the Minister that he should reach the point now — today — of overriding the decision to close the Dalriada?

Mr Wells: It is worth mentioning that the demand for respite care in the winter period is extremely low. At the time of the decision, only one person was booked in for the second part of November. The next peak of demand was not until February. The trust officials were content that there was easily capacity in the north Antrim area to meet that demand. It is not a matter of scuttling around trying to find alternative provision. As it turned out, there was time and there was capacity.

Mr McMullan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: For the final time.

Mr McMullan: Will you now state that the trust came to you with the strategic view of closing either the Dalriada or the Robinson, and that the trust opted to close the former in favour of the latter, which is not what was said to me

yesterday in a meeting between Sinn Féin and the trust's new chief executive, Dr Tony Stevens?

Mr Wells: I have no doubt that, when the board was discussing the issue, other options were considered, maybe even the Robinson, but by the time that the decision got to me, there were not options. I was given a list of what the trust, in its professional judgement, considered to be the best option for saving the money. I have no doubt that the Member could well be right, but the list that I have does not include an either/or. It simply states, "Dalriada".

Most of those — 80% — who access MS respite services at Dalriada come from the Northern Trust , with the remainder predominantly coming from the Western Trust. There are also two users from Belfast. The other trusts have already made alternative arrangements. In 2013-14 — I mentioned this when answering a question from Mr Swann during a Question Time — the number of bed days available was 4,380. Of those, 1,402 were used. That equates to a 32% occupancy rate. That is worrying, because it indicates that, whilst the standard of care is very high, the demand is not as pervasive as Members suggest.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: I will try at the end, but I really have to get to the end of the speech. Members will understand when I do so.

Demand in the unit tends to peak at certain times, such as in February and during the summer months. That means that, at other times, the unit has a very low occupancy rate. Members have to accept that. I am advised that, today, there will be two patients remaining in the MS unit in Dalriada Hospital and seven receiving intermediate care. I make it absolutely clear that none of those patients will be required to leave unless it is clinically appropriate to do so. There is no cut-off date on 30 November. If someone requires clinical or respite care at that date, they will continue in the Dalriada.

It is anticipated that half of the employees associated with the Dalriada site may be affected. Permanent staff will be redeployed to support acute community and emergency services. No staff — and I emphasise this — will lose their jobs, and the hours they work will remain as per their contract. There are a number of jobs in the Causeway locality and the personnel, staff and services managers are currently on the ground, working with staff to match their skills to vacancies available and to ensure that, as far as possible, individual circumstances are taken into account.

Following the announcement, the Northern Trust contacted MS service users and families from the northern area and advised them of the decision. Relevant key workers are currently meeting patients to discuss options for their future respite care. The trust also linked with the Western and Belfast Trusts regarding this change. Trust senior management attended Dalriada Hospital on Thursday 30 October and spoke with patients and staff.

Personnel staff continue to work on the ground to help and advise those staff affected. The trust will continue to meet and discuss redeployment options with those staff. The trust communicated with trade unions on 30 October and formally met with them on Friday 31 October. The trust also continued to communicate with all political representatives in the area and met Moyle council representatives on 3 November and attended a public meeting that same evening.

Ongoing communication is taking place between the trust and the MS Society and, of course, the media. The trust will continue to do all it can to communicate with all stakeholders to ensure that everyone understands the decision and the options now available to them. I have met the MS Society, elected representatives, health professionals and members of the Ballycastle community. I visited Dalriada Hospital on Friday. I met Tony Stevens of the Northern Trust to discuss this issue on 13 November.

Mr Speaker, I have listened to the widespread concerns expressed by patients and families about the potential adverse impact of the temporary closure of services at Dalriada. I am very aware of the public's dissatisfaction that patients and clients have not had an opportunity to participate in a formal consultation process on these proposals. I cannot stress enough that we also need to ensure patient safety.

However, we have four months before the end of March next year, and in view of the widespread concern, my Department will be instructing the Northern Trust to immediately begin an eight-week public consultation, as Mr McMullan requested, on this temporary closure to see whether there are alternative viable proposals that could be put in place to allow the services to reopen before the end of March.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for giving way, and I certainly welcome what he has just said. In the knowledge that there is a severe breach of confidence between the public in the Ballycastle and wider north Antrim area and the Northern Trust, could the Minister give some assurances that there will be an element of independence to this consultation to ensure that there is a fair outcome rather than one predetermined by the trust?

Mr Wells: Mr McIlveen raises an important point, and I would be happy to look into that issue and address the points he has raised.

Mr Weir: Will the Minister further give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Weir: A lot of us have grave concerns over the priorities that have been given by different trusts, and in my case, particularly the South Eastern Trust as regards Bangor. If there are alternative proposals — certainly in our case, some of us are working to save the money in-year — and these can be accepted by the trust, will the Minister indicate that there will be no obstacle put by himself or the Department in the way of those alternative proposals that allow places to stay open or reopen in various areas?

Mr Wells: I would be absolutely delighted if Members or the community or those who are experts in this field provide viable alternatives. But I have to make a very important point. They must release an equivalent amount of saving to what is being achieved by the decisions —

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: OK.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for, maybe reluctantly, giving way. Can the Minister clarify that during the eight-week public

consultation, which some might say is a bit late, admissions will continue?

Mr Wells: I need to make the point that there will be no fresh admissions but that those who are already in the hospital will continue to receive the care that they require until they are clinically assessed and allowed to leave — in other words, as if this decision had never been made. Any alternative, viable proposals —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: Oh dear.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister not agree that, if this is to be a fair and transparently fair consultation, the status quo should prevail rather than the pre-emptive decision to close, which suggests that the consultation will only be a farce? If this consultation is to be genuine, does he not need to restore the Dalriada to its position as an active, operative hospital?

Mr Wells: The only proposal that I am making is that there will be no new admissions — no new admissions. Those who are there already will continue to be cared for up until the point at which they would have been moved on as if this decision had never occurred — in other words, in line with medical assessment.

Any alternative proposals that are suggested in the responses to the consultation must release broadly equivalent resource savings that, in the view of clinicians, would provide services safely in terms of the impact of the proposal on the quality, sustainability and accessibility of services, and provide assurance about adherence to established standards of service.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: No, I simply have to finish this. I am sorry, Mr Dickson.

The door is now open for the public to have their say — albeit within a tight timescale, as I believe that the deadline will probably be around 31 January — with a clear prospect that the envisaged four-month temporary closure of these services could potentially come to an end sooner. My Department will monitor the situation closely over the coming weeks to ensure that the service provided to MS sufferers in Northern Ireland continues to meet the needs of the local population.

I can now give way to Mr Dickson.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister. I am concerned about any consultation process. You made an announcement that you are prepared to extend an open consultation process for eight weeks. Is that not window dressing to cover up the embarrassment of the trust and the Minister?

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

Mr Wells: 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.

Mr McKay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: I just have time for Mr McKay.

Mr McKay: What will happen to the staff for those eight weeks?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sorry; you actually do not have time. The Minister's time is up.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to make a winding-up speech on such an important debate. I was delighted to hear all the support from fellow MLAs. Minister, our motion calls for you to reinstate the service at the Dalriada immediately. I will start with a plea: do it, Minister, and do it now. This is an issue that, as we know, has caused so much public anger, emotion, concern and protest. Much of that has been reflected in an emotionally charged debate in the Chamber today. As John Dallat put it, this has the ability to unite us across the Floor.

I will refer to Members' comments, but, first, I will make a few comments of my own. Minister, I appreciate that difficult decisions need to be made. Frustratingly, however, whilst the funding crisis in our health service may not have been unexpected, as my colleague Mr McGimpsey said, it was avoidable. I will reiterate a point that I have been making over the last number of weeks and months. The funding void will have been known about long before it struck. It could have been avoided, but it was not, and trusts have now been forced to slash services. Members, this is where we are today.

While suggestions for cuts may indeed come from the trusts, be in no doubt that the Minister is required to give his personal approval of them. There is no question that the Minister was asked for his opinion on the Dalriada, and there is no question that he approved the closure of the respite centre. Some in the Chamber may find that hard to accept, but I ask them to speak to the Minister directly or to the trust privately. It saddens me to say that I suspect that not all the reductions that we have been told about are just as new or as recent as we are led to believe.

12.15 pm

As we heard from Members, there have been long-standing concerns about Dalriada's future. The people for whom it provides respite and intermediate care, as well as its loyal team of staff, will have seen its value in the eyes of the trust diminish. Even its physical appearance has gone downhill.

While it is easy to comment on bricks and mortar, the real cost of the closure will be the human impact on the people who use the service, not only the 69 with MS indicated by the Minister but many hundreds more family members and carers who benefit from the relief that Dalriada provides. The many benefits of respite care, be they medical, financial or otherwise, ripple outwards from the patients to their family circle and friends. Minister, that must never be forgotten or underestimated.

Speaking to people with MS, and their carers, I am in no doubt of the importance of effective respite. It gives family members the opportunity to travel in the knowledge that their loved ones are safe and secure. The debilitating fact about MS is that symptoms come and go, robbing people of their independence to do even the most basic tasks, and leaving them to suffer the most spine-chilling level of pain.

Having a centre with the staff and skills required is a huge benefit and grants carers the precious period of respite that they so richly deserve. I know so many people coping

with this condition, whom I have supported. I would be here all day if I listed their names, people who have touched my life. They would dearly love to receive respite in my constituency, but it is not available to them. I am not alone in the Chamber in representing constituents who are denied this service. Their passion is to raise public awareness of MS, to fundraise and to support fellow sufferers. They view this so-called temporary closure as a bitter blow to every MS sufferer in Northern Ireland — that is 4,200 sufferers and their families.

Yet we are being asked to believe that the service at Dalriada is no longer required and can be met through private providers who, as we stand here today, have not signed a contract. Even if a commitment is signed today, this week or next week, what guarantees are there that this respite service —

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for giving way. Would she now agree that what the Minister said about no new admissions is, in effect, closure in another form?

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Chair of the Health Committee for her intervention. I totally agree. Yes, it is, in effect, closure.

What guarantees will be available in years to come, Minister? None. There is no long-term strategy for people living and struggling daily with a long-term debilitating condition. The reason, I suspect, it is being re-provided to the private sector is not to save money but to make sure that the service is easier to adjust and tinker with in the years to come.

Whilst Dalriada is located in the Northern Trust, it was, in theory, to be used by all. In theory. Of course, 30% bed occupancy is not good enough, but if patients were not being allowed to enter the centre in the first place or not even being told about it, it is little wonder that so few were receiving care. The fact is that the trust sought for some time to strangle the existence out of the centre.

I will turn to comments made by Members. Mervyn Storey reminded us that Terence O'Neill opened the hospital in 1963. He praised those defending the hospital as a credit to their community, and I totally agree with him. He spoke about the long-term failure to address the medical needs of the community of north Antrim.

Daithí McKay supported the motion, saying that this was decision day for the Minister. He also praised the campaign of the Save the Dal group.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes.

Mr Swann: In reflection on that, and I listened to every Back-Bencher who spoke in support of the motion, I point out to the Minister the last section of the motion, which:

> *"calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reverse the decision and immediately reinstate the service at Dalriada Hospital".*

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Swann: Minister, that is the final sentence in the motion. What you have offered is an eight-week consultation on a temporary closure. You have said that the eight-week consultation will close on 31 January 2015, but, with the temporary closure forecast to last until the end of March 2015, there is potential for a gap of 59 days. Knowing the decision-making speed of the trust, the Department and the Health and Social Care Board, by the time they even get round to opening the consultation on the temporary closure, the decision will have been made and you will have closed Dalriada.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for the intervention. The point was very, very well made, and I totally agree with him.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. She made reference to the Save the Dal campaign, which, no doubt, will continue to challenge the trust, especially in the absence of the Minister challenging the trust. The good thing about the debate today is that we have had clarification that the Minister is working with the trust to close down the hospital.

Mrs Dobson: Yes, working with the trust's spokesman. I thank the Member for his intervention.

Fearghal McKinney praised the campaigners who were at Stormont last week, where he joined his colleagues from north Antrim. He said the real concern was over how the cuts are being administered. He also said that the decision to close the hospital is contrary to TYC, which I totally agree with.

Kieran McCarthy said that it was right to speak up loud and clear on this issue. He cited the Budget as the underlying cause of the decision and raised concern for the future. He also referred to TYC.

Paul Frew supported the motion and the campaign, which he described as being managed by the people. We have joined those people and given them a voice today. He also said that if the hospital was to disappear it would hurt for a generation. I hope his Minister, who has ultimate responsibility for the trust he lambasted here today, will listen to us and to Mr Frew.

Maeve McLaughlin referred to the closure as being short-sighted and spoke of Transforming Your Care.

In conclusion, we need to hear from the Minister what the plans are for future respite services for all 4,200 MS sufferers and their families across Northern Ireland. That is something on which I am looking for answers from the trust, the board and the Minister directly. Minister, you can make the intervention. You have the ability, you have the authority and you know in your heart that this is the right thing to do for MS sufferers in Northern Ireland. I support the motion and thank Members for their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the decision to close the regional multiple sclerosis respite centre at Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle until March 2015 and transfer the service to the independent sector; further notes the importance of appropriate respite provision for patients and their families; believes the decision to be entirely wrong and one which makes no financial sense; fears the decision will result in the permanent closure of the centre; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reverse the decision and immediately reinstate the service at Dalriada Hospital.*

Prison Service: Staff Safety

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes to wind up. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to wind up. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Givan: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly condemns the targeting of Northern Ireland Prison Service employees by dissident republicans; calls upon the Minister of Justice to reject any proposal that compromises the security of HMP Maghaberry, the safety of prison staff or concedes to the demands of republican prisoners in Roe House; and further calls for a review by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, working with the Prison Officers' Association and the Prison Governors Association, to address concerns about staffing levels across all grades in each prison establishment in Northern Ireland.*

This motion brings back the reality of what happened during the terrorist campaign in the conflict, when a number of prison officers were murdered by terrorists in pursuit of the Provisional IRA's objective to take over the Maze prison. Indeed, it succeeded in taking over the Maze prison. Countless officers were injured during the conflict, and it is right to put on record our appreciation of the sacrifice that they and their families made to protect our community.

Since the agreement was signed in 1998 and since the St Andrews Agreement and subsequent agreements were signed, prison officers have continued to be targeted. Their families have continued to be targeted. Prison officers have continued to be injured, and, of course, we know of the tragic and brutal murder of David Black in 2012. There has not been a peace dividend for prison officers and their families. It is appropriate that we remember that reality. Through the Prison Service protection scheme, hundreds of staff have had security installations put into their properties — not 10 years ago or 20 years ago but in the past number of years. Officers have had to relocate through the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme because of the very specific threats made against them.

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

When the Maze prison closed, we were told that there would be no more separation and no more political status for those who committed crimes in the name of a flag or a cause. Maghaberry prison then housed those criminals who still tried to pursue their political aims through violence. They were integrated into the wider prison population in Maghaberry, but then the first concession was commenced. Paul Murphy, the Secretary of State in 2003, instituted the Steele review. That report made the recommendation that a separated regime should be established at Maghaberry prison. That is what happened. Roe House and Bush House then came into being. Was that the end of the protests? Was it the end of the demands made by prisoners in Maghaberry when they got their separated regime? No, it was not. What was their tactic? To continue to ask for more. How did they do that? By continuing to target prison officers and intimidate staff and to abuse them inside and outside the prison. What was the response to that ongoing intimidation and to the protests that were taking place in the prison? Under direct rule, Paul Murphy granted a separated regime.

Now that devolution has taken place, we have David Ford as the Minister of Justice. What is his response to the dirty protests and the intimidation? To sign an agreement in 2010. To carry out an appeasement process with the republicans who are intimidating and targeting prison officers and other staff. What is the policy for dealing with those who want to take control of Roe House in Maghaberry? To appease them and accommodate them. He struck a deal in 2010 that was another concession, building on the work of Paul Murphy. It was a capitulation to the demands made by those republican prisoners.

What were the next steps in that agreement? Did the protests stop? Did the intimidation stop? Did the targeting stop? No, they did not. They repeat the tactic that they have repeated for decades: they continue to target prison officers. They have a dirty protest. I was in Roe House when it was going on: the human excrement, the stench of urine, prison officers coming home saturated in urine that had been thrown over them by prisoners in Roe House. However, the 2010 agreement states that, in order to facilitate the agreement, the next steps were to be an end to the protest. The threats were to end. None of that happened. What is David Ford's response? Is it to go back to a pre-2010 agreement? No, it is not. He stands over the agreement that he negotiated with those terrorists.

For the record, in 2010, 53 prison officers required security installations in their property. In 2011, 43 prison officers required security installations. In 2012, David Black was gunned down as he travelled to work along the motorway by terrorists campaigning to take over Maghaberry prison. That tactic was used before by the Provisional IRA. In the 1970s, a family member of mine was shot at 13 times as he travelled to work in the Maze prison. He was hit twice by the Provisional IRA as they pulled up alongside his vehicle on the M1. Thankfully, by the grace of God, he survived and continued to do his job for the people of Northern Ireland. It is a tactic that has been tried and tested before by republicans as they try to take over the prison.

12.30 pm

David Ford stands over the agreement. When the prison was wrecked and there was the huge cost of dealing with that dirty protest, the protest ended after David Black was murdered. What did David Ford do? In response to a question that I submitted at that time, he said that the prison arrangement at Roe House would go back to a pre-protest position. In other words, he stood by the 2010 agreement despite David Black being murdered and those prison officers being targeted. Now, the republicans' tried-and-tested tactic is to say, "We are now all working together in Roe House after the factional feuds that were there. We are now all going to have peace, and we will share facilities". The olive branch gets offered. They say, "We are not going to intimidate staff". I was in Maghaberry a number of weeks ago while the stocktake was going on. Republicans were keen to tell me, "Look! There is no intimidation here of staff". Yet, within a week of that visit,

I was speaking to staff who had received direct death threats from those republican prisoners.

What does David Ford do? Independent assessors come in and make recommendations suggesting that there need to be more concessions and that we need to get back to the 2010 agreement. Who is to blame? “All sides are to blame. The Prison Service has not fully implemented this agreement. It is part of the problem and needs to be part of the solution”. Not the republicans, no: everybody. This collective guilt that republicans are tried and tested —

Mr Ramsey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I am not going to. I need to finish.

Yet, while the stocktake was going on when I was in Maghaberry, the grille separating the upper and lower landings in Roe House was open. The staff made it clear to me that that was a cause of concern for them, and concessions were being made while the stocktake was going on. That grille is now closed. Thankfully, it is closed, and, hopefully, I helped to get it closed. Yet, the assessors’ attitude when they came to the Committee was “Let us take away the oxygen from the republican campaign. Don’t allow them to become martyrs. We have now got them on the back foot, so we will use the approach that was tried in 2010” — and failed miserably — “Let us go back to that”. What does David Ford do? He stands over those independent assessors, two of whom were responsible for 2010 and are still on the panel today. They are trying the same appeasement policy as has failed in the past.

What has happened? Threats continue. Republicans and those acting on behalf of those prisoners are naming officers on their websites. Targeting continues. When I speak to the Prison Service officials at the Committee, I am told that one threat would be one too many and that, therefore, the deal would be off. However, what did the Prison Service do? As a gesture of goodwill, it will implement part of the agreement. Yet, what was the next step even in the stocktake that was held recently? Protests need to end, and intimidation needs to end. What is the Prison Service director general’s response? “As a gesture of goodwill and demonstration of our commitment, we will give in and make a concession”.

Members, it is clear to me and to the prison officers I speak to that we have a weak and capitulating Minister of Justice and a weak and capitulating director general of the Prison Service. We have the repetition by dissident republicans of the tactics that were implemented by the Provisional IRA, and they are being conceded to. When will people realise that you do not deal with republicans by giving concessions to them? Who runs the prison? Is it the republican prisoners, or will it be the Prison Service, the director general and the Minister of Justice? Sadly, I have no confidence in this Minister and the director general being able to stand over a proper regime in Maghaberry that puts the safety and security of prison officers first and foremost.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. 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 12.34 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I have to tell Members that questions 3, 8 and 10 have been withdrawn. We will start with listed questions.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund/Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the viewing figures for broadcast programmes funded by the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund. *(AQO 7130/11-15)*

Mr Lunn: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist uimhir a haon. Question 1. ***[Interruption.]***

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. Thank you very much to the Member.

In 2013-14, the target was to deliver 60 hours of Irish-language content to a weekly audience of 25,000. The Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund aimed to deliver 12 hours of Ulster-Scots programming to reach an audience target of 40,000 people per programme in the North.

In the latest figures in Ofcom’s communications market report, during 2013-14, programming supported by the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund and broadcast by the BBC reached an audience of 660,000, which is just under 40% of the total population of the North. I believe that that demonstrates a continued demand for programming from both funds.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that those figures will help the case for her negotiations with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) when it comes to discussing the re-funding of those programmes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. I fully agree with the Member, and I am delighted that those figures have been independently supported by Ofcom. They support the experience thus far from both broadcast funds, NI Screen and people in the creative industries sector, who have said to us that there is an increasing demand for work within both broadcast funds. That is a good thing, and it will certainly help my case — probably not this year — when I go to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I hope to have a further meeting at the end of this year, but, if that is not possible, a meeting with all the spokespersons will be realised at the beginning of next year and before the next Westminster election. It is important that we get cross-party support for it.

Mr McCausland: The Minister put the figures together for the programmes that are made by both broadcast funds. Will she give us separate viewing figures per programme for each fund? If not, will she send that on to me?

Will she also ensure that, when she is negotiating with the Treasury or DCMS in London, the funding for both broadcast funds is equalised? That will mean that we will have real equality and not the Trojan Horse of equality that was mentioned by her party leader last night in his efforts to break unionism, which, of course, he will fail to do.

Ms Ní Chuilín: At least my party leader knows when to apologise, but —

A Member: He has plenty to apologise for.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. Minister, will you resume your seat, please? At this stage, Members should know that I will not accept anyone making remarks of any kind from a sedentary position. I am disappointed that that has happened again today, especially so soon into Question Time.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will certainly ensure that I will lobby to have the funds realised and will do so on the basis of need. If the Member is telling me that there is equality of demand and equality of evidence between the Irish language and Ulster Scots, I have yet to see it.

I will match funding to need. That has been my commitment, and I have done that thus far. I do not cherry-pick or pick pet projects but do it on the basis of need. I will happily negotiate for additional secured funding and an uplift on the current funding on that basis.

I will also happily furnish the Member with viewing figures for each of the programmes. Not only can both broadcast agencies stand over those figures but they have been independently supported by Ofcom. I am happy to share them with him and other members of the Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Members, before I call the next Member to speak, I have to tell you that question 9, not 10, was withdrawn. I apologise for that.

Hockey: Lurgan and Portadown

2. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she is promoting hockey in Lurgan and Portadown. *(AQO 7131/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. As the Member knows, responsibility for promoting hockey in the North of Ireland, including Lurgan and Portadown, rests with the governing body of the sport, Ulster Hockey. Since 2011, Sport NI has provided Ulster Hockey with funding of almost £914,000 for the promotion and development of hockey across the North. A further £551,000 has been invested in hockey clubs and schools to deliver the sport in communities. In that investment, a number of primary schools in the Lurgan and Portadown areas have received funding of almost £3,400 to deliver a range of sports and to provide coaching for children, across sports, particularly hockey.

Sport NI is assessing applications received under its Active Awards for Sport programme. It is the second round of the lottery-funded small grants programme, which is primarily aimed at grassroots community-based sports. Six hockey organisations, including two hockey clubs based in the Craigavon Borough Council area, submitted applications. Sport NI will notify the applicants of the outcome in December 2014.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that, last month, I, alongside Sport NI and DCAL officials, met Lurgan Ladies' hockey club and Killicomaine Junior High School. We are delighted that Killicomaine Junior High School has since had its new pitch confirmed by the board. What more can the Minister do to ensure more effective partnership working that will deliver further good-news stories for clubs and players in Portadown and Lurgan?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member has highlighted the fact that partnership is key, certainly around future provision. That is particularly the case when looking at the capital needs of clubs and, in this case, schools and councils. The people involved in the case of the Member's constituency and the area that she highlighted came together naturally because they have a good working relationship. They also see that bringing clubs together and bringing clubs and schools together realises facilities; that is what we are encouraging people to do. Obviously, there is a big difficulty around future funding. However, if clubs, partnerships and schools provide evidence of need and of a good, effective partnership, with the support of a governing body, it will stand them in good stead. That is how we would like to see provision rolled out in future.

Mr Humphrey: Does the Minister agree that it is important for young hockey players from Portadown and Lurgan and, indeed, from across Northern Ireland's clubs, to be able to participate in the Commonwealth Games? Will the Minister encourage Ulster Hockey to relax the regulations to allow a Northern Ireland team to participate in future Commonwealth Games, commencing in Gold Coast in 2018?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have written to the governing body on that matter. I have received correspondence, but I have not yet had an opportunity to read or disseminate it. That issue was raised with me in relation to hockey and rugby sevens at the previous Question Time, and I gave a guarantee then. Upon receipt of that correspondence, I will happily share it with the Member.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will the Minister provide an update on Sport NI's new capital funding programme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Further to my response to the initial question, Sport NI is developing a capital programme that aims to invest £17·5 million of lottery funding to sports facilities over the next five years, which, I am sure the Member and other Members will agree, is substantial funding. The programme will seek to integrate the facility needs of community participants and the performance of athletes in the same multi-sports environment.

Sport NI has consulted sports governing bodies to identify priorities for high-performing athletes. It has also spoken, and started working in good partnerships, with councils to deliver sports facility strategies; it is also working with local clubs and communities. It is envisaged that that investment will be brought forward in the new year. At this stage, however, it is important to finish the consultation so that we get a robust level of service needs in the communities. The small grants award will be made known soon, and we will move on to the bigger capital programmes in the new year.

Mrs McKevitt: What inter-sport exchanges does the Minister's Department encourage to allow young people to have the opportunity to learn more about sports that

are not traditionally known in their communities, such as hockey and camogie?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that the Member is aware of what is known now as the game of three halves. That goes across soccer, Gaelic games, rugby and, sometimes, hockey and other sports in between. I think that it is a good initiative. It exposes young people in particular to games that, traditionally, they normally would not find themselves attracted to. It also brings forward an awareness not just of the games but of the culture behind some of those games. It is really important. Sports governing bodies and individuals in clubs and schools have been very proactive in trying to make sure that children get every opportunity to avail themselves of those games.

I believe that, particularly in relation to soccer, Gaelic games and rugby, the three governing bodies, through additional funding that they have received from DCAL, have done a lot of work around that, not just to help people to improve their physical and mental health but with the cultural awareness and inclusion that those programmes bring. I am sure that the Member will agree that it is very important.

CAL: Senior Staff Costs

4. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the annual cost of staff at grade 5 and above in her Department. *(AQO 7133/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The cost of staff at grade 5 and above in my Department at the end of the financial year on 31 March 2014 was £818,428. This figure includes the cost of temporary staff involved in special projects or dedicated projects. When those posts are excluded, the cost was £690,000. At 31 March 2014, permanent staff at grade 5 and above comprised five at grade 5, including one at grade 3 and one permanent secretary.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for her answer. I have just a couple of points. I would be indebted to the Minister if she could relate more to the cost of £128,000 for temporary staff and what they were doing. I think that the figure is high. Has the Minister considered sharing some specialist functions in her Department, such as finance, with other Departments to save public money?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will happily relay that figure back and try to get the Member the detail tonight to him personally. I brought additional staff in to look at the stadia development programmes. Skilled expertise was needed in order to bring those programmes forward. In addition to that, I work with the Strategic Investment Board to try to ensure that there is better provision and that I do not have to buy in or contract additional work when that service is already available. The Member will also be aware that you pay for that, but it is an expertise that, so far, I have found very valuable.

The Member will also be aware that DCAL and its arm's-length bodies have a particular financial need in my Department to ensure that the money and the governance and audit trails around it flow freely. I am reluctant to point out one area in the working remit of DCAL that I would be happy to look at. At the minute, I am looking at everything.

Mr McGlone: Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go n-uige seo. What uptake of voluntary redundancy does she anticipate in her Department and how might that be funded?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist sin a chur orm. I have no idea at this stage about any figures in relation to voluntary redundancy. As the Member will be aware, my high-level financial budget plans, albeit provisional, were put on the website last week. It is something that the officials, with our staff side representatives, are working through. It is early days yet, but I anticipate that, by the close of play of the consultation on the draft Budget, we might have more definitive figures back. If and when those figures are brought forward, I will be happy to share them with him and with other members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr Michael McGimpsey is not in his place.

2.15 pm

Ulster Orchestra

6. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made in securing the future of the Ulster Orchestra. *(AQO 7135/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I have met representatives of the orchestra to explore the nature of the problems that it faces and the work that it is undertaking to identify possible solutions. Officials from my Department, together with the Arts Council, continue to engage with the orchestra and its sponsors to develop and refine potential operating models and alternative funding mechanisms that would enable it to safeguard its future. If a new, sustainable operating model emerges, I will give it serious consideration, and, subject to receiving assurances that it can be delivered, only then will I engage with Executive colleagues to assess how we as an Executive might support it.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome her recognition of the Ulster Orchestra's significance in Northern Ireland's cultural life. Will she give us an assurance that she will continue to drum up support for the Ulster Orchestra, subject to the production of a new operating model?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that we will hear some more about the Ulster Orchestra, not only today but over the next couple of days. As I said in my primary answer, I am expecting a revised business model to come back from the Ulster Orchestra, on the basis that it can stand up to scrutiny. I am sure that the Member and others have concerns about that, but it will mean that we are not facing this problem year on year and that the orchestra will withstand next year's Budget, the Budget the year after that and Budget the year after that. It is only if the new revised model is brought forward and that it has full support that I can bring forward any proposals to my Executive colleagues for support. I value the Ulster Orchestra's work, and I am on record as saying that. However, it is unsustainable in its current configuration.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, are you expecting that revised plan today? If so, when will you be in a position to evaluate it and decide whether you can help?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am expecting a revised plan by no later than Friday of this week, which is 28 November. If you are under the impression that I am expecting it today, you

know more than my private office, but, sure, that would not be a first, Basil, would it?

I am certainly expecting the revised plan by the end of this week, and, soon after, I will be working on seeing whether we can realise it. I will meet the orchestra and, indeed, the Arts Council, Belfast City Council and the orchestra's other sponsors to see whether we can get a model that suits everyone's needs.

Mr McCausland: I welcome the fact that Belfast City Council has made the commitment of £100,000 towards the Ulster Orchestra. I understand that Sir George Bain made some comments on the radio today about the provision of the business model for the Ulster Orchestra, which, given what has been said even here, will hopefully be forthcoming very soon. Will the Minister give the clear undertaking that, in the event that it arrives in the next few days, she will very soon be in a position with the Arts Council to ensure that the funding to make up the shortfall on top of the £100,000 is met?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I did not hear any of the comments on the radio about the orchestra, but my understanding was that that £100,000 came from Belfast City Council on the condition that DCAL's funding came forward. My conditions are that, if the revised model is robust and helps to meet the needs of the Arts Council, DCAL, Belfast City Council and the other sponsors, and we attract the rest of the Executive's support, that is a way to go forward. My clear intention is that we do not meet a shortfall only to be in the same place next year. I do not think that that is fair on the orchestra, the Arts Council, Belfast City Council or the other sponsors. I also do not think that it is fair to the public, who have a lot of loyalty to the orchestra and want to see it surviving, working and thriving. It is my job to make sure that the model can stand up to scrutiny and has the economic sustainability that no one paid attention to in previous years.

Mr Lyttle: I add my voice to the Save the Ulster Orchestra campaign and welcome Belfast City Council's investment. I seek the Minister's assurances that she will do all that she can to ensure that, as part of any funding model that she may be able to award, the orchestra will not be reduced in size to that of a chamber orchestra?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I cannot give guarantees about what size the orchestra will be or what it may or may not be reduced to. I understand that the Ulster Orchestra's programme management board will be bringing a few suggestions and proposals to the model, and it would be foolhardy for me to say that I would support a, b, c or d without even having seen them first. I am sure that the Member appreciates that. We need to ensure that we make every effort and put our best foot forward to do everything that we can to try to make sure that the Ulster Orchestra is sustainable. Therefore, it is on the basis of what we have, what we expect to be brought forward and what support we can get to sustain it in future years.

Mr A Maginness: The Ulster Orchestra is highly respected throughout the world and is a leader in many respects. Will the Minister reassure the House that, in the event of there being an ultimate crisis that might see the orchestra go out of business, she will provide the necessary funding, given the fact that every substantial orchestra throughout the world is supported by public funds?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is asking me to give guarantees that I am not in a position to give. The orchestra costs a lot of money from the public purse and will cost money in the future from the public purse, and I am not saying that it should not. Even the orchestra itself said that it is currently unsustainable. We need to get an orchestra that is fit for purpose and will have better economic security in the years ahead. That will mean that we will have an orchestra that we are all very loyal to and proud of. It will also mean that it will provide inspiration and aspiration for young musicians coming forward, and there will be employment. However, at this stage, it would be foolish to give guarantees that I cannot give just to be politically popular.

Mr Cree: I also heard that the new operating model had been prepared. In your budget, Minister, you obviously have a certain amount set aside to use at your own discretion and for prioritisation. Can you indicate whether there is any money in that that might give the orchestra a bit of hope at this stage? I know that we cannot tie you down, but is there hope from DCAL?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Any discretionary money that I have is very, very small. It would not even be seen in the Ulster Orchestra. I made a decision to invest that small discretionary money into disability, particularly arts performance for children who are severely disabled, and I make no apology for that. You are talking about £25,000 here, £10,000 there and nothing over £50,000 at one time, particularly in relation to plays for children and young people who were so far removed from services that I do not think that anybody — I am not even suggesting the Member — would argue that that was not the thing to do. The Ulster Orchestra needs hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money, and I do not have that amount of money lying surplus in my Department.

As I said, and I am sure that the Member was here when I said it, I am waiting for the sustainable model to be brought forward by the end of this week. When I read it and have discussions with my colleagues in the Arts Council and Belfast City Council, the sponsors and my Executive colleagues first and foremost, only then will I make a decision or a recommendation to them if I am satisfied that the model that they are bringing forward is what we need for the future.

Arts Sector: Budget Cuts

7. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what impact the current financial situation will have on the arts sector. *(AQO 7136/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: The impact of the draft Budget for 2015-16 will not be unique to the arts sector. All service areas across my Department and its arm's-length bodies have been affected by the recently announced budget reductions. Decisions on how budget reductions are managed are a matter, in the first instance, for the board and the senior management. I have asked that the Arts Council does all it can to minimise the impact of the reductions on jobs and front-line services. Work on developing savings plans is continuing, and my Department intends to publish a more detailed assessment of the likely impacts by the close of the draft Budget at the end of November this year.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is there any likelihood that some of the budgets for this financial year could be reduced, given that they are normally paid

out quarterly? Is there any likelihood that some of those budgets could have percentage reductions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member may be aware that, initially, most Departments were looking at 15%; it then went down to 12·8% for DCAL, and then it went down to 10%. I made a decision to try to protect libraries as much as possible, with a cut of between 7·5% and 8%. That had a knock-on effect on the other ALBs, and their cut sits at 11·2%. I appreciate that that is a substantial amount to remove from the sector, but that is the decision that I made. Obviously, I will lobby and fight for more money, particularly for areas of the arts that have a far reach in communities that have never experienced the arts before. That is the priority that I will set. There is no point in saying anything different because I am at the podium. You can perhaps get away with saying things at Question Time that you will not stand over outside the House, but I am saying here what I have said before and will say afterwards.

Mr McKinney: Can I extend that point? In recognition of the deeper impact that particular types of arts activity can have on community health and well-being, what assessment is being done of those extra benefits with a view to arguing against and mitigating the cuts?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As the Member will be aware, DCAL produced a revised business plan and set out a list of key priorities in conjunction with the priorities that we, as an Executive, set out in the Programme for Government. I also asked all the arm's-length bodies, particularly arts organisations, libraries, museums and sports, to try to make sure that, through the budgets that they have and the additional moneys that some received at monitoring rounds, they meet those objectives and priorities as well as possible. That is to make sure that people who were never in the funding cycle, who were never in the annual supported programmes, who have never had an opportunity, who do good work out there and who have never been supported by the Arts Council get support. I want to make sure that that happens, and I make absolutely no apologies for that.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Why is there a need for a new arts strategy, particularly in light of recent budget constraints?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, there is no overarching arts strategy in the way that we have the Sport Matters strategy. It overarches all Departments, and all Departments have taken part in it. There is a budget aligned to Sport Matters, and that is the direction of travel that I want to take with the arts. I believe that the fact that there has not been an overarching strategy has not given value to the arts. I also appreciate that the strategy, which is largely delivered, particularly the improved arts infrastructure that has been invested in, needs also to include the diversity that we have here, particularly in accessibility and education. So, it is and has been my ambition and strategic direction that we need to have a fuller, more robust strategy for the arts to ensure that it enjoys the full support of the Executive and the full support of the community, and we will go out to consultation very soon on that.

Ms Lo: Northern Ireland already gets much less public arts funding per head compared with the rest of the UK. There is clear evidence of the economic benefit of investing in the arts sector. Has the Minister done any assessment of what negative impact any further cuts in the arts sector may have on our population?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree with the Member that we need to try to increase the amount spent here per week per capita in comparison with other institutions. I feel that, for years, the money set aside for the arts has not been enough. Since coming into office, I have pleaded with people in the arts sector, who sometimes have not understood what I have been trying to say. I knew that this day was going to come. I pleaded with people in the arts sector to show the value of their work: how it regenerates the economy; and how we cannot have a life without arts, cultural activity and creativity. The arts need more money, and I will continue to stand up for the arts and increased investment. I made a decision based on the monitoring round and the draft Budget to ensure that, as well as possible, libraries were protected from permanent closure, but that is not to say that I will not argue for additional money for the arts. I will continue to do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We will move on to topical questions. Before I call Mr Sammy Douglas, I remind Members that Deputy Speaker Roy Beggs made a plea this morning for no private conversations, particularly when Ministers are answering questions.

2.30 pm

Windsor Park: Redevelopment

T1. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of Windsor Park. *(AQT 1801/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: Like the Member, I have driven down Boucher Road, and I am delighted to see O'Hare and McGovern's hoarding around the ground. I am also delighted to see the dirt tracks on Boucher Road, which show that there is a lot of construction activity taking place. Windsor Park is on target. All the construction elements have been met as per target, even with some setbacks, particularly around asbestos. Everything is on target.

I am delighted to say that working with the IFA on that capital build programme has been as it should be. I am sure that the Member and other Members will be aware that there were not just pre-construction social clauses, and that we are now working on social clauses post-construction. So, it is on target, and actually slightly in advance.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware of some recent difficulties with car parking at Ravenhill, or Kingspan. Is she in a position to outline plans for parking in the vicinity of Windsor Park, not just for spectators but for local residents?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that parking was a big element when the planning permissions were awarded. Notwithstanding that, the stadia have to be good neighbours with the people who have lived there a lot longer than the stadia programmes have been in existence. It is important that we use things like public transport. Park-and-ride facilities are now being developed in partnership with Translink to ensure that local residents are not put off or inconvenienced any more than they need to be.

There is more parking space available at Windsor Park than at Ravenhill, so that is an added bonus. It is a built-up

community that needs to be respected. The Irish Football Association needs to work very closely with its friends and neighbours to ensure that inconvenience is reduced as much as possible when the stadium is finished and is opened up to the public.

Financial Transactions Capital: CAL

T2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is aware of the important part that financial transactions capital plays, albeit some £35 million remains unallocated this year, and whether her Department has been able to use any of that source of revenue. *(AQT 1802/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials have been working very closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel. We would not make a bid for any capital projects that we have unless they are shovel-ready. I am doing an assessment, as part of the draft Budget discussions, of what capital projects would be ready to try to spend some money on, albeit small amounts of money, before the end of the financial year. At this stage we are still in discussions on capital projects with the Department of Finance and Personnel and with Sport NI and the Arts Council. The Member will know, through the Committee, which capital projects were brought forward in monitoring rounds. There is no point in bidding for money if you have to hand it back again.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that response. I know that most Departments are a little bit cautious about working with the private sector, which you have to do to lever in money. Following on from her response, has she charged anyone in her Department to liaise with the private sector to see whether there could be common ground and to utilise that asset?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am working with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), which has links with the private sector, and, indeed, the voluntary and community sector, around potential investment and future programmes. I am working with the SIB, the state aid programme, and the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) programme, but I will happily look out for other opportunities.

We have had discussions, with the councils in particular, around different aspects of investment that we can do in partnership. Some of that may mean spending money up front in order to lever in other moneys. I am totally open to that, but I want to do it on a basis that has been properly assessed and evaluated. Only then will I make a bid for something that will not be handed back in other monitoring rounds.

Stadia Design: Health and Safety

T3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether any of the relevant authorities have any outstanding issues with regard to health and safety matters in the design of the new stadia at Windsor Park, Casement Park and Ravenhill. *(AQT 1803/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I cannot comment on Casement Park because it is subject to legal proceedings. A judicial review has been heard and we are waiting on the judgement.

I have not heard any health and safety issues in relation to Windsor Park or Ravenhill Kingspan. Had there been health and safety issues, they would have been brought forward to me. I have a very good and open working relationship with both sporting bodies. Any issues would have been brought to me well before now.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. What are the evacuation times for the three stadia and how do they compare to safe standards?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will happily write to the Member on the evacuation procedures and standards. However, he should be aware that planning permission would not have been given to any of them unless the access and egress arrangements not only met the standards but went further than that. That is the criterion. It is not something that you might want to do or might think about doing; it is something that has to happen. If there is any issue that the Member has in relation to the other two stadia, I expect him to bring that to my attention and to the attention of the governing body. If not, he should certainly bring it to Belfast City Council, which has responsibility for the health and safety certificates that each of the sports grounds has received.

Libraries: Permanent Closure

T4. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she intends to protect libraries from permanent closure during this Budget period. *(AQT 1804/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist sin a chur orm. As I outlined in my answer to Jimmy Spratt's question, I made a decision to protect libraries as much as possible from permanent closure in the draft-Budget period. That is something I have decided to do. We have invested quite heavily in libraries. I personally lobbied other ministerial colleagues for service level agreements to provide sustainability, particularly for people who live in rural communities. Libraries are a vital source of infrastructural investment for those communities, and it is important that we keep them open. That is why I want to make sure that there are no permanent closures in this Budget period.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister very much for her answer. I am sure that many libraries will be glad to hear her reply that there will be no permanent closures. In saying that, how will she, working with Libraries NI, ensure minimisation of the impact of shorter opening hours, particularly in rural areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have met Libraries NI and will be meeting them over the next period. The Member will not be surprised to know that our officials have been working very closely with all the arm's-length bodies (ALBs), and particularly with the chief executive of Libraries NI. We have received word that some potentially face a reduction in opening hours, but we are trying as much as possible to minimise those reductions. The important thing is to make sure that there are no permanent closures. We have achieved that for this Budget period, but it is still very much a work in progress in relation to the reduction in opening hours.

Gerry Adams: Trojan Horse Statement

T5. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will take the opportunity today to distance herself from and repudiate the foul-mouthed statement by Gerry Adams that equality is simply a tactical Trojan Horse to break and undermine the unionist

community in Northern Ireland, given that equality is one of the core principles espoused by the Minister in her Department. *(AQT 1805/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, I think that you have a brass neck to slap my wrist, or anybody else's, over equality. You and your colleagues have a very —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Minister, could you make your remarks through the Chair, please?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sorry. You have a very short memory, but I do not. My party colleague and president has apologised, unlike your colleague Gregory Campbell, who has never apologised for the offence he caused around the Irish language. Equality is for everyone. It is for all the children of this nation, not just Catholic or Protestant, unionist or republican; it is for us all. That is something that I do and will continue to do, and I make no apologies for it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Before I call for a supplementary question, I remind everyone that remarks must be made through the Chair and that it is not customary to be reading questions.

Mr McCausland: I say to the Minister, then, that on this occasion, perhaps it is rather the case that Mr Adams was being truthful and speaking from the heart, and it is simply the fact that his mask slipped on this occasion. Does the Minister not accept that that is really the case? He simply was caught on, was found out and had to own up.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assume from the Member's question that he has not accepted Gerry Adams's apology for the language that he used. I have yet to hear an apology from Gregory Campbell. In fact, I have yet to hear an apology from anybody on the Benches opposite for the disgraceful remarks that he made about the Irish language and the offence that he caused. It is not slapdash comedy to be Islamophobic, homophobic or against the Irish language. I have yet to hear an apology. What I have heard from your Benches are excuses, and that falls far short of the standards that we are all expected to adhere to in the Assembly. People in glass houses should not throw stones. Sin é.

Mr McCausland: There is plenty of stone throwing sometimes in Ardoyne.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Aye.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I remind Members that I do not need any help from the Benches to chair this meeting. I said before that remarks made from a sedentary position will not be tolerated by any Deputy Speaker.

Arts Sector: Budget Cuts

T6. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she agrees that community arts are vital to creativity, jobs, community cohesion, civic participation and economic growth in Northern Ireland, despite Northern Ireland having the lowest spend on arts across the UK and Ireland, and, if so, does she further agree that the uniform budgetary reductions being applied to the arts sector could have a devastatingly disproportionate impact for years to come. *(AQT 1806/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member was in the House when he heard other Members ask me questions in relation to the budgets of the DCAL family, and particularly of the arts. I am very supportive of the arts, but it is hugely unfair that, year on year, we are given a reduced Budget from the British Government by a cabinet of millionaires who are Tories and do not value the services here in the North of Ireland. They do not value the services not only in this part of the island, but across the island. It is going to have an impact. I want to ensure that the most adverse aspects of that impact are felt least by the services that deliver within the community and for the community and create employment. I can do nothing else other than that.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her response and I note that she has made reference to the UK Government. Can she gave us a bit more detail about what she is doing within the Northern Ireland Executive to stand up for community arts? Will she join me in congratulating the success of the C S Lewis community festival that took place in east Belfast this weekend? Can she advise the House as to how she can support that festival?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I certainly congratulate the C S Lewis Festival. I must say that Eastside Arts is a pleasure to work with. I am happy to do that. However, I find it a bit rich that the Member's sister party in England is part of a Tory-led Government that are making cuts all over the place. Is it OK to do it in London, but not here? The Alliance Party needs to make its mind up. I know that it is about revenue raising which, for me, is shorthand for water charges, prescription charges and raising student fees. Is that OK so long as the arts sector gets it? Which is it? You cannot have it all. What we are trying to do, and we are on the record, is protect those who are most affected and most vulnerable. Those are communities that are extremely deprived. We continue to do that and make absolutely no apology for it.

City of Culture: Legacy Funding

T7. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a detailed breakdown of how the money she received in the October monitoring round for the City of Culture legacy fund will be spent. *(AQT 1807/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to write to the Member on that, as I have done before. I have corresponded with the Member on various questions. I have worked through some of that with the partnership around the City of Culture legacy funding. I am happy to write to the Member with details.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time is up.

2.45 pm

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Questions 8 and 11 have been withdrawn.

ERASMUS+

1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Education what practical assistance his Department is providing to schools that want to become involved in the ERASMUS+ programme. *(AQO 7145/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The schools programme of ERASMUS+, which replaces the Comenius

programme, offers a wide range of opportunities for pupils, students and teachers to participate in partnership and exchange activities across Europe. The EU programme aims to boost skills and employability while modernising education, training and youth work.

The British Council is, with Ecorys, the national agency for the delivery of the ERASMUS+ programme on behalf of the European Union. The national agency is responsible for keeping schools informed about the programme and supporting them in the application process. They hosted workshops across the North during October and November, and further events are scheduled for December and January. My Department continues to work with the national agency to ensure that schools are encouraged to take up the opportunities that the programme offers and are supported in making successful bids.

In addition, my Department notified schools in January 2014 of the EU's new ERASMUS+ programme. That was followed up by a press release in October to highlight the publication of the deadlines for the 2015 round. My press release encouraged schools and youth organisations to apply for funding and highlighted the benefits of participating in the programme.

Fifteen schools here have already been successful in applications to ERASMUS+. My Department will continue to work with the British Council to promote the programme to ensure that the participation of schools and youth organisations is maximised.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. What level of funding is available for schools that want to become involved in the programme?

Mr O'Dowd: The level of funding can be up to 70% of the initial bid. I will give the Member an idea, based on the schools that have already been successful. Of the 107 applications that have been received from organisations in the North, which is equivalent to 6·8% of the total from here and Britain, 50% have been successful. In total, €5,673,463 has been awarded to organisations here. Quite a significant level of funding is therefore available to successful applications, and that is why the Department has been encouraging schools to apply, why we are working with the British Council on the matter and why we are encouraging participation in the programme.

Education: Cultural Rights

2. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the current education system in meeting the cultural rights of children as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). *(AQO 7146/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I recognise the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and appreciate its value in setting out how children and young people should be brought up in the:

> *"spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity."*

Many of my Department's policies ensure that children and young people have access to educational opportunities and materials that are in keeping with their cultural identity and that of others. In particular, the curriculum supports the principles of the UNCRC, specifically those that relate to identity and culture.

Mr McCausland: In a response to a question for written answer that I received the other day from the Minister, he mentioned the Ulster-Scots education project, which is producing materials on culture, history and language. Am I right in assuming that his Department has not contributed one penny to that and that it is being funded entirely by the Ulster-Scots Agency? Will he contrast that with the fact that he recently gave £140,000 to Irish-medium youth work? There seems to be something of a disparity between £140,000 and nothing.

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is working with the Ulster-Scots Agency on the production of materials. It is also working with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). I understand that the Ulster-Scots Agency is funded to provide materials to the Ulster-Scots community. I think that it is a particularly good idea that my Department work with the Ulster-Scots Agency to promote materials for Ulster-Scots cultural expression. I thought that you would have thought that it was a great idea rather than a bad idea. Perhaps your problem is this: you do not want any money going to the Irish-language sector. If that is the problem, I cannot help you with it. If you want me to support the Ulster-Scots Agency and Ulster-Scots culture further, I am more than happy to sit down and talk to you about it and see how we do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I remind the Minister and others that they must address their remarks through the Chair and that the dreaded word "you" should not be used.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. An dtig liom iarraidh ar an Aire caidé mar atá cearta cultúrtha páistí á gcosaint i nGaeloideachas sa chóras reatha? How are children's cultural rights in the Irish-medium sector met under the current system?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I thank the Member for her question. As she will be aware, the Irish-medium sector is protected under the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent legislation, which sees the Department facilitating and supporting the growth of the Irish-medium sector. Over 3,000 children now attend naíscoileanna, bunscoileanna and meánscoil across the North. It is a growing sector. My Department will continue to invest appropriately in it. We will also continue to invest in youth work in relation to the Irish-medium sector.

Irish-medium Development Proposals

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Education to outline the nature of the recent development proposals relating to the Irish-medium sector. *(AQO 7147/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: During 2014, my Department received three development proposals relating to the Irish-medium sector. One of them sought the opening of a full-time nursery unit at Gaelscoil Eoghain in Cookstown. Although I did not approve full-time provision, I approved the establishment of a new part-time nursery unit at the school. There was also a development proposal (DP) for the expansion of Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh in Strabane through the establishment of an off-site unit. I had concerns about the impact that the off-site unit could have had on the host

school and did not approve the DP. However, I recognised that there was a demand for Irish-medium education in the area, and I asked Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Western Education and Library Board and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) to further explore options in the area. The third development proposal was for the establishment of an Irish-medium post-primary school in Dungiven. I advise the Member that my officials are collating all the pertinent information to enable me to make a decision on that proposal.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Bhí mé ag smaoineamh an mbeidh ceann ar bith de na scéimeanna seo ag teacht go luath? Will any of the schemes be announced any time soon? When can we look forward to them? The Minister is obviously aware of my interest in a number of the schemes.

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. In relation to the Dungiven development proposal, my officials are still working on the evidence collated during the eight-week consultation period. Once the documentation comes to me, I will make a decision as quickly as possible in relation to that matter. It is quite a complex development proposal, but I am aware of the urgency felt in the area for that development proposal to be decided on one way or the other. I will work at it as quickly as I possibly can.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. While we are talking about the Irish-medium sector, can I just say that I am appalled and embarrassed by what is going on over the Irish language.

On this subject, we have development plans that seem to be splitting off the Irish-medium sector from groupings with other sectors. What effect will that have on other voluntary schools? We need to make sure that we have a level playing field for everybody.

Mr O'Dowd: Each development proposal will be judged on its own merits. Account will be taken of the impact of a positive or negative response to that development proposal on other schools in the area. Irish medium is a growth area in our education system. There is a growing demand among parents for it, but, in the three development proposals I referred to in answer to Mr Ó hOisín, I turned down one, I made a stipulation on another that it would be part time rather than full time, and I have yet to make a decision on a third. They are being put through rigorous tests against the principles of the sustainable schools policy and against the principle of my Department's legal obligation to facilitate the Irish-medium sector. There are no guarantees either way. When a development proposal comes forward, I assure the Member that all aspects are taken into account.

Ms Sugden: Other than the Irish-medium sector, what plans does the Minister have to bring forward governance and funding policy proposals for sectors not under the remit of the new Education Authority?

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to bring forward any further funding other than that set out as part of the discussions around the Education Authority for the controlled sector. We are about to enter one of the most difficult phases for education, in budget terms, for many years. I am looking to see where we can save money in education rather than opening up new funding streams.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go n-uige seo ar na cúrsaí faoi láthair. I thank the Minister for his answers to this point. An féidir leis an Aire a chur in iúl dúinn caidé an meastachán atá déanta ag an Roinn s'aige féin ar na háiseanna agus ar chúrsaí straitéise lastoigh den Roinn i dtaobh an chórais Gaeloideachais. Will the Minister provide us with details of any assessment carried out by his Department of the facilities provided for and the strategic direction of Gaeloideachais, Irish language education?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question. The Member will be aware of the Irish-medium review that was published during my predecessor's time and is still a significant reference policy document in my Department for the expansion of the Irish-medium sector.

We have seen growth in the Irish-medium sector. Only two or three weeks ago, I announced in the House the publication of the Irish-medium post-primary review, which sets out a pathway for the development of further post-primary provision in the Irish-medium sector. As I said in response to Mr Cathal Ó hOisín, there is a development proposal for the development of stand-alone post-primary provision in the Dungiven area that will have to go through the normal processes.

We have taken proactive steps to develop the Irish-medium sector. We have firm policies in place; we have funding streams in place; and we are responding to the demand of parents and communities in relation to the Irish-medium sector. However, as I said to Mr Kinahan, I will only approve development proposals that adhere to my Department's policies and are educationally robust and sustainable.

Education: Low Attainment

4. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to outline the new strategies being pursued to assist sections of our community that currently have low levels of academic attainment. *(AQO 7148/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I have continued to implement policies and provide funding for additional interventions to raise standards and increase equity. Strategies include the revision of the school funding formula, which directs additional money at schools serving a high proportion of pupils with free school meals. I also support a number of programmes to improve pupil outcomes in literacy and numeracy particularly targeted at pupils at risk of low attainment. I am seeking full implementation of the entitlement framework. Young people who see their time in education as relevant to their future and have access to courses that interest them are more likely to achieve their full potential.

My proposals for the revised special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion policy aim to provide a framework to promote early identification, assessment and provision for SEN children so that they can achieve their full potential. I hope to bring a special educational needs draft Bill to the Executive shortly.

Outside school, I have provided funding to support the development of better links between schools, parents and communities.

From September 2014, through the extension of the free school meal entitlement, an additional 12,000 pupils were eligible for this benefit and the school uniform grant.

Sure Start is being expanded to cover the top 25% most disadvantaged wards by April 2015.

The development of a pupil attendance strategy will focus on improving the attendance of children and young people who have low academic achievement. However, the continued use of academic selection by some schools is a barrier to addressing underachievement, particularly in disadvantaged communities. I strongly encourage those schools to move away from academic selection so that we can eradicate this social division.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. It is a little disappointing that he keeps on dragging in the chestnut of academic selection as the answer to everything that relates to this.

There are obviously concerns about the low attainment, in particular, of males from a unionist background and on free school meals. The Minister outlined initiatives that principally focus on the schools, but I wonder whether he could give a bit more information on the support or opportunities for support for a number of community-based organisations that are seeking to tackle educational underachievement.

3.00 pm

Mr O'Dowd: The Member may be disappointed by what he described as me dragging in academic selection. I am not dragging it in; international evidence is dragging it in. Your party chooses to ignore that evidence because it does not suit your current agenda, but you cannot stand up and express concern about educational underachievement in Protestant working-class communities while ignoring academic selection. You simply cannot do it.

I underlined in my answer to you several policies that are directly targeted at ensuring that young people who are in danger of educational under-attainment are assisted through those programmes. You asked me about community-based programmes. You are right in the sense that I believe that, in general terms, our educational policies in the classrooms are correct. When I came into office, I said that we needed to drive them with more rigour and vigour, and we have been doing that ever since. However, the community has a crucial role in raising educational aspirations. In last year's budget, I set aside £2 million for community interventions, which is a new departure for the Department of Education. In the past, we largely focused solely on what happened within the school gates. We are now focusing on what happens outside the schools gates to see if we can support communities and families.

The Member will be aware of my advertising campaign that runs across the media calling on and supporting families to become involved in their children's education. We have also invested heavily in youth work, particularly in disadvantaged communities, to inspire young people to become engaged in formal and informal education. Many initiatives are going on, but you simply cannot ignore academic selection.

Mr Beggs: The Northern Ireland Audit Office follow-on report from February drew particular attention to the close linkage between absenteeism, truancy and poor educational attainment. That is a fundamental issue: if you are not at school, you will not reach your full potential. Will the Minister advise on what action he has taken with other Ministers to ensure that parents and local communities are empowered? What action is he taking in his Department to empower schools and educational welfare officers so that they can help parents and young people to reach their full potential?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. He is absolutely correct: if children are not in school, they will not benefit from the educational experience of school. However, there are many different reasons why children become habitual absentee statistics. We have to work with schools and families. As I said in response to the previous questioner, we have to work with communities to raise awareness and aspirations in education and the importance of education and attending school. My Department is drawing up a response as a result of the Audit Office report and the work of the Public Accounts Committee. We are engaged in detailed work on how we can improve our work and our interventions supporting the boards and, in future, the Education Authority. We will publish a strategy in due course.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will the Minister outline what he is doing to ensure early intervention in areas of low academic targets?

Mr O'Dowd: The Executive have invested significantly in early interventions across several Departments to encourage and upskill families to ensure that they have the ability and knowledge to assist their young people from a very early age in their educational and learning pathways. We are now making a preschool place available to every child whose parent wishes them to have one. In the SEN legislation that I hope to bring to the Executive in the very near future, we are also targeting early intervention through the identification at an early stage of any SEN requirement that a child has and following that up with support. My Department is involved in a number of areas that we wish to develop in the near future.

Home-to-school Transport

5. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education when he plans to publish the findings of the independent review of home-to-school transport. *(AQO 7149/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The independent panel conducting the review of school transport presented its report to me at the end of August. I am now taking time to consider the report and its recommendations before deciding on the way forward. The report will be published in due course.

Mr Buchanan: The issue of home-to-school transport has been lobbied on in the Chamber for some time. Does the Minister agree that his delay in issuing the report is of grave concern to parents and is curtailing education and library boards in providing transport in extremely dangerous rural areas? Does he agree that some flexibility needs to be instilled in the old scheme until he sees fit to bring forward the programme?

Mr O'Dowd: Measures are in place for any board to provide transport to children who, it believes, are travelling a dangerous road. The review is extensive. It examines transport from many angles. It has spoken to many stakeholders, in particular pupils who use our transport system. However, the magic answer that will please everybody is not in that report, because everybody has a different view on transport.

It is probably the most hotly contested issue in education in terms of provision by the boards. Maybe SEN, then transport, but in some areas it will be transport, particularly in rural communities.

I will publish the report in due course, but I emphasise to the Member that the report presents challenges to everyone. It will test the will of everyone in where they want to see transport provision and where the priorities are for transport provision into the future. It will also test us in this context, as I responded to a previous questioner: we are entering the most difficult education budget that this Assembly has ever seen.

We spend £70 million on transport. Approximately £30 million of that is on special educational needs; the rest is for a variety of reasons. It is highly unlikely that we will be able to continue to spend that amount on transport.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Minister. Following on from Tom Buchanan's question, have any lessons been learned or are there measures that the Minister could bring in in light of the most recent and awful tragedy on our roads that saw death coming to a family's door? There has to be, Minister, better ways of doing this.

Mr O'Dowd: I have asked the relevant board, the North Eastern Education and Library Board, to deliver me a report into the circumstances that it is responsible for with regard to the Gilmore family and the events that led to the tragic death of young Adam. I am also conscious that there is a PSNI investigation going on into that matter, and the PSNI will take primacy in any investigation.

When we talk about boards and transport provision, we must bear in mind that transport officers, board members, officers and staff are themselves parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. They are only too aware of the tragedy that befell the Gilmore family.

Could things have been done differently? Let us wait to see what the report tells us, but I can assure you that the anguish of the Gilmore family is felt by the North Eastern Education and Library Board staff. They want to ensure that if things could have been done differently, they are done differently in future.

I am not suggesting this of the Member, but I caution against apportioning blame in relation to this tragedy to a board because a board is made up of people.

Mr Allister: I discern from what the Minister says that two weeks on he has still not received a report from the North Eastern Education and Library Board on how it handled the circumstances giving rise to the tragic death of young Adam Gilmore.

Would he agree with me that it is equally unsatisfactory that, two weeks on, the same education and library board is yet unable to say to the Gilmore family whether, even now, it will provide transport to them on this provenly dangerous road?

Mr O'Dowd: For the record, the North Eastern Education and Library Board has provided me with a draft report, and I had several questions about a number of areas in it where I wished for clarity. The board is now preparing a final report for me.

I know that the board is engaging with you and with the Gilmore family about the events that led up to that tragedy, but not the criminal investigation being carried out by the PSNI, and are liaising with you and others as to how they provide transport for the Gilmore family in the future.

This tragedy, foremost and without doubt, has been for the Gilmore family to carry. Their loss is unbearable, and, as a father myself of children around that age, I can only imagine the grief that they are going through. However, I caution Members about pointing the finger of blame or accusation at any organisation at this stage because the organisations are made up of people, and those people not only have rights and entitlements, but they, too, have feelings. They too are conscious of the fact that the decisions that they now make could end up with a tragedy, such as the one that we have witnessed with the Gilmore family, despite their having no intentions for that to be the case. We expect our public servants to deliver a public service, and 99 times out of 100 they do so above and beyond the call of duty. When something goes wrong, we have to ensure that all the facts are to the fore and are investigated before we start blaming anyone. I think —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Minister's two minutes are up.

Anti-bullying Forum

6. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the work of the anti-bullying forum. *(AQO 7150/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Over the last year, the anti-bullying forum has worked with 7,000 pupils in 37 schools and over 1,000 young people in 26 non-school settings to raise awareness and provide anti-bullying training. Ten seminars, aimed at enhancing anti-bullying policies and practices in schools, were held and attracted 283 school leaders from across all the education and library boards (ELBs) and all school types.

This year, Anti-bullying Week, with the theme Together We Will Make a Difference, ran from 17 to 21 November. I attended the launch event on 18 November, where I presented prizes to the winners of the art and creative writing competition, which received over 4,000 entries. That was more than double the number received last year, which shows the increasing awareness of the issue within schools.

In late 2013, at my request, the forum undertook a review of anti-bullying practices and presented a report which made a number of recommendations. That has led to an agreed joint working programme for 2014-15 and beyond.

One of the key recommendations was the strengthening of legislation to ensure greater consistency across all schools in tackling this problem, and on 23 June I announced my commitment to introducing anti-bullying legislation in the current Assembly mandate. Work on that is progressing, and it is my intention to begin a public consultation early in the new year, ahead of the introduction of a Bill to the Assembly in May.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. What guidance does the Department provide to schools on the issue of bullying?

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has regularly updated its guidance to schools in relation to bullying. All schools, by law, have to have an anti-bullying policy. That policy should be developed in conjunction with staff, pupils and parents in consultation. The exact detail of the anti-bullying policy is not set out in law, which is a matter that I want to return

to in the consultation on the legislation that I hope to bring before the Assembly in May, because a strong argument has been made to strengthen our anti-bullying legislation.

The way to eradicate and challenge bullying is to get adults and children to change their attitudes and treat each other with respect, to support the victims of bullying and, as strange as this may sound, to support the perpetrators of bullying. When a young child is carrying out acts of bullying, you will often find that there are other problems are at play in the child's personal life or family life or that there are other factors bearing down on that child. We have to investigate those to ensure that that child receives assistance as well.

Legislation is certainly one way forward, but the eradication of bullying in our schools and workplaces requires a change of attitudes by all involved.

Mrs McKevitt: How does the Minister's Department determine evidence of cyberbullying, particularly in the growing world of social media?

Mr O'Dowd: That is an issue that is developing all the time, and we have offered further support to schools, but the situations can change so quickly that it is difficult sometimes for guidance to keep up with those who are involved in cyberbullying. A number of Departments are examining that matter. The recently published child sexual exploitation (CSE) report, which has been taken under the guidance of the Health Minister, has some bearing on that as well. We are trying a number of elements to support schools and support individuals across the Executive and within my Department.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time is up. We now move on to topical questions.

Primary Schools: Enrolment Levels

T1. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools in the state-controlled and CCMS sectors fall below the minimum Bain enrolment levels for rural and urban schools. *(AQT 1811/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. I appreciate that these are topical questions, but I cannot have all that information with me on days like this.

I am more than happy to present the Member with the information, but I emphasise again what I have said many times in the House, which is that this is not a numbers game. Although lists of schools can be produced in which enrolment falls under 105 and 145 respectively, I will not be held to the idea that x number of schools are in danger and y number of schools are not in danger. The sustainable schools policy sets out the viability criteria of schools. It is not simply a numbers game.

Mr Gardiner: I note the Minister's comments and accept that he will write to me to put me in the picture. Thank you.

3.15 pm

Development Proposals: School Considerations

T2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education, in the light of a recent development proposal that was made public to expand the integrated post-primary-school sector in his area, to give further details of the considerations he undertakes when determining whether expansion should occur, particularly in advance of the area-planning process. *(AQT 1812/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Without being specific about that particular development proposal, I will give the Member a broad outline of the issues that we consider. We will obviously refer to the sustainable schools policy and assure ourselves that the development proposal is in line with it. We will assess the impact on other schools in the area, and we will also have to take into account any integrated or Irish-medium proposal or statutory duty for both sectors.

Mr Beggs: The expansion proposal that was included in discussions of the area-planning process could benefit all young people and schools in the area. However, should expansion occur in advance of the process, the local grammar and integrated schools will be oversubscribed, and, as a result, the pupils will come from the controlled secondary sector. Does the Minister recognise that Protestant boys in particular are already underachieving and that it will be they who are adversely affected? Will he ensure that an appropriate equality impact assessment will be undertaken so that we do not further disadvantage members of our community because of any change that may occur in advance of the area-planning process?

Mr O'Dowd: I hope that the Member appreciates that I cannot discuss a specific development proposal, as I am the decision-maker in that process.

The area-planning process for post-primary education has been published for a number of years. It is an evolving process. Any decision that I make on a development proposal will have to have regard to the area-planning process. It will have to be proved to me that the area-planning proposals for the area have been taken into account.

As to the Member's request for an equality impact assessment, I welcome the fact that he now recognises that selective schools in his area may be having a detrimental impact on sections of, in this case, Protestant working-class boys.

Education Authority: Progress

T3. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Education what has been done to date in preparation for the implementation of the Education Authority in April 2015. *(AQT 1813/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: In fairness, the Bill was passed only a week ago. I am now in the process of writing to the various bodies and political parties that have nominating rights to the authority. We have advertised for a chair, and I am looking into how we will proceed with the appointment of senior officers to the body, taking into account the stipulations in the legislation. The Department is working on a change management body, so there is a wide range of work going on in preparation for the implementation of the Education Authority.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer and understand that it has been only a short period since the Bill was passed. However, is he aware yet of any estimated saving that it will produce?

Mr O'Dowd: The estimated saving at this stage appears to equate to what would have been achievable under the Education and Skills Authority, which is £180 million over a 10-year period. We are going in the right direction to reduce our administration and bureaucracy around education and to target funds towards the front line. That is quite timely, given the considerations that we have to take into account around our Budget in the next year.

Education: Segregated System

T4. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Education for his response to the recent comments that our education system is segregated. *(AQT 1814/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I, personally, do not like the term "segregated" because it implies that, whatever sector parents or pupils choose, they are "segregationists". That implies the southern states of America. I find it offensive when supporters of one sector then lambaste me across social media with photographs of divisions in southern state schools during the 1950s and 1960 and accuse me, because I have taken the right decision on not agreeing to a development proposal for an integrated school, of somehow being a "segregationist". Segregation is based on being forced into one sector or another. Parents here have choices, and I continue to support choice.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he outline how our system enables young people to come together in their learning process? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Yes. This is one of the areas where politicians have caught up with education and caught up with many parents and schools. Shared education may be a new concept to many politicians, but it certainly is not a new concept to many of our schools that have been involved in shared education over many, many years and built up working relationships and personal relationships across sectors. We now have caught up with them. We now are in a position to invest quite significantly in shared education in the future, where young people will be learning about each other from each other. Difference is not the problem in our society; how we treat difference is the problem. If we learn to respect difference, we will go a long way to resolving many of the issues in our divided society.

St John's PS, Moy/Moy Regional PS: Shared Campus

T5. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the capital build project for the shared education campus for St John's Primary School, Moy and Moy Regional Primary School. *(AQT 1815/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The Moy project is one of three schemes that I announced in July to be supported under the shared education campuses programme. It is in the very early stages of development. A project board has been established, and a site search for a new campus is under way. The Southern Education and Library Board will carry out the technical feasibility study and economic appraisal for the project in conjunction with CCMS.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Will he detail the wider benefits of the capital build project, through social clauses, to the local construction industry and the community?

Mr O'Dowd: Since 2009, the Department of Education has had social clauses attached to its capital build programme for schools. It is about hiring the long-term unemployed, ensuring that apprentices are taken on and ensuring that young people are given an opportunity to gain their first meaningful employment. Obviously, these have a wider ripple effect in our society when you give people, particularly young people, meaningful employment.

As I have stated before, my main objective has to be to provide new schools. However, the spending of public funds in this manner also ensures that there is investment in the construction industry. It is worked out that, for every £1 invested by my Department in the construction of a new school, £2·84 is created in the broader economy. So, it is quite a significant economic driver. As we move through the discussions on the draft Budget, I will, as I have said before, be engaging with the Finance Minister around the proposed capital budget for education because I am concerned that it will not be sufficient to bring forward the developments that we have in the pipeline.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr Raymond McCartney is not in his place.

AQE/GL Selection Tests

T7. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Education to confirm or give an estimate of the number of primary-school pupils who are currently sitting the *AQE and GL selection tests*. *(AQT 1817/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I cannot confirm that, because they have absolutely nothing to do with my Department. I read speculation in the newspapers and the media about the numbers sitting them. As far as I am concerned, one pupil sitting them is far too many.

Mr McCarthy: Given that some schools have prepared and are openly preparing children for the selection tests and that, equally, other schools are refusing to do so, is there anything that the Minister can do or intends to do to regularise what is happening and simply provide a level playing field for all our schoolchildren?

Mr O'Dowd: I have proposed a level playing field for all our schoolchildren. They should be able to transfer to their nearest good school. Primary schools should not be preparing any child or disrupting the curriculum, in any way, to the advantage of an outside body. That is what is happening: it is not for the advantage of the children; it is for the advantage of an outside body.

A number that will not be reported in the weeks and months ahead will be how many children these bodies have decided are failures. They will not publish those figures, and you will not see them emblazoned across the front pages of newspapers or on social media. You will not see how many people the AQE or GL tests have rejected. However, those children will be rejected in a few months' time. I advise parents not to buy into that marketing ploy. I say firmly that any primary school that prepares children for unregulated tests in curriculum time and uses school resources to do so will be challenged by my Department.

Teacher Training: Future

T8. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Education to detail, in light of the Minister for Employment and Learning's review of teacher-training provision, what conversations

he has had with that Minister about the future of teacher training and, in particular, the future of St Mary's University College. *(AQT 1818/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I can detail those conversations very easily. I have not had any because it is not my responsibility. It would be like the Minister for Employment and Learning asking me about development proposals a, b and c. That is none of his business. I have a copy of the report and have read it, but the decisions made on the back of that report are solely a matter for the Minister for Employment and Learning.

Mr Attwood: The Minister knows what I will say next, and it is that I am surprised by that reply. I am surprised because you cannot divorce the world of education from the world of further education, and you cannot divorce teacher-training provision in our secondary and primary schools from teacher-training provision in our third-level institutions. It is one of the most self-evident examples of the requirement for joined-up thinking —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Sorry, can we have a question?

Mr Attwood: Given that Mr Farry has, I suggest, a very clear, if not dogmatic, agenda for teacher training, is this not a place where you, as a Minister, with your responsibilities, should show better authority?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure which part of that speech to respond to. I will try to pull a question from it somewhere. Mr Attwood is acutely aware of the situation, and I know exactly what he is asking and why he is asking it. As I said to him before, he is preparing a press release to run out to the west Belfast papers, point fingers and make all sorts of accusations.

The reality is that my role in teacher training is to indicate to the Minister for Employment and Learning how many teachers I believe need to be trained in the coming years. It is then his responsibility to provide the training places, if he agrees with me. It is also up to him to decide where those training institutions will be. I may have views about where they should be and where high-quality teacher training should be provided — we are fortunate that we have a significant number of colleges providing that — but that is not my role. It is the role of the Minister for Employment and Learning.

Malvern Primary School: Future

T9. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Education whether the Belfast Education and Library Board's consultation on the future of Malvern Primary School has been completed and, if so, what the next steps are for the future of the school. *(AQT 1819/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the consultation on a development proposal for Malvern Primary School. I understand that the pre-consultation process has been completed and that a report will be brought to the Belfast Education and Library Board in the next number of weeks. It will then decide what, if any, steps it will take next.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. Time is up.

Private Members' Business

Prison Service: Staff Safety

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly condemns the targeting of Northern Ireland Prison Service employees by dissident republicans; calls upon the Minister of Justice to reject any proposal that compromises the security of HMP Maghaberry, the safety of prison staff or concedes to the demands of republican prisoners in Roe House; and further calls for a review by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, working with the Prison Officers' Association and the Prison Governors Association, to address concerns about staffing levels across all grades in each prison establishment in Northern Ireland.*

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out from the first "calls" to "further" and insert

> *"notes the stocktake document, published on 12 November 2014 by the independent assessment team, on the separated prison regime in Maghaberry prison; and".*

From the outset, I want to make it clear that the amendment that the SDLP tabled was included to ensure that the stocktake report that was compiled by the independent assessors on the situation in Roe House is part of the motion and the debate.

The report was released on 12 November. It is a very important milestone in addressing the situation in Roe House, and it is important that the House discusses it.

3.30 pm

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

I understand — indeed, I have sympathy with — the points that Mr Givan made in his opening address to the House on the DUP motion. He spoke with considerable passion, deep interest and knowledge, and great concern. I share those concerns. I want to make it very plain that the SDLP acknowledges the good work that prison staff have done. They deserve our support, and they deserve to work in an environment that is free from intimidation or threat, as do their families.

The 2010 agreement, which Mr Givan referred to — he did so in critical terms — was posited on a number of principles, one of which was to create a situation in which staff and prisoners, particularly staff, would be free from any threat or intimidation, or anything of that nature. When the authors of the stocktake report appeared before the Justice Committee, they emphasised the importance of the process being two-way. It was not simply a matter of prisoners making certain demands and certain things being given to prisoners. The original agreement and the report to which I am referring emphasised the importance of prison staff being protected from intimidation and threat.

Mr Bunting, who led the assessment team, is a leading trade unionist and is secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). As a trade unionist, he put tremendous emphasis on the protection of fellow workers in the Prison Service. I want to make that point strongly to the House. His colleagues, Rev Dr Lesley Carroll, Mr Chris

Maccabe CB and Mr Conal McFeely, are serious-minded people. They have dedicated their lives to public work and to helping society at large. It is very important to note their contribution to this issue, which was voluntary, unpaid and disinterested, in the sense that all they wanted to do was to find a solution to the continuing problems in Roe House. Their report should be seen in that context.

The SDLP amendment does not ask anyone in the House to support the report; it asks the House to note the report. Hopefully, we will learn from the report, and I hope that it will effect some substantive change in the coming months, particularly in the next six months. It is important to note that, in the conclusion of the report, the compilers state:

> *"While many of the [2010] Agreement's aims and objectives have been achieved a number of issues are still outstanding and tensions remain."*

The compilers were not oblivious to the fact that there was still tension and still work to be done. They stated that there was a unique opportunity, given the prison reform programme that is due to be completed next year, to create a prison system that is compliant with the highest human rights standards and that the stocktake report should be read in that context. They further stated that they did not:

> *"underestimate the difficulties that arise from having 'separated' areas for paramilitary prisoners in Maghaberry Prison. However, we are convinced that the opportunity exists to ensure the outstanding issues can be resolved if all involved parties maintain full compliance with all the principles and undertakings that underpin the August 2010 Agreement."*

They went on to state that communication was essential in the process. They put tremendous emphasis on the creation or the maintenance of a prisoners' forum and said that forum could be chaired by an independent chair, such as an official from the International Committee of the Red Cross. That is an important contribution in understanding and trying to improve the situation that exists in Roe House.

I want to emphasise that they also went on to state that they believed that there should be:

> *"an agreed timeline of six months for resolving any outstanding issues and over this period Roe House, by example and deed, should be a conflict-free environment and all threats to staff internally and externally should cease."*

Finally, they stated:

> *"we would suggest that if the outstanding issues are to be resolved, all parties must commit to a new regime that is secure, safe and humane and freed from the prison experience of the past."*

I think that that is a very important contribution to the debate today. We have to see the report in the context of trying to free us from some of the ghosts of the past that continue to haunt our present.

It is very important that all of us in the House take that report seriously and, at least, give it a chance so that it can create a new dispensation that is positive for everyone in the context of Roe House — staff and prisoners — and, in addition to that, wider society, because, if the situation in Roe House deteriorates, there are bound to be political consequences outside and a ripple effect throughout society. We know that from experience, and we cannot ignore it.

We should move on from the report and try to build on the good work that has been done by those people. Indeed, the response from the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been very positive in relation to the report and in its attempt to create a situation in which the 2010 agreement can be fully implemented.

I also note the points that have been made in relation to staffing levels in the Prison Service. I think that it is important that we look at them. It is important that staff feel safe and secure, and that prisoners feel safe and secure and that they have access to educational services, to work, where they can, and to proper recreational and leisure activities. It is important that we focus on those things, but I believe that the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Prison Service are intent on reviewing all those matters.

I know that some concerns have been expressed about the level of manpower in the Prison Service, but, at this point in time, it is not critical. I hope that the Prison Service will be —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr A Maginness: — saved from the worst excesses of cuts, and I hope and pray that the current positive situation that has been achieved in Roe House will be built upon and that we can do a lot better in the next six months.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the amendment and endorse the outcome of the independent assessors' stocktake of the August 2010 Maghaberry prison agreement.

Back in 2010, the agreement that was reached came about because of a protest by the republican prisoners in Roe House. At that time, I was not elected; however, since 2011 a number of colleagues and I have, as the Justice Committee, been in the prison on numerous occasions. Each time, we met senior management and some of the republican groupings in Roe House. It was obvious from speaking to both sides that trust had totally broken down and that relationships between the prisoners and the Prison Service were at an all-time low.

From discussions that we had over that period, we found that both sides wanted to end the impasse, and it is in that context that I welcome the report that the independent assessment team has prepared. I take this opportunity to commend the team's work, time and effort, and the report that it has produced in such a short time regarding the segregated prison regime in Maghaberry. We can all argue and debate and apportion blame as to where the fault lies for the failure of the 2010 agreement, but that will get us nowhere. It is most important that lessons are learned by all and that the report is grasped both by the prisoners and the Prison Service in an effort to bring about the change that everybody said they desired.

The stocktake allows for an opportunity to move forward and create a pathway towards a conflict-free environment for prisoners and staff. The assessment team's recommendation of an agreed timeline of six months for resolving any outstanding issues is to be welcomed. I

believe that that period will focus minds towards a positive outcome.

Another aspect of the report that I want to touch on is the prisoners' forum. We learned from our visits — and this was experienced by the assessors themselves — that the prisoners were frustrated that the forum did not function properly and that issues that they presented seemed to get lost and were never followed up.

The Prison Service also had difficulties with the forum. I welcome the assessors' recommendation that the Prison Service should continue to ensure that meetings of the prisoners' forum are properly planned. For trust to be re-established and outstanding issues to be resolved, a proper functioning forum is key. As the Member who spoke previously said, an independent body chairing forum meetings for at least six months should also be seriously considered.

A channel of communications is also key if trust is to be built. Peter Bunting touched on a very important point at last week's Committee meeting when he said that, on behalf of society, there needs to be a solution and that that is the right thing to do.

From my experience of Roe House, I know that there needs to be greater freedom of movement. That would not compromise security in any way. Basically, Roe House is a prison within a prison. I agree that family visits must be facilitated in a manner that is more family-friendly. We all know how important family contact is for prisoners and their families. The family should not be punished as a result of the circumstances that they find themselves in.

There should be a review of education provision, and that is to be welcomed. Every prisoner should have the opportunity to benefit from education and to enhance their capacity for the future.

To conclude, as with any agreement, the success or failure of this depends on all sides adhering to its terms and principles. It is not, as some Members have said, an appeasement of prisoners in Roe House; rather, it is a suggestion that both prisoners and the prison officers exist in an environment that is free from conflict. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. I ask that the Minister endorse the stocktaking document.

Mr Elliott: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. I apologise to the Member who moved the motion for missing the first few minutes of his speech. Clearly, this is an important and very topical issue, and I have been very wary of any agreement between prisoners and management. Let us not forget that these are republican prisoners. I think that they are there for a punishment.

I do not see why they should be forcing the hand of management in this process.

3.45 pm

The review team was before the Committee recently. Mr Bunting and his team have already been mentioned by Mr Maginness. I thought that Mr Bunting was quite forthright. While I may not get his exact comments right, in general terms he said, "I am sick of the whole lot of you. I am sick of having to go in and out of prisons to negotiate with prisoners. I am sick of trying to negotiate with prison management". I think that he almost went so far as to say, "I am almost sick of coming in front of the Committee", without saying it. Clearly, he was frustrated by the entire process, and that was what he was trying to indicate to us.

One other group of people is very frustrated and — a matter that I raised in Committee — has not had proper consultation: the direct front-line prison officers. They were not directly consulted in the process. They were expected to implement something that management and the prisoners seemed to negotiate and agree. During all this was the callous murder of prison officer David Black by republican terrorists, and Mr Bunting referred to that. This is something that we should keep at the front of our mind throughout the debate. This is the type of action that the comrades of these people are carrying out, along with the intimidation of prison officers and their families. Let us not forget that.

I heard Mr Givan say that, instead of all agreements being null and void if the prisoners did not conduct themselves in a proper way, the prison management went ahead and implemented some of the agreement without the prisoners living up to their responsibility at that stage. To me, the proposal and the agreement should have been null and void at that time if the prisoners were not willing to live up to the agreement.

The agreement, which I was not content with in the first place, went beyond what the prison management had approved. Let us hear some of the areas of progress. Prisoners have freedom of association to use shared space locations — recreation room, exercise yard and a new AstroTurf pitch. Some of our young people would just love to have an AstroTurf pitch in their area so that they could go out and enjoy that in the evening on their way home from school. Prisoners have access to the library and to computers. Some kids in our community would just love that opportunity on their way home from school, but libraries are being closed and their hours reduced. However, prisoners — dangerous criminals — can have immediate access to that facility. A prisoners' forum is to be established. What can we expect from that? The key is how much right these people have to a prisoners' forum. They have access to a separate gym area. Those are all areas of agreement.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: One of the points made by Mr Bunting and his colleagues was the importance of the prisoners' forum for communication, in order to get the agreement fully implemented. Does the Member agree that that is a good aim and should be achievable?

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

Mr Elliott: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

I thank the Member for that intervention. If it were as simple as that, then, yes. However, let us just wait and see whether it is that simple. You know what these people are like: when they get an inch, they look for a mile. They will be looking for more and more. Never think that the concessions will end here. They will keep going, and they will look for more concessions from management. Again, who will be at the front line? It will be the prison officers and the prison staff, and we have heard about how they are under strength as it is. They do not have the numbers. The exit scheme has left them short on numbers and resources, and so they will clearly struggle. They will have

to implement this, and I feel that, at times, they are being made fools of by their management and the prisoners.

Mr Dickson: I would like to start by paying tribute to the men and women of our Prison Service, who show incredible courage daily to deliver a safer Northern Ireland. I also believe that it is right, as others have said, that we should today think of the family of David Black, who was brutally murdered on his way to work and made the ultimate sacrifice to keep people safe.

The stocktake report on the Maghaberry prison arrangements agreement refers to the ongoing intimidation of staff. Some staff have received specific threats and have had to move home. That despicable activity has no place in Northern Ireland in 2014. It is not justified and never has been. The report acknowledges that, in the face of such challenges and difficulties, significant progress has nevertheless been made, and staff are to be commended for that, not chided. The challenge is how we make further progress on the basis of the principles agreed between staff and prisoners. Any agreement on a way forward needs to be based on those principles, including that prisoner and staff safety must not be put at risk; that staff should be able to carry out their work professionally and free from harm, intimidation or threat; and that the security of the establishment should in no way be diluted. Those are the principles that have been agreed by staff and prisoners and that need to be at the core of any future agreement.

From reading the Prison Service's response to the stocktake, I see that the Northern Ireland Prison Service has agreed to eight of the nine recommendations relating to them and that there is, indeed, partial agreement on another recommendation regarding visitation arrangements. It was encouraging to read that response, which was clearly formulated after careful consideration of the report. It is also clear that, on the basis of the agreed principles, no changes should or will be made that compromise the security of the prison, its staff and the prisoners. Mr Givan suggested that the recommendations will do the opposite, but he is wrong. David Ford, as Minister, has made it absolutely clear that he has not and will not compromise on security, and his record on that issue stands. None of the recommendations risks a return to the conditions that once existed in the Maze prison, and, if they did, David Ford would reject them outright. The Maze conditions were ridiculous and so is the claim that David Ford would allow them to be reinstated in Maghaberry.

I have been to the prison. While I can understand the comments made by Tom Elliott, I have seen that AstroTurf pitch. It is behind extremely high walls. I have seen the library with its used and used and used again books and the computers that are so restricted, and rightly so. No child in Northern Ireland outside those walls would want access to any of those facilities.

On staffing, the Prison Service is, like others, operating in a very difficult financial circumstance. In those circumstances, it is important not just that we have the necessary staff but that our prisons are managed in such a way as staffing resources can be maximised and used most effectively. I know that the Northern Ireland Prison Service continues to keep staffing levels under review and is looking across the whole of the Prison Service. That is to be welcomed.

I pay tribute to the work and professionalism of Sue McAllister and will not run her down. She is an excellent director general of the Northern Ireland Prison Service and has some 25 years of service, working in some of the most difficult prisons in the United Kingdom.

As we seek to continue to reform and improve our prison system, we recognise that our prisons must be places where relationships are built between prisoners and staff based on mutual respect, and where the security of our facilities and those within them are treated as paramount.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Dickson: I support the motion and oppose the amendment.

Mr Frew: I support the motion, which is under my name and those of my colleagues. The SDLP amendment is disappointing, to say the least, because what they have basically tried to wipe out is the call to reject any proposal that compromises the security of Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry and the safety of prison staff, or concedes the demands of Republican prisoners in Roe House. The SDLP wishes to wipe out that aspect of the motion.

I do not know why they are not comfortable with trying to uphold the security of Maghaberry Prison and the safety of the prison staff, or why they are not comfortable with regard to the demands that Republican prisoners in Roe House make. It is a shame that they have tried to amend the motion, because it was complete. Everything we wished to say in the message going out of the House was complete.

In all of this, I have no doubt that there have been honourable people trying to do their honourable best in the way that they see fit. There is no doubt that people have tried to make accommodation and come to some arrangement that, ultimately, could and should have saved the lives of prison officers and their families, but, unfortunately and regrettably, that activity has failed, because we stand here today to debate the motion knowing full well of the death of David Black and the details surrounding that.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Yes, I will.

Mr A Maginness: The Member raises a point in relation to the SDLP amendment, but if the stocktake report, and everything arising out of it, were fully implemented, my party and I believe that that would provide enormous security to prison staff and prisoners. There would be no compromise in relation to the safety of any staff or the security of the prison. Our amendment is in that context.

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

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his contribution, but there is one big lie, if you like, in all of this. There is one big fundamental problem, in that the stocktake report is what it is — it is a snapshot. Who is to say what could happen in the future? Who is to say what demands the terrorist organisations will come up with next? Even if something were to happen and some of the conditions in the report were reduced, the threat level on the prison officers would be exactly the same, and might even be worse, in order to prove a point or teach a lesson to someone and to the establishment itself. Therein lies the danger in what

has been tried and sought out. You can only reason with reasonable people. That has been proven time and again in countless stages and in countless countries around the world, and even in this Province. You can only reason with reasonable people.

What are those people demanding? They are demanding free access all around the place. I have their demands, their wish lists, here. They include that the policy of controlled movement should end; that movement should not be stopped at any point due to an incident outside their community; and that daytime and night-time lock-ups should end. They even go as far as wanting park swings, slides and face paints. I am sorry, but I fight tooth and nail every day for my community, for parks, swings or slides, and I cannot get them for my community. What does the community say to me? Do they say to me, "We are going to beat you up; we are going to put you under threat; we are going to threaten your family, or you will have to check under your car every day in life?" No, they do not. They just keep campaigning and keep going on until they get what they want to achieve.

If people in my community want an AstroTurf pitch, they fight for it. They do not pick up a gun for it. There is a big difference. I heard it muttered that those things are for the children of the prisoners, but what about the prisoners who thought nothing of leaving children fatherless? What about those children in my community? These are not reasonable people. They are terrorists, and they need to be treated like terrorists. Whilst they are in a prison, they should be treated like prisoners.

4.00 pm

Nobody should be threatened outside or inside a prison, because that is morally evil and wrong. It has to stop. How will giving concession after concession —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Frew: — achieve that? I say that it will not. I say that it will make the situation even worse and put more prison officers and their families at risk and under threat.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will speak in favour of the amendment and in opposition to the motion. However, given the way that the motion is framed, I have no disagreement on the need to remove the threat against prison staff, and, if there are issues about staffing levels, perhaps there should be an ongoing review.

The reason why my party is opposed to the motion and favours the amendment is due to the supposition outlined by Mr Givan and Paul Frew that the independent assessment and stocktake is somehow wrong and should not be supported. We welcome the initiative and the work of all concerned — the assessors, Anne Owers's team in the past, the Prison Service and senior management in Maghaberry — to bring about a conflict-free situation in Maghaberry and a place where everyone can be treated with dignity and respect, and that means everybody.

Thankfully, in the 21st century, we have reached a place where the concept of prison as "lock them up and throw away the key" has long since been confined to where it should be: the dustbin of history. I have visited Maghaberry on countless occasions. Go to Maghaberry, Hydebank and Magilligan, and you will see a regime in which people are not needlessly locked up and are involved in purposeful activity, and, when it comes to outcomes for society, that is more productive than any outdated concept of locking people up and throwing away the key. Punishment should end with the loss of liberty. We should have a process that gives people the opportunity to be more constructive while they are in prison.

It remains our view that the agreement reached in 2010 and the principles that underpin it, which are repeated in the stocktake — I agree with Alban Maginness about the part of the motion that the amendment would remove — make very clear what conflict-free means. People should be able to live their life without being under the threat of intimidation or violence. We support that. We could spend all day, every day looking back to 2010 and asking who was responsible, who let what slip and what went wrong. However, the opportunity for all of us to create a conflict-free atmosphere and a place where no one lives under threat was lost. We now have an opportunity to re-establish that. In my opinion —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will, surely.

Mr Frew: The Member keeps repeating the line, "where no one is under threat". However, the only threat coming from anywhere is that coming from republican prisoners. Is he for one moment suggesting that the prison staff are causing a threat? That is not how I see it. There is only one threat going in one direction. How can he keep saying, "where no one is under threat"?

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

Mr McCartney: I thought that I was being very clear when I said that no one is under threat. The document is clear that, whoever is posing a threat and in whatever circumstances, it will not be tolerated because it is in breach of the principles. That is the point that I am making.

The document and the stocktake outline the way forward. When the independent assessment team was before the Committee last week, I thought that they gave a very robust outline of their thinking in response to questions. They were asked whether this was compromised. I think that that zero-sum approach does not serve us well. The thrust of some of the questions was about what would happen if the prisoners were in breach of the agreement. The independent assessment team was clear that, having supported the agreement in 2010 and this latest stocktake, the prisoners would put themselves in a position where they would be seen to be clearly in breach of the agreements. I do not want this to become a poring-over of what happened in the past; but there is no doubt that the opportunity that was created was missed and lost, and we should have that in mind as we take this forward.

I agree with the Prison Service in its support for the recommendations, except for the one that is obviously outside its remit. However, as we go forward, we should all bear in mind that this is an opportunity.

When Stewart Dickson was speaking, I was not confused, but, given the tone of his presentation and acceptance of the stocktake, I thought that he would have been more comfortable with the amendment, particularly as Alban Maginness addressed the points that Paul Frew made.

When you note the document, you find that the beef of the middle part of the motion, in terms of compromising security, threats, removing conflict from the prison, is addressed in the stocktake document. My fear —

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. I accept that those issues are addressed in the report.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Dickson: Which one of us?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Your time is up.

Mr Douglas: I am pleased to speak in this important debate, and I support the motion.

I grew up in Belfast during the Troubles when many of my friends, neighbours and, indeed, family members ended up behind bars. I visited every prison in Northern Ireland and, certainly in those days, conditions were indeed grim, particularly for elderly parents or the mothers of young children who were visiting prisoners. During what we call the Troubles, prison staff showed tremendous courage, fortitude and bravery during some of the most difficult days of our lives.

One of the prisons that I visited was Crumlin Road Gaol, which is now to become a visitors' centre and whiskey distillery. In fact, I met some of the investors at Stormont today.

I paint a bleak picture of what prison was like for prisoners and their families; conditions, particularly in the early days, were absolutely horrendous. However, if we fast-forward to 2014, we see that prisons have changed beyond recognition. As the report says, since 2010 the changes include increased freedom of association, including the use of a new AstroTurf pitch, access to a library and computers, prisoners preparing their own food, communal dining and access to a gym. So, undoubtedly conditions have improved dramatically. I am sure that many of those tens of thousands of prisoners during the Troubles would have loved to have had some of those changes come about.

However, one thing has not changed as we fast-forward to 2014: the threats, intimidation and indeed murder of prison staff. Our thoughts and prayers are with David Black's family today. Undoubtedly, they will be listening in to this debate. Certainly, our prayers are with that family.

Mr Givan, in his presentation, was passionate, and rightly so, because he and his family have been subjected to threats and indeed a murder attempt on his uncle in the past. If anything, our motion is about the safety of prison staff and, indeed, the protection of their families. I want the Minister to confirm to us and assure us that this will be the case and that prison officers and their families will be protected.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Douglas: I will. Go ahead.

Mr Dickson: I really appreciate you doing that, because that is the very point which I wish to agree with you on, by way of answer to Mr McCartney: the stocktake document, just noted on its own, stops with that point. That is why the Alliance Party is supporting the motion. We are supporting this because it is imperative that the Minister has the support of the House to continue to encourage the absolute security of that prison and the protection of its staff. That is what he is here to do and that is what he is determined to do. That is why we support the motion.

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

Mr Douglas: I thank the Member for his contribution. Certainly, I would like to leave here today having been assured by the Minister and having that confidence when I walk out the door.

There is one issue that I think that we will certainly agree on 100% in relation to this report by the independent assessment team. The 'News Letter' says:

> *"The report concedes that 'outstanding issues' of threats and parcel bombs sent to prison staff remain unresolved, despite a list of prisoners' demands being met."*

For me, as a democrat, democracy should not reward threats, parcel bombs and, indeed, murder. I know that our friend Tom Elliott, again, mentioned the horrendous murder of David Black.

There is one thing that we have learned from the past, and it is this: that the tens of thousands of young men, and indeed women, who pass through our prisons end up behind bars. Lives change for ever. Families change for ever. The question for us all has come up before: what did it achieve? What will these prisoners achieve in terms of their political ideals? Previous experience is that, in the past, prisoners' demands become unceasing. You just cannot feed this big monster.

I look forward to the Minister assuring us that prison security will not be compromised. I support the motion.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I rise as a new member of the Committee, so most of my knowledge on this subject is from second-hand reading of reports and the views of the assessors who have been to the Committee. I have not been to Maghaberry yet to look at the situation first-hand. I will be somewhat briefer, perhaps, than other Members have been today.

It is important that we welcome the review of progress since the 2010 report. It provides a good snapshot of where we are and perhaps a road map for the way forward on a lot of these issues. It is good that it identifies areas for further improvement while flagging up what progress has been made. It is incumbent upon us to grasp this opportunity to move forward in the best interests of staff, prisoners and, indeed, wider society. That is what we must not forget: having the best working conditions in the prison and the best conditions for prisoners are in the interests of wider society. We should remember that. A solution is in everybody's interest going forward.

I think that the difficulties around the prisoners' forum need to be addressed. Again, communication issues will be vital in moving forward. Even Mr Douglas talked about the importance of having a conflict-free environment. Improved communication will be central to that. Dealing with a lot of the difficulties around the forum can only be a good thing. If we are to continue to improve our prison system, we need to grasp the opportunities in the review, such as issues around family visits.

4.15 pm

I will touch a little bit on Tom Elliott's comments about his problems with education, recreation, library and computer facilities. Sometimes, some in the House seem to forget that prisoners retain rights. They are still human beings with rights. They have every right to education and to recreation facilities. It is important that we look after those rights. Mr Frew said that we need to make sure that they are treated like prisoners, but prisoners have educational and recreational rights.

Mr Frew: Thank you very much for giving way. That is not the issue, because everyone has rights. Their victims have the right to life. The point is that the prisoners try to achieve things through threats: threats to life and the threat of punishment, beatings and everything else. That is totally unacceptable. The prisoners should be starved of that oxygen. Of course they have rights, but they use threats to try to get concessions and to get things in the prison.

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

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comments. It sounds as though we are trying to trade rights. We cannot do that.

I think that we all agree that a conflict-free environment is vital. The stocktake provides a road map to a better place. It is incumbent on us all to embrace the direction of travel, not just for the staff and the prisoners but for wider society. I support the amendment, but I oppose the original motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Pat Ramsey, who will have the last five minutes available for debate before the winding-up speeches.

Mr Ramsey: I support the SDLP amendment. I have reflected on some of the comments made by my colleagues across the way. I understand where they are coming from. I understand the anger and frustration. If David Black's family are listening today, the SDLP is saying to them that what happened to their husband and father was entirely unjustified. The continued use of threats, abuse, violence and intimidation against Northern Ireland Prison Service staff or any of the health-care staff working in our prisons is unjustifiable.

I note the Prison Service response to the agreement. It states that it should reaffirm everyone's:

> *"support for the fundamental principles and undertakings"*

in the stocktake report.

I think about what Stewart Dickson said. Anyone who has been to Roe House since 2010 will know that it has a few dozen books that are as old as the hills. It has computers that, in any other environment, would have been condemned and dumped years ago, and it is only in recent times that prisoners have had access to them. The so-called 3G pitch would not inspire anyone to do training or anything else. However, things are progressing in the prison — even in Roe House.

It would be unfair not to acknowledge the contribution of the Prison Service, prison officers and the independent assessors — Alban named them, so I will not name them again — and their tireless work to try to do what you, Paul Frew, talked about: to ease the pressures on everyone, but particularly the prison staff, so that they can go to work without having to look under their car and are not looking to get on to the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme to get their house sold in order to move. That is the basis of the agreement.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Frew: I understand the Member's sentiment. I understand the genuine belief that those people were going in to do a good job. I do not question their commitment, but the threats are still happening to this day. People are still living in fear of intimidation and are still checking under their car, so, ultimately, it has failed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member will not have an extra minute on this occasion.

Mr Ramsey: If I had known that, I might not have let him in. *[Laughter.]* I thank the Member for his comments. I think he makes a good point. Raymond McCartney talked about an opportunity. There is a window of opportunity here, and the challenges will be up to those republican elements in the prison now to come up to the mark. My understanding, and the understanding of independent assessors, is that they are behind the principles of the fine points that the independent assessors have made. That is ensuring that the prison is freer: free from violence, free from fear and free from intimidation. So time will tell how honourable the prisoners are.

There are some fundamentals here that are important to reference as well, which the stocktake has highlighted. They include free space on the landings. We have a large volume of prisoners, close to 100 prisoners, with two being allowed out at any given time. This report is suggesting that that number should be increased, and if it does increase, and if there are difficulties, then the challenge to the prisoners is this: if you do not step up to the mark, they will be reduced again.

I appeal to the Members across the House. There are absolutely no circumstances where the SDLP or any Member of this Assembly want in any way — I say this directly to Paul Frew — to compromise the security or integrity of the Prison Service.

I have visited Roe House on many an occasion. I saw them when they were on dirty protest, and it is not a nice environment to be in for anybody. Now we are not only easing the pressure in the prison, there is a window of opportunity to ease the pressure outside the prison as well. Sammy Douglas talked about a life changing forever —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Would the Member draw his speech to a close?

Mr Ramsey: — it changes the lives of families who are visiting prisoners as well. I think there is an opportunity to make a difference, to enable prisons, particularly Roe House, to ease the pressures, allow management to do their job but allow the prisoners to be in a good environment.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): This is an important motion before us this afternoon, which covers some very important and serious issues. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues that have been raised by Members and will try to treat them with the seriousness they deserve.

Let me start by paying tribute to the work of those who staff our Prison Service. They face a degree of risk that most of society does not face. They sometimes have difficult working conditions, as well as concerns at home. Let us remember that they should be foremost in our thoughts as we seek to ensure safety and security in our prisons.

No one should underestimate the difficulties that arise from having separated conditions in Maghaberry Prison. That decision was taken by the Northern Ireland Office, as was said, which was inherited by this Assembly on devolution, although decisions on admission to separation are still decisions for the Secretary of State.

The Prison Service, which is responsible to this Assembly through the Department of Justice, has a crucial operational responsibility to deliver a safer Northern Ireland for all of us against the backdrop of the threat that it faces from dissidents. Those are very real challenges that operational staff in the Prison Service face daily. I repeat: I record my appreciation to them for their dedication and professionalism and my condemnation of any targeting of prison officers or others who work in the justice system.

I have met some of the staff who work in Roe House, specifically to deal with the problems that they face over and above those faced by other prison officers. They, and all those who work in our prisons, are working on behalf of this whole community. They must be able to perform their duties safely and threats must end.

In August 2010, as has been said a number of times during the debate, the agreement was reached by the joint facilitation group that brought about an end to a protest by prisoners in Roe House. The following month, I established the independent assessment team to ensure that the agreement's principles and undertakings were being implemented.

I want to take this opportunity to place my thanks on record to the four members of the team for the time, the patience and the commitment they have brought to their role and for the very fair and balanced approach that they have taken in their reports to me, both written and verbal.

The principles underpinning that agreement include the following: arrangements should be predicated on mutual respect; prisoner and staff safety must not be put at risk; arrangements and procedures should be achievable and sustainable; and the security of the establishment should not be diluted.

In July this year, following a recommendation from the Prisoner Ombudsman, I asked the assessors to undertake a stocktake of the implementation of the agreement of August 2010. I invited them to return to the agreed principles and undertakings of that agreement and pass comment on the state of compliance. The assessors have examined a range of evidence. They have undertaken consultations with the Prison Service, the republican prisoners in Roe House and a range of other interested parties. I am clear that the stocktake provides an opportunity to look at where progress has been made but also to identify any outstanding issues that can be pragmatically addressed.

The Prison Service will not relinquish control of any part of any prison to those held in custody. It has not happened, it is not being recommended by the assessors and it will not happen. Any allegation to the contrary is simply wrong. Maintaining the security of the prison is a key underpinning principle of the 2010 agreement, and I assure the Assembly that I will not accept any proposal that would compromise the security of Maghaberry prison or the safety of staff, visitors or other prisoners. Indeed, I will not support the amendment because it specifically deletes the call on me to reject any such proposal, although there are many merits in highlighting the work of the stocktake.

I was grateful for the thoroughness and balance of the stocktake report, which has now been considered in detail by the Prison Service, shared with the prisoners affected and published. The stocktake underlined the principles of the 2010 agreement, but, undoubtedly, it was correct for the stocktake to reflect on issues since then, including the dreadful murder of David Black.

Mr McCartney: Is there not a danger that somehow the message will be that, by supporting the motion, you are not supporting the stocktake exercise?

Mr Ford: I make it clear that I will support the principle of the references to the stocktake, but I am not prepared to support the deletion of the references to the concern about maintaining security in the prisons, because that is the most important issue.

As I was saying, the murder of David Black was probably the most egregious example of a breach of the agreement. However, the report also relates ongoing concerns, including intimidation and threats, sometimes to specifically named members of staff, that have resulted in some individuals having to move home and other major problems. However, the report also acknowledges progress in the context of the challenging environment for staff and clearly describes how further progress can be made.

The report identifies a number of developments taken forward by the Prison Service since August 2010. The assessors make 10 specific comments. One recommendation, as has been said, on the criteria for entry into separation is an issue for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to consider and not the Department of Justice. The Prison Service has considered the report and welcomes its fair assessment of the current state of compliance with the 2010 agreement. Of the nine recommendations that fall to NIPS, eight have been fully accepted and one partially accepted.

On a number of occasions, Members referred specifically to the prisoners' forum, and there is a wish to implement that policy across the prison generally. However, there is undoubtedly a need to provide a forum in which individuals can discuss the day-to-day management issues as they relate to Roe House. The Prison Service is seeking to follow up on the recommendation for an independent chair to be appointed, although I suspect that seeking somebody from the International Committee of the Red Cross may not be an appropriate way of doing that. The partially accepted recommendation relates to the proposals for an upgrade to visiting facilities for prisoners. While it has not yet been possible to agree how to resolve this issue, it continues to be discussed.

Two other specific issues seem to have caused a degree of concern inside the House and outside. The first is the incremental increases in controlled movement. The independent assessors recommended incremental increases in the number of prisoners on a landing from three up to a maximum of six. Their report makes it

absolutely clear that any change to the present restrictions is dependent on the prisoners acting in good faith and ceasing all actions that might prevent staff carrying out their work professionally and free from harm, intimidation or threat. This is about normalising the regime that can be offered without compromising security. The Prison Service has taken a first step, allowing four prisoners on to the landing.

The second issue is full-body searching. As members will be well aware, the Prison Service has been examining and will continue to examine any advances in technology or policy that will reduce or remove the need for full-body searching. It has not yet been possible to identify an appropriate technological alternative. As Members will know, I have answered many an Assembly question on that. There has been a change in the approach to full-body searching, with a focus on intelligence and risk rather than on the less effective approach that applied in a blanket way. Prisoners are now no longer subjected to a routine body search when leaving the prison on final discharge, including home leave. Where risk remains, full-body searching is still essential to maintain the security of the establishment, the safety of all and the protection of the public. It will continue on that risk-based assessment.

4.30 pm

In respect of these two issues, neither the independent assessors' recommendation nor what I described as the response is a move to relinquish security. They are clear signals that the Prison Service is prepared to normalise the regime offered to prisoners as and when it is appropriate to do so. Members should remember that that is in line with recommendations that were made by CJINI in 2006, 2009 and 2013 and, indeed, referred to in the Owers report, but it will only be in an environment where the security of the establishment and the safety of staff, visitors, prisoners and everyone else in Northern Ireland remains the priority.

The report recommends:

> *"there should be an agreed timeline of six months for resolving any outstanding issues and over this period Roe House, by example and deed, should be a conflict-free environment and all threats to staff internally and externally should cease."*

I am content with this timeline and the overarching principle about the threat-free environment that will facilitate progress. On that point, I am absolutely unequivocal. People have talked about a return to the Maze. That has not happened. that is not happening and that will certainly not happen while I am Minister.

I am not discussing today the wish list that was published on behalf of prisoners; I am discussing a serious report from the assessors, in line with other serious recommendations from CJINI, to move towards normalisation in an appropriate way.

Mr Douglas: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will.

Mr Douglas: Minister, do you agree that, when people end up in prison, when they are incarcerated, that is a punishment for them? They lose their freedom. It is about rehabilitation rather than punishment while they are in jail, but can you give the wider public confidence that these prisoners' demands, threats and intimidation are not about rewarding that bad behaviour?

Mr Ford: I hope in what I am saying that it is about following through on recommendations from serious people about normalisation where possible in the absence of threat. It is certainly not about conceding the wish list that was published recently by prisoners. It is about following through on what are reasonable measures as we maintain the security of prisons. Change will be possible only on the basis of ensuring safety and security for officers, other staff, other prisoners and the wider public. It is not normalisation concession after concession; it is normalisation because that is the right and appropriate way to treat prisoners. The Prison Service will continue to ensure that Roe House, just like the rest of our prison estate, is run by the staff and management of the Prison Service, not by any group of prisoners.

The motion refers to staffing levels in prisons, although there was little talk in the debate about that. Perhaps, Deputy Speaker, I should touch on that. I believe that the Prison Service benefits from being led by an extremely experienced and well-qualified team under the director general, Sue McAllister. There may be a perception that prisons have become less safe in recent years, but that is simply not the case. It is too simplistic to say that running safe and effective prisons is only about staffing levels; it is about having the right people in the right place at the time. That is all in the context of the difficulties that the Prison Service faces, as does the rest of the public sector, in this challenging financial climate. In that climate, it has to make informed decisions on how it can most effectively use the staff available to fulfil its obligations to provide safe, decent custodial services whilst delivering significant and necessary savings.

It is essential to manage the prison population effectively to ensure that crowding is kept to the minimum. The information available makes it clear that the major issue is the impact that crowding has on prisoner safety. It is therefore encouraging that, against those financial constraints, improvements in conditions are being made at Maghaberry, with over 350 prisoners recently moved out of crowded accommodation. This is being managed at a time when the prison population has increased significantly since devolution in 2010, from just under 1,500 to almost 1,800 today. That is a very significant increase, and yet moves have been made that have led to reduced threats of general violence because of a reduction in crowding.

Those staffing levels continue to be kept under review, and NIPS recently commenced a re-profiling exercise to look comprehensively at the way operational staffing levels operate in every part of the prison estate. That exercise, of course, includes consultation with the Prison Officers' Association. Those re-profiling exercises and updates to shift patterns are a necessary and normal part of prison operations that reflect the changing needs and requirements for regime delivery. The Prison Service will continue to take those steps to improve safety and manage the population.

In summary, I support the motion. Whilst I welcome the comments made by Alban Maginness and others on the issues in the stocktake report — I have spent some time dwelling on it — I cannot accept an amendment that inserts references to the stocktake report by deleting references to the security and safety of the prison and staff. That

would be an entirely wrong position for me, as Minister, to take. I hope that I have made it clear in my comments that I welcome the stocktake report and believe that it shows the way forward, but I suspect that lessons would be drawn inaccurately were I to suggest that I was prepared to delete references to keeping prisons safe and secure.

I utterly condemn the continued targeting of Prison Service employees by dissident republicans. There is no doubt that there is work to be done there, and there are issues that need to be addressed on how the August agreement is carried through. While I accept the report that has been produced by the assessors, I repeat that they are not suggesting any compromise in security. I will not accept any compromise in security and nor will the Prison Service management team. The attacks made on the director general today were entirely inappropriate. Let us support the motion in agreement and without acrimony.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We heard comments from my colleague, who reiterated that prison staff and their families needed to be free from threat and intimidation and spoke about the prison reform programme. Mr Lynch endorsed the independent assessment of the stocktake report, and we heard from Mr Elliott and Mr Stewart Dickson. Mr Frew spoke emotionally about the need for prison officers and their families to live free from any threat or intimidation. Mr Douglas referred to his experience of prisons and his visits to them.

I want to say something in case there is any doubt about the validity of our motivation. I do not like using situations to make political statements, but I attended the home of David Black and I attended his funeral. Despite the utter heartbreak in that family, my colleagues and I were very warmly welcomed to that house. As has happened on so many other occasions, I discovered that I knew his extended family and his in-laws, who are good, decent and well-respected people in that community. The hurt over that murder extended far beyond one community in that area, because the extended family circle are long-standing in that area and are well got and respected.

I genuinely hope that those responsible for that murder are caught and that they eventually see the error of their ways, as others have done in the past. They did not just pick up using threats and violence against prison officers and other members of the community at the hedge. As others have done, they should see the error of their ways. They are going absolutely nowhere, and seeing the heartbreak in that house would really bring that home hard and fast to anyone who needed it brought home to them. So, let nobody be in any doubt about the motivations of the SDLP. They are what they always have been: to try to bring about political solutions, engage through dialogue with people and bring an end to violence.

The Minister made a point about the SDLP amendment removing details from the motion. The SDLP amendment refers to noting the stocktake report. That report refers specifically to outstanding issues, including ongoing abuse of and threats to staff. That is included in the report that we refer to and suggest should be noted.

The amendment tabled by my party means to ensure that the progress made by both prison officers and prisoners in Maghaberry prison does not go unnoticed. The problems are not completely fixed, but the report goes some way to show the changes that have been made there. I echo the comments made by my colleague about the stocktake report, but I also want to note the Northern Ireland Prison Service's response to it. Its acceptance of the report shows the progress that has been made in Maghaberry since this agreement.

As outlined by the Minister, the Prison Service accepts eight of the recommendations fully and one partially. It is good to see, particularly, that progress has been made in the shared space and facilities in Roe House; the use of discretion in the requirement for full-body searching — the Minister referred to this — for those who are leaving prison in the case of a serious medical condition; the continuous review on the full-body search issue; and the use of prisoners' forums. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has agreed to the recommendations regarding the prisoners' forum. The report shows that improvement still needs to be made in some areas, including family visits and the ongoing issue of full-body searches. The SDLP supports the ongoing implementation of that agreement. Ongoing work is still needed in relation to the abuse of staff in the Prison Service, and I particularly condemn the targeting of prison officers in and outside the workplace.

That concludes our deliberations on the proposals in the SDLP amendment.

Mr Poots: I welcome the opportunity to wind up the debate. Prison Service staff stand between us and anarchy. The people who are behind bars are there because the justice system has deemed them to have committed a crime, to be dangerous to the community and to be in need of reform. That would not be carried out if it were not for the work of Prison Service staff. They are a critical component of the well-being of society and therefore deserve our full support. I am somewhat disappointed that the SDLP has pulled back from giving that support and sought to water down the motion with its amendment, which would remove key parts of it. Those staff deserve our support because they stand between us and anarchy.

I visited the home of David Black after his gruesome murder. His wife's words were "Why did they kill David?" Did they kill David to achieve a united Ireland? They know full well that killing one prison officer will not move a united Ireland closer by one millisecond. Why, then, did they kill David Black? Why have they targeted all of the other prison officers? Why have hundreds of prison officers had to have extra security applied to their homes? Why do they make threats against prison officers? It is because they see it as a means to an end. It is because they will use bully-boy tactics to achieve goals. The goals that they seek to achieve have been set out. They have made their requests and their demands. The approach employed over and over again is to use the bully-boy tactics, then back off a little. They will have negotiations, behave for a period of time, then engage more bully-boy tactics, extract more concessions — and so the cycle goes on until they get what they really want.

Mr Lynch referred to Roe House as being a prison within a prison. That is because the republicans prisoners in Maghaberry wanted separated status. Just remember this: Roe House is there because republican prisoners wanted separated status. However, what they ultimately want is a prison regime that is similar to that when the Maze was closed down.

4.45 pm

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. It is very clear that senior Prison Service staff do not believe in any way that the principles of the agreement will compromise the safety, security and integrity of Maghaberry prison. Does the Member not accept that?

Mr Poots: I accept that we have diametrically opposed opinions. The view of the Members opposite is that we need to give the prisoners a chance. Our view is very clear: the prisoners need to demonstrate that they are going to obey the rules of the regime, that they are going to engage with the regime and that they are not going to be threatening prison officers. We have had substantive threats to prison officers in the last few weeks. The prisoners are still misbehaving, but you want to give people a chance who were threatening to kill people weeks ago. You are saying, "We will give you a few more concessions now". Therein lies the problem: we have people who are well-meaning and sincere, but they are being taken for a ride by the prisoners. We must be very conscious of that.

We have people visiting the prison from the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, the Minister approved three visits from senior politicians in the Republic of Ireland this year, as well as visits in previous years. They are interfering with what is going on in our prison, and that is not appropriate. They are visiting dissident republican prisoners.

When we are talking about the safety of prisons, staffing is a key issue. There should be 861 members of staff in Maghaberry, yet there are currently 812. There is a recruitment issue there that the Minister and, indeed, the director general and officials need to address. The issue has not been addressed, and, consequently, that is putting the prison under more pressure.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Will he accept an assurance that that is currently being addressed?

Mr Poots: I welcome the fact that it is "being addressed", but the situation should not have transpired in the first instance. We will closely monitor that. Of course, as a consequence, many prison officers are under greater pressure and greater stress, resulting in higher levels of sickness and therefore more people on overtime. Therefore, it is very important that it be addressed, and addressed very quickly.

Moreover, there were 47 assaults by prisoners on members of staff from August 2011 to July 2012, but, from August 2013 to July 2014, that figure doubled to 94. The number of assaults on other prisoners went up from 316 to 342, so we are not seeing an improvement in the safety of Maghaberry prison under this regime, this Minister and this director general. Those are all key aspects that need to be dealt with today.

On the recommendations, we go back to 2010. This has been like a game of ping-pong, with the debate on how we should be responding to the issues going from one side to the other. We have the people who are indicating that we should be giving ground to the prisoners, and we have those of us who are very clearly saying, "Let us see the colour of the prisoners' money in the first instance". The threats have to stop, and not just within the prison but outside. The behaviour of republican terrorist organisations associated with the prisoners needs to be such that prisoners are not, on the one hand, being allowed concessions whilst, on the other hand, people outside the prison are threatening, abusing, bullying and terrorising other individuals.

Let us be clear and take a very clear stance. Those people are in prison, not because they took an extra bun at the Sunday school picnic or for not paying a TV licence. They are in prison for murder, attempted murder, the possession of lethal weapons and explosives and all sorts of other activities. They are dangerous people.

Allowing six people to be on the wings is a significant concession to them, and they will keep pursuing their demands for free unlocked access for 24 hours whilst we keep conceding. Let us be very clear to the prisoners: they are in prison for a particular reason, because they have committed crimes against society and have lost their freedom. Given the nature of the offences that they have committed, they are high-risk prisoners and, consequently, we have to ensure the safety of the prison staff and other prisoners.

Prior to its closure, we saw what it was like in the Maze. We saw murders in the loyalist and republican wings and rape in the prisons. Drug abuse is commonplace in Maghaberry prison, and drugs are smuggled into that prison regularly. If drugs can be smuggled into the prison, surely explosives could also be smuggled into the prison.

Any attempt to drop security and reduce the steps that we take to ensure the security of our prison —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Poots: — can pose a risk to the security of the prison. Therefore, we in this party will continue to oppose that. I support the motion.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 33; Noes 53.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKevitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson,

Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 54; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKevitt.

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly condemns the targeting of Northern Ireland Prison Service employees by dissident republicans; calls upon the Minister of Justice to reject any proposal that compromises the security of HMP Maghaberry, the safety of prison staff or concedes to the demands of republican prisoners in Roe House; and further calls for a review by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, working with the Prison Officers' Association and the Prison Governors Association, to address concerns about staffing levels across all grades in each prison establishment in Northern Ireland.*

5.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments while we change the Table.

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

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I want to apologise for not being in my place during Question Time to the Education Minister. I have spoken to him as well, and I apologise for my absence.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much for coming and apologising in person.

Motion made:

> *That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Cherry Tree Nursing Home, Carrickfergus

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 eight minutes.

Mr Dickson: I thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and the Business Office for the opportunity to debate the issue this afternoon. I also thank the Minister for his attendance.

I have been dealing with the concerns about the quality of nursing-home care in my constituency for quite a number of years now. I should stress that Cherry Tree House is not the only nursing home that has been drawn to my attention. It is, however, the home about which, as an East Antrim MLA, I have received the most complaints and expressions of concern from relatives and former staff. I pay tribute to those who have come forward to tell their stories and who have unfortunately had to battle with the system to try to get their voice heard, never mind get justice. It really should not be so difficult to get matters of great concern treated seriously.

We now at least have the report, which was published in July 2014, titled 'Independent Review of the Actions Taken in Relation to Concerns Raised about the Care Delivered at Cherry Tree House, Carrickfergus'. The Minister will be aware from correspondence that I have sent to him that the relatives whom I represent have concerns about the independence of the report and do not think that it goes far enough in its recommendations. Therefore, I would be most grateful if the Minister will agree to meet me and the families to discuss those concerns.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Yes.

Mr Wells: Yes, I am aware of the request, and I will meet you and the families.

Mr Dickson: I really appreciate that.

Despite its shortcomings, the report came to some disturbing but important conclusions and found that, in the period examined — a long period from 2005 to 2013 — Cherry Tree House consistently failed to comply with the minimum standards of care. There was a cyclical scenario of quality improvement plans being made but not being acted on. There was a consistent failure to address the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) requirements and recommendations, with some being restated up to seven times.

The RQIA inspectors mostly stuck rigidly to inspection plans, did not act on their own initiative and did not act to investigate recurrent issues, recent complaints or matters on which they had been given intelligence during inspections. Indeed, in one incident, the RQIA received information on the morning of an inspection that pages referring to serious shortcomings had been ripped from Cherry Tree's communications book, an important document in every nursing home, yet there was no evidence of the book having been inspected.

The report also found that, in a number of incidents, the RQIA relied on the home to provide reassurance that issues had been addressed, despite years of concern. It found that inspection reports did not provide supporting evidence to show that compliance had been achieved or sustained. Minimum standards on continence, a frequently raised issue of concern, were never examined by RQIA.

The review team also said that, under current procedures, it would have expected enforcement action to have been taken following an inspection in August 2009, which showed that Cherry Tree had taken little or no action to comply with requirements and recommendations from previous inspections. It strongly implied the same following an inspection in June 2011. A final important finding was that families were unclear about the roles and responsibilities of RQIA and the health trust, and about how to properly engage with the complaints procedure.

It is a damning report. That is reflected not only in the comments throughout but in the numerous recommendations. The RQIA is singled out for particular criticism, and I would be grateful if the Minister would share with us what information he has about the steps that the RQIA has taken since then to comply with the recommendations. I must say to him, however, that I think that the health trusts — in the case of Cherry Tree, mainly the Northern Trust — have got away very lightly in the report. It found that the trusts dealt with complaints appropriately under current procedures, but there is a question to be asked if a nursing home that they send their patients to consistently fails to comply with minimum standards of care over a sustained period of time. Does that not suggest that there might be something wrong with the procedures? How can a facility like that be allowed to keep operating in that way? I have said it before, and I will say it again: what does it take to line the ambulances and health trust staff up at the door and close a facility like that?

The Northern Trust in particular would have been aware of a number of complaints coming in over those years. Why did someone not take a step back and say, "OK; we are operating within the procedures, but clearly there are still problems, so we need to review those procedures"? The review team noted that:

> *"on many occasions the Trust relied on the outcome of internal investigations by Cherry Tree House management to provide them with assurance of the standard of care provided."*

Were they not reading the RQIA reports? The report goes on to state that that is consistent with a particular trust policy. Well, if that is trust policy, it is wrong, it is weak and it needs to be changed. It is deeply disturbing that trusts cannot adapt to effectively deal with consistent failings in our care system. I really think that the Minister needs to look at how it is possible for trust patients to be sent to a nursing home that consistently fails to meet minimum standards of care over such a long period of time.

That the Northern Trust spent £653,000 of taxpayers' money sending patients to Cherry Tree House between September 2013 and July 2014 raises questions about how public money is being used responsibly. If one reads the

July report and the RQIA inspection reports, one will find a catalogue of disturbing incidents, allegations and failings. On management and care, reports found various failings in the recording of fluid intake, the keeping of care records, the supervision of staff and the provision of mandatory training, including the very basics of first aid. There have been numerous allegations of assault and abuse over several years. I have heard allegations of residents being shouted at and denied the right to go to the bathroom. I have seen for myself photographs and heard allegations of residents being forced to use mattresses with the urine of other residents on them. I could go on.

I want to raise the issue of whistle-blowing. The report includes a timeline of whistle-blowing incidents and makes clear that whistle-blowers highlighted issues about the management of continence, moving and handling dependent residents, the use of bed rails, the quality of food, poor hygiene in the home, medicine management, fire safety, shortages of staff, lack of staff training, poor communication between management and staff, and, most importantly in this section, lack of support for the whistle-blowers themselves. Indeed, whistle-blowers approached the Department of Health, the former Minister, the Human Rights Commission, the Northern Ireland Ombudsman, the Northern Trust and the RQIA, and still the whistle-blower who spoke to the review team said that they did not feel supported and thought that very little was ever done about their concerns. It is unacceptable that those who step forward to highlight shortcomings feel so unsupported. How, Minister, do you propose to rectify that?

That is my first question to the Minister in the limited time that I have left. I have other questions that I would like to put to you, Minister. What actions have been taken to ensure that all the recommendations of the report are being implemented? Minister, will you work with the trust to explore how, under its policies and procedures, a nursing home to which it sent patients could continually fail to meet minimum standards of care? Will you look at putting in place a new and more robust enforcement policy for the RQIA that does not allow for requirements to be restated over and over again? Given that Cherry Tree House continues to operate and no one from the home has been held to account for the incidents that have failed residents and their families over the years, how do you envisage the latter getting justice?

Last week, the Assembly had a debate on appreciating age and the importance of recognising the contribution of older people to society. In that debate, I said that our society is measured by how we treat older people and that one way in which we could start to recognise their contribution was to make sure that they had the best care in their final years. I view our response to this matter as a test of our resolve in that regard. I very much hope that the Minister not only shares my determination to see the standards of care improved but wants justice for those who have seen their relatives denied the peace and dignity that they deserve at the end of life.

Mr Hilditch: At the outset, I acknowledge Mr Dickson's efforts in securing the Adjournment debate and the damning report telling us about the situation at Cherry Tree House.

Many of us will, at some stage, have to deal with the issue of care in nursing and residential homes, but mainly on a personal level as we seek to secure the best way forward and options for a family member. For that relative, we would seek the best quality care, delivered in a professional manner with skill and compassion in surroundings and facilities that give us confidence in our decision-making. Those who have gone through the experience will realise the complexities involved and how families place their trust and confidence in those who provide nursing and residential home facilities for their loved ones. How shocking it is, then, to read the report on Cherry Tree House. Mr Dickson summed up well the catalogue of horrors.

When the then Minister ordered a review of Cherry Tree nursing home, some eight years after a whistle-blower first made serious allegations of dreadful neglect and practices in the home, it really struck at the heart of the community.

Cherry Tree nursing home is placed very centrally in the community and is on one of the main arterial roads in Carrickfergus. In that community, it is almost impossible not to know someone involved at the home among the management, staff or residents. Locally, there was much thought, concern and passion for those innocently caught up in a situation at what must have been a very distressing time for everyone involved. My involvement began when the matter became public, and my office was contacted by people who indicated how relieved they were that the allegations were now, in their words, "being taken seriously". One person, who was a relative of one of the residents, said that she had been vindicated, having previously reported incidents on several occasions only to be treated as though she and her family were some sort of troublemakers. Let no one doubt the strength of feeling in the local community or the depth of knowledge about the situation.

5.30 pm

I turn to the 'Independent Review of the Actions Taken in Relation to Concerns Raised about the Care Delivered at Cherry Tree House, Carrickfergus'. The review was published in July. It sets out a chronological sequence of incidents, reaches a number of conclusions and, more importantly, makes recommendations that must be acted on. It is crucial for the wider sector, as well as for Cherry Tree nursing home, that confidence be restored. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority — the health watchdog — must not lose sight of the criticisms directed at it for the handling of the whistle-blowing complaints and its lack of robustness towards the owners of Cherry Tree nursing home.

The section on whistle-blowing in the Cherry Tree case is of particular interest to me, as I wear another hat as Deputy Chair of the Audit Committee. On a number of occasions over the last couple of years, I have raised the very issue of whistle-blowing, and I have had to deal with whistle-blowers directly. I am concerned about their treatment, how they are regarded and the timeline involved in dealing with issues. This can be a very stressful time for people who have done the right thing and brought to their employer's attention practice that is simply wrong. It is something of a coincidence that we are discussing whistle-blowing at Cherry Tree House today and the report of the Northern Ireland Audit Office — 'Whistleblowing in the Public Sector: A Good Practice Guide for Workers and Employers' — is issued today. On the back of the Cherry Tree case, I commend that document as someone who

has, over the last few years, garnered the utmost respect for whistle-blowers.

Again, I thank Mr Dickson for the Adjournment debate and look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Dickson for securing the debate.

I acknowledge that I did not know much about Cherry Tree House until very recently — when I say "recently", I mean the last few months — when I started to get phone calls about it from people who at first would not give me their name. At the end, I was talking to people who were openly giving me their name and status, and, in one case, I spoke to a family. To be honest, I was shocked at this. As Mr Hilditch said, when someone picks a nursing home for their loved one to stay in, it is to be a home for the loved one, a place of sanctuary and safety, not a place of anger and fear. That is what I cannot understand. When I first heard about Cherry Tree House, I thought that there must be something wrong, because there would be no way that a home could get away with some of the things of which it was accused, and, as we all know, there are always two sides to a coin. However, the more this went on, the more I started to believe.

I received the report only today, and it really compounds what people have been saying. Questions have to be asked about the inspections and the follow-up inspections of these reports. Who is looking at the reports or going into the homes? I have had reports of management harassing families outside for payment for their loved ones' care. This was in front of the public, with other people knowing their business. I have been told of poor record keeping and that the bookkeeping is a mess. I have been told of different types of assault and abuse of patients and of staff being shouted at and demeaned in front of patients and other people. Indeed, one person told me that patients were really only a means of making money. I really cannot say any more about this.

As Mr Dickson said, in the period 2013-14, £653,000 was put into this home for patient care. Earlier today, we debated for an hour and a half the MS centre in Ballycastle, which the Minister will close because of a budget of £500,000. We have a facility here that looks after the most vulnerable in society — elderly people who have worked all their life and expect to spend the twilight of their life in safety — and here they are in a place of fear. I call on the Minister now to put in place a full investigation of this home. If nothing else, it should be closed or somebody put in to run it. As we have seen tonight, what is going on there is nothing short of criminal.

Mr Beggs: I, too, thank my East Antrim colleague Stewart Dickson for bringing this Adjournment topic to the Assembly. Cherry Tree House has been in the headlines for the wrong reasons. It is important that lessons are learned from it and that others will not face similar circumstances.

First and foremost, we all have to welcome the fact that the whistle-blower had the courage to take a stand and highlight the worrying aspects of the care that residents were receiving at Cherry Tree House. The subsequent publication of the highly critical report, 'Independent Review of the Actions Taken', highlighted very basic failings in the original RQIA inspections. RQIA inspections need to be rectified, as many families rely on them to give a degree of reassurance, when they may be unable to be present, that their vulnerable family member is being cared for and looked after appropriately and protected. Lessons need to be learned for the benefit not only of this home but for the RQIA and, indeed, all residential homes throughout Northern Ireland.

I am keen to learn why it has taken so long to identify that there were such basic failings in the methods used by the RQIA. Only by changing the inspection process can failings be identified and addressed and standards of care for the elderly improved.

One of the recommendations is that new residents and their families should be provided with information on how to make a complaint. How fundamental is that? It is vital that every resident and every new resident in every home knows that information and feels empowered to do something if they feel that improvement is needed.

The summation of complaints received between January 2005 and January 2013 is quite unbelievable: 19 allegations of abuse, including 12 of abuse by staff, and 27 cases involving personal care in respect of individuals. There were 40 other care issues, including residents falling, poor hygiene and loss of residents' property. There were 13 staffing issues, including poor staff attitudes and inadequate staff training. It is really interesting that, in some instances, RQIA did not follow up on the issues raised in complaints during the next investigation of the home. Where is the intelligent inspection? Where is the thought process? Where is making sure that what needed to be improved was improved? That is fundamental. What a basic failing it was that the previous inspection was not gone through in detail before the next inspection so that you know what things should be rectified in order that standards can be improved. Those who made the complaints and met the review team expressed concerns regarding how their complaints were handled. That is also of concern. People should feel that they are given a fair hearing when they make a complaint.

The primary reason why the failings were highlighted was the whistle-blowing, as others have said. With a number of the recommendations, I am alarmed that they have had to be made in the first place. You would think that they would have been in place from the start. What are we talking about here? The whistle-blowers included an agency care assistant, three care assistants, three members of the Cherry Tree House staff, an observer in Carrickfergus and two other members of Cherry Tree House. Alarm bells should have been ringing very loudly during the process. It was not just someone with a gripe against the employer; the frequency of the complaints is unbelievable. Allegations of abuse of residents were mentioned at least 16 times. The standard of care delivered to residents was mentioned at least 25 times. Other care issues, such as failure to implement procedures for the protection of vulnerable adults, were mentioned at least 15 times. Glaring issues were raised, but they were not addressed.

Another fascinating detail in the report is this:

> *"We recognise that statutory organisations have difficulties in investigating allegations of historical abuse and poor care practice because residents may have died or staff moved on."*

You can see how that would cause a very practical difficulty, but it goes on:

> *"However, the review team believe that if, after being investigated, complaints had been followed through, and if contemporaneous records in Cherry Tree House had been inspected, some of these matters could have been addressed at the time they occurred."*

Again, a very fundamental assessment, you would have thought. When you are given a warning that there is a problem in an area, that area should be concentrated on, and any issues that arise should be addressed. Clearly, aspects of the RQIA inspection methodology and practices need to be implemented over the period. Lessons must be learned, as I said at the beginning, for the benefit of all our vulnerable elderly people or those who need care in such residential and nursing homes.

It must be a concern to us all that one relative is quoted as saying:

> *""Inspections resulted in the same requirements and recommendations made to Cherry Tree House year after year".*

No lessons were being learnt, and no effective enforcement was being enacted on the home. It appears that the RQIA had more power; it could have muscled in and enforced. Previous requirements were not being corrected. Surely that could have warranted warnings or, if necessary, the removal of status and making people aware that that could easily have happened. If that had happened, the improvements would have happened much sooner, which would have benefited all concerned.

Mr Dickson: Will Mr Beggs give way for a moment?

Mr Beggs: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I will follow through on that. I am sure that he will agree — I hope that the Minister can address this — that you would think that, post the report and investigation, things might have improved. However, as recently as 28 May this year, two further failure-to-comply notices were issued against the home.

Mr Beggs: I have been talking to some relatives as well, and what they have been telling me is that there have been improvements. We have to recognise that. But they also indicated that there needs to be further improvement and that there is not the high quality of care we would all want for our own loved ones. There need to be further improvements, but let us recognise that there has been improvement.

5.45 pm

Cherry Tree is an option, and some patients are happy to reside there. It is important that there are facilities available locally for our constituents, and I hope that, with proper enforcement and the cooperation of the management, a high quality of care can be provided.

Mr Wells: I am grateful to Mr Dickson for securing this debate today. I know that he has worked tirelessly to represent the families of people in Cherry Tree. I listened very carefully to his views and those expressed by other Members. As I promised earlier in an interjection, I undertake to meet Mr Dickson and the families so that we can look at this very difficult issue in much more detail.

I assure Mr Dickson and Members of this House that I am committed to ensuring that people living in our nursing and residential homes receive a safe and quality standard of care. The important part of achieving these goals involves ensuring that proper and effective processes are in place to identify and rectify any instances where the care provided falls short of what any of us would regard as acceptable for our loved ones. That is why we have a strong independent regulatory body for Health and Social Care (HSC), the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, or the RQIA as it is commonly known. This body has statutory powers to inspect standards and to enforce sanctions. I should emphasise that this body was formed in 2005, the time when concerns were being raised by Cherry Tree, and that is relevant, as we will hear later on.

The RQIA inspects provision against departmental minimum standards for nursing and residential care homes. The RQIA uses these standards and the corresponding regulations as the basis for regulation of the sectors. These standards set the benchmark for the quality of care that residents can expect to receive.

Each time the RQIA takes enforcement action, the nature and extent of that enforcement action is published on its website, so there is total openness here. A member of the public can go on to the website and see what has been said about their local residential or nursing home.

The sanctions available to the RQIA include the imposition of conditions on registration, restriction of further admissions until improvement is demonstrated, or cancellation of registration, which results in closure. So, the sanctions are quite draconian when used. The RQIA adopts a stepped approach to enforcement. Closure or urgent closure would be considered as a measure of last resort to be deployed when all other sanctions have failed.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: I certainly will.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister accept that the RQIA was slow to move to such enforcement action against Cherry Tree House and that, as a result, the poor standards were allowed to continue? It does seem as if, once it moved to that, there has been improvement. So, would he accept that its threshold for requiring evidence of change has been too high and that there needs to be a review of that area?

Mr Wells: I am being honest with Members. The report issued in July 2014 does not paint the RQIA in a particularly attractive light. I accept that. What I am hoping to show is that the RQIA has learnt from errors and misjudgements in relation to Cherry Tree House. The penny has dropped, as it were, that improvements were required, and changes have been instigated by this and other examples.

We also have to recognise the impact that closure can have for residents, who may be obliged to give up their home as a consequence. It is also worth pointing out that not every resident of Cherry Tree complained. Some residents were relatively content. But, I also have to admit that many others were not content, and that is an important issue.

The frequency of inspection will increase above the statutory minimum in response to specific enforcement action and/or concerns about the quality of care in a registered home. Registered providers are required to notify existing residents and their families of formal

enforcement action. The RQIA revises and updates its enforcement policy on a regular basis. The current enforcement policy was extensively updated as recently as March 2013 to reflect the lessons learned by the authority in taking enforcement action. The RQIA has also initiated a review of its inspection methodology.

In addition, trusts have a statutory duty to ensure that they provide quality care to all service users and are responsible for carrying out formal reviews of the care packages provided to individuals, as a minimum, once a year. In discharging this statutory duty of quality, trusts work closely with the RQIA in the event of regulatory issues arising, including both care and environmental issues.

Notwithstanding all of this, should any individuals or their families or carers have concerns about the care they are receiving, they can make a complaint in whatever way they are comfortable with. So, individual residents or their representatives do not have to wait until an inspection is carried out. Direct contact can be made with the RQIA if anyone has concerns. I urge MLAs to take that on board and let the RQIA know if they hear of any concerns in their community.

All regulated care homes must operate a complaints procedure that meets the requirements of applicable regulations, relevant minimum standards and the HSC complaints procedure. Complaints may be made by service users or persons acting on their behalf, providing that they have obtained the service user's consent. The registered provider is required by legislation to ensure that the complaint is fully investigated.

Alternatively, individuals may, if they prefer, raise their concerns through the local health and social care trust that has commissioned the care on their behalf. As Mr Dickson stated, it is mostly the Northern Trust in this case. The trust commissioning the care has a continuing duty of care to the service user and should participate in local resolution as necessary. Mr Dickson has been helpful in pointing out that, recently, £653,000 of trust money has been used to fund places in Cherry Tree; that is a very significant amount of money.

Where complaints are raised with the trust, it is its responsibility to establish the nature of the complaint and consider how best to proceed. The complaint may also trigger the need for an investigation under protection of vulnerable adults procedures or, indeed, highlight non-compliance with statutory requirements.

If the RQIA is notified of a breach of regulations or associated standards, it will review the matter and take whatever appropriate action is required. Trusts work closely with the registered providers, other professionals and the RQIA to enable appropriate decisions to be made. HSC trusts must also assure themselves that care homes that deliver care on their behalf are effective and responsive in their handling of complaints.

Of course, another important safeguard for the health and social care system is the identification of a positive whistle-blowing culture. Mr Hilditch made the interesting point that a publication on this very issue was released today. All my Department's arm's-length bodies are required to have a whistle-blowing policy in place. I am encouraged to note that, in a recent HSC staff survey carried out in 2012, 78% of the staff surveyed said that if they were concerned about negligence or wrongdoing by staff they would know how to report their concerns, and 60% said that they would have confidence in doing so. So, I think we are making considerable progress on this issue.

The Cherry Tree report makes it clear that there were shortcomings in the care provided there over a period of time. Everybody accepts that that is the case; no one would deny it. However, it would be remiss of me not to place this in context. Every day in Northern Ireland, care home staff deliver high quality care to almost 10,000 people who live in our residential and nursing homes, with just over 7,000 receiving nursing home care. In the vast majority of these cases, the care provided is of the highest standard. However, as we have seen, sometimes things go wrong and standards slip. What is important is that, when this happens, there are strong and effective measures in place to identify and deal with these cases.

My Department has fully accepted the report's 22 recommendations and is working with the relevant HSC organisations to ensure that they are implemented as soon as possible. I emphasise that because several Members raised that issue, including Mr McMullan, who is no longer with us. I am certain that, if Members have any concerns about the issue, they will be tabling questions for written or oral answer or writing to me to keep themselves up to date with what is happening in the implementation of the recommendations. There are certainly Members in the Chamber this evening who are extremely keen to write to me, because I get a vast amount of correspondence daily.

I was worried when I read about the Cherry Tree House issue. In fact, it arose when I was Chair and Deputy Chair of the Health Committee. I shared the same concerns that Mr Dickson so ably articulated. I have given my commitment that the Department will do all it can to implement the recommendations as quickly as possible.

My Department is also reviewing the minimum standards for nursing homes, and the revised standards have recently gone to public consultation. My Department is also taking forward the development of the adult safeguarding policy in conjunction with the Department of Justice to introduce a package of measures aimed at improving safeguarding outcomes for children and vulnerable adults across Northern Ireland.

The objectives supporting the policy will range from the prevention of adult abuse through the implementation of good safeguarding arrangements to effective protective responses from lead agencies when adult abuse occurs or is suspected. The intention is that we will publish the finalised policy in 2015.

Finally, I thank all who contributed to the debate. It is quite clear that the issue has caused a great deal of concern among elected representatives in the East Antrim constituency. It is entirely correct that Mr Dickson decided to use his Adjournment debate opportunity to raise the matter. I hope that, when I meet him — hopefully, fairly soon — we will be able to talk through the lessons learned by this unfortunate situation.

Perhaps the one good thing that can come out of all this is that, in future, vulnerable elderly and, sometimes, severely handicapped people in residential nursing care will be guaranteed a much higher and much more acceptable level of care than was evident in Cherry Tree House.

I regard this as a crucial and serious issue because, regardless of our present situation, the vast majority of us will have someone we love in a residential nursing home, or some of us may be residents ourselves at a future time. It is vital that we learn from the stark lessons that this example has exposed and ensure that we do not have a repeat of the Cherry Tree House issue.

Adjourned at 5.58 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Culture, Arts and Leisure

Líofa Website

Published at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 18 November 2014

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): On 22 September 2014 a Líofa participant contacted the department to advise that they had seen their name and e-mail address on the Líofa website. Subsequent checks of the site by department officials were unable to authenticate the claim. Officials contacted the website developer to advise and ask them to rectify any potential breach of security on the website. The reported difficulties were identified and DCAL advised that they had been corrected by the developer on 24 September and therefore the website was not taken down.

However, during routine duties on 4 November, departmental officials discovered that the names and contact details of Líofa participants could be accessed via the Líofa website's search facility.

Contrary to some of the recent claims being made in the media DCAL has taken this breach of security very seriously and initiated instructions on 4 November to shut the website down and in addition commence a robust investigation. The department has engaged IT security experts, accredited by the Communications Electronic Security Group (CESG) - the UK's National Technical Authority for Information Assurance - to establish the full extent of the website's vulnerabilities.

The Information Commissioner has also been advised.

I have asked the Departmental Accounting Officer to give specific personal assurance that the website is thoroughly re-checked by CESG accredited consultants through the use of manual and automated penetration testing and that the website undergoes a full IT health check before it is made live again. These individuals are fully qualified and highly experienced in assessing departmental and other public sector bodies IT systems.

The details that participants were asked to provide when they registered with Líofa were name, email address, home address or home town, age range, and whether or not they were attending Irish Language classes. It is this information which may have been accessible. The Líofa website did not hold any other personal or financial information.

The development and delivery of the website was commissioned by Foras na Gaeilge on the department's behalf and is managed and maintained through a contract. The specification for the development of the website included requirements for data protection and the encryption of data stored on the site.

Lead responsibility for management of the website's content transferred to the department in February 2014, and data protection responsibilities transferred on 25 September 2014.

The Departmental Solicitor's Office is being consulted on the matter.

I am deeply sorry about this potential breach and apologise unreservedly for any concerns this may have raised for Líofa participants. My officials have apprised them of the situation and will advise them further when additional information is available. They can be assured that I and the department are doing everything possible to correct this situation and to restore confidence in the Líofa website.

I would stress at this stage that there is no evidence to suggest that any information provided by Líofa participants has been accessed or misused in any way.

The Líofa website provides a valuable resource to all those interested in learning Irish and I have asked my officials to ensure it can be restored as soon as possible to provide access to help Líofa learners on their journey.

As soon as I get a response to these queries I will make a full oral statement to the Assembly.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Congenital Cardiac Services: Consultation on International Working Group's Recommended Future Model

Published at 12.00 noon on Monday 3 November 2014

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Members will recall that in my Statement to the Assembly on 14 October 2014 I stated that I intended to announce details of the public consultation on the future model for congenital cardiac services for the population of Northern Ireland as recommended by the International Working Group (IWG). I am honouring that commitment today through the publication of the consultation document by my Department for a 12 week period of public consultation ending on Friday 23 January 2015.

While I am satisfied that the IWG has fulfilled its Terms of Reference, before I make my final decision on whether to accept the recommendations, I want to hear the views of patients and their families who use this service, the clinicians who provide the service and the Northern Ireland public who have been engaged in the discussion on the future of this service.

This consultation provides the public with an opportunity to give its views on each of the IWG's 14 recommendations. It is intended that the consultation document will be publicised by way of a press release which will be highlighted on my Department's website. The consultation document provides a response form to enable those who wish to do so, to send their views to the Department. In addition to this, my Department will hold a number of public consultation meetings around Northern Ireland, to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to put their views directly to my Department.

In the meantime, while the consultation is ongoing, I have instructed my officials to work with health service commissioners and providers to immediately plan for the implementation of the service model recommended by the IWG. I will await the outcome of the consultation before making my final decision on whether to implement the IWG's recommended service model. My decision to proceed with the planning however is in keeping with the principle that precautions should be applied given the vulnerability of the sustainability of this service at the Belfast Trust.

Work of the Unscheduled Care Task Group

Published at 11.30 am on Wednesday 19 November 2014

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): On 10 February 2014, my predecessor, Edwin Poots MLA, announced that he had commissioned the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to conduct a review of unscheduled care services in the Belfast Trust with a view to the wider regional context. On 1 July 2014 he announced that the RQIA had published its report and that he had accepted its findings and recommendations for transforming the delivery of unscheduled care.

Having considered the findings of the report my predecessor also announced on 1 July that he had decided to establish a regional task group to take forward the RQIA's recommendations, under the leadership of my Department's Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, and Chief Nursing Officer, Charlotte McArdle, who co-chair the task group. The task group's immediate action was to oversee and coordinate a range of actions to support the reform of urgent and emergency care services and the implementation of the RQIA's recommendations. To achieve this, the whole system will have to work together, including our GPs, Ambulance Service, community care teams and staff in acute hospitals.

My predecessor also said that he wanted to see results, and therefore set the clear aims for the task group of eliminating all avoidable 12-hour emergency department waiting time breaches from this winter onwards and of making significant progress towards achieving the four-hour waiting time standard , over the next 18 months. Elimination of lengthy delays is critical to ensuring high-quality care and to improving patient experience.

The Assembly is aware that the HSC achieved a 44% reduction in the number of 12-hour waiting time breaches during last year. I am pleased to report that in the first six months of 2014/15 this progress has continued with the lowest number of 12-hour waits in five years. That is a considerable achievement, and I pay tribute to all staff in the HSC who worked hard to deliver this significant improvement, but there is still much more to do. Regrettably the Belfast Trust has been the exception to this continued improvement and I have made further comments below on the position in Belfast.

The RQIA's report contained 17 recommendations. The purpose of my Statement today is to update the Assembly on the progress being made in addressing these recommendations: 10 recommendations have been taken forward by the Task Group and 7 were for the Belfast Trust to address by a dedicated work stream within the Task Group. A report on progress achieved against the recommendations follows below.

Escalation

The task group has established an escalation work stream which has worked closely with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) in developing a Regional Unscheduled Care Escalation Plan which will ensure that there is a consistent and robust methodology for monitoring and raising the level of escalation across the region including keeping the ambulance services informed of periods of heightened pressure across HSC Trusts. The work stream

is also working with Trusts to review and test each of their escalation plans to provide assurance of the robustness of these plans. This will include an assessment of their ability to respond over the Christmas and New Year period.

Care of frail older people

The task group's focus is to strengthen the unscheduled care services provided to our frail older population There has been considerable progress including: identifying improvements in the transfer of information between nursing homes and Emergency Departments; developing standards which reduce the number of internal hospital moves older people can be subjected to; and, developing a standard which restricts the discharge of older people from hospital late at night without their or their family's permission

Recommendation 3 of the RQIA report specifically identified the potential for direct assessment of frail elderly patients to the Belfast City Hospital and I am pleased to report the Belfast Trust has now established Phase 1 of their project 'BCH Direct', which will ensure that frail elderly patients can be directly assessed and admitted to the City Hospital site. The number of patients assessed and admitted has been steadily increasing over the last number of weeks and the Trust has received very positive patient and carer feedback about the experience.

Respiratory Services

Recommendation 4 of the RQIA report similarly asked the Belfast Trust to examine the potential for direct access admission for respiratory patients. The Trust is in the process of finalising the arrangements to expand direct access to the Belfast City Hospital under the 'BCH Direct' project for those with respiratory illness and has set a target of January 2015 for full implementation.

In addition the task group is working to develop a discharge care bundle for COPD (Respiratory) patients, lead by the Trust's respiratory nurses, which will ensure a safe effective discharge home and contribute to prevention of hospital admissions.

Patient Flow

Ensuring effective patient flow, both within and across hospitals was a key thematic finding of the RQIA report. There were a total of four recommendations within the report (5, 7, 8, 13) highlighting the importance of getting this right. In response to this the task group established a patient flow work stream that has made substantial progress to date in driving forward improvements. These include: the development of a regional model for unscheduled care that identifies alternatives to ED attendances particularly for older people and those requiring urgent assessment rather than emergency care; an audit tool is being developed to identify any delays in the patient's journey. This will help Trusts identify gaps and take action to correct delays; a regional approach to multidisciplinary assessment at discharge is also being developed. This will ensure a safe discharge process which minimises the bureaucracy often associated with this process; regional standards for Triage nursing practice and Emergency Nurse Practitioners are being developed, supporting nurses to develop their skills and improving the consistency of approach throughout Northern Ireland; and, a regional audit tool is being developed and tested to monitor the fundamental aspects of nursing care in the Emergency Department. This tool will help quality assure that patients receive the care they need.

The Task Group has also proposed that the HSCB works with Marie Curie (MC) to introduce an extension of the seven day a week Out of Hours Rapid Response Palliative Care Service, currently in place in the North and Southern Local Commissioning Group (LCG) areas, to cover in-hours at weekends and bank holidays and to roll out a similar service to the northern sector of the Western LCG. The pilot is planned to commence on 1st January 2015 and will also involve partnership working with NIAS, who will refer, under agreed protocols, directly to the service, rather than transferring patients to an Emergency Department. The scheme will be evaluated after 12 months, when consideration will be given to full regional roll-out.

Diagnostics and Out of Hospital Care

Recommendation 10 of the RQIA report seeks to maximise alternative models of accessing hospital services outside of the traditional ED route, including an examination of the arrangements for provision of direct access to hospital-based assessment and admission services for appropriate patients. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) is planning to introduce a clinical support desk to provide callers and responding ambulance staff with clinical advice, utilising decision support software and accessing referral pathways. All emergency vehicles, both ambulances and rapid response vehicles, have been equipped with mobile phones in addition to radio communication system. These are pre-programmed with the contact numbers of receiving hospital departments including: Emergency Departments; Cardiac Cath. Labs; and, potentially stroke teams.

The RQIA's recommendations 12 and 13 are closely linked and aim to ensure that large numbers of patients do not present to Emergency Departments at any one time, as this can cause significant pressure and have consequences for the patient experience. To address this Trusts are working with NIAS, and other transport providers, at local levels to improve non urgent transport of patients. The HSCB has also developed a Locally Enhanced Service to support general practitioners to commence home visits earlier in the day and bring forward the time of day patients are being referred to hospitals. This includes options for additional clinical (GP) sessions for managing acute demand. These sessions are to help meet the additional demand for acute appointments and home visits during the winter months with the aim of speeding up the triage and assessment of patients who present with an urgent acute problem who may require admission to hospital.

Belfast Trust

The Belfast Trust has started to implement a programme of measures designed to deliver sustained improvements in unscheduled care services. The programme, known as IMPACT, is a three year programme focused on significantly improving patient safety, patient experience and patient outcomes. The programme aims to achieve this by reducing waste, harm and variation in care. While I recognise that some progress has been made, the Trust in recent months has continued to experience, unlike most other Trusts, high levels of patients waiting more than 12 hours in both the RVH and Mater Hospital EDs. In addition

the RQIA carried out an unannounced inspection of the RVH ED and Acute Medical Unit (AMU) on 12 to 14 May 2014. The RQIA's report highlights that although some progress had been made to address its recommendations by May of this year, a concerted effort was still required to ensure recommendations are actioned and implemented in full. Following this inspection, RQIA inspectors provided feedback to the Belfast Trust's senior management team and some staff. At this meeting RQIA described the interim findings of the inspection, and provided recommendations for immediate consideration, to ensure patient safety.

My Department received the RQIA's Inspection Report on 30 September 2014 and on 17 October 2014 held an accountability meeting with the Belfast Trust, HSCB and PHA to seek assurances that the Trust was addressing the RQIA's findings. The RQIA has today published its unannounced inspection report and the Belfast Trust has published its updated Quality Improvement Plan. My officials are considering the assurance provided by the Trust at the meeting on 17 October, supplemented by additional information provided by the Trust, that it has addressed the RQIA's findings. The information and assurance provided by the Trust will inform a further unannounced inspection by the RQIA before the end of this year.

I am very disappointed that given the assurances that the Belfast Trust made to my predecessor that it would bring about sustained improvement appear to have not been fully realised by the Trust. Therefore when I receive the follow-up unannounced inspection report by the RQIA later this year I expect to see and require significant improvement.

Values and Principles

A key recommendation of the RQIA report was the need for a set of principles to guide the future design of urgent and emergency care in Northern Ireland. I fully support this recommendation and in order to ensure that the focus and drive for improvement and innovation is maintained my Department is developing a Values and Principles Statement that will underpin the development of future policy and service delivery for Emergency and Unscheduled Care. I intend to begin a process of public consultation on the draft Values and Principles Statement in the coming days. This will be an important document and it is right that patients, their families, clinicians and the public should have a say in its development.

My Department is also considering how we might build on the progress achieved by the Task Group. Potentially this could involve a new regional policy framework for unscheduled and emergency care services in Northern Ireland. This will require further detailed work and I will provide a further update to the Assembly on this in the months ahead.

Education, Training and Development

The RQIA's recommendations focused on how we strengthen the contribution of our staff through education, training and developing. The Chief Nursing Officer and her team have been working with Trusts and our local universities to develop a training program for Advanced Nurse Practitioners. These new and exciting roles in nursing will help strengthen the contribution of a very experienced and skilled group of staff.

Preparations for Winter 2014/15

In addition to the specific responses to the RQIA recommendations the Task Group is also overseeing a range of work to ensure that urgent and emergency care services are prepared in advance of the winter. Each HSC Trust has developed a local implementation plan for the elimination of avoidable breaches of the 12 hour waiting time standard. These plans have been reviewed by the Task Group and my Department has asked that the HSCB monitor implementation of these over this winter.

The Executive has allocated a total of £5m funding to unscheduled care services to help ease winter pressures in the months ahead. To date, some £2.3m of this funding has been allocated to Trusts, including the Ambulance Service, to fully fund or contribute to the costs of a range of measures to improve unscheduled care. The remaining £2.7m of the additional funding will be allocated to Trusts to fund measures to improve patient flow and expand capacity over the winter.

I commend this Statement to the House.

Social Development

Regeneration and Housing Bill

Published at 3.00 pm on Tuesday 11 November 2014

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The Executive agreed on 11 April 2013 that the Reform of Local Government should be implemented with effect from 1 April 2015 with the creation of 11 new councils and the transfer of a coherent package of functions and powers from central government to local government on that date. The aim of this fundamental reform programme is to transform local government, putting decision making on local matters in the hands of locally elected representatives. It is not just about doing things differently; it is about doing things better. By transferring key functions such as planning, urban regeneration, local economic development and local tourism from central to local government, councils will be provided with the means with which to shape their areas and communities.

In order to enable the new councils to discharge these new important responsibilities, I must first put in place the necessary legislative framework. The overall reorganisation of local government is covered in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and other transferring Departments will be putting their own legislation in place.

My predecessor and I have made a number of unsuccessful attempts to secure Executive agreement to the introduction in the Assembly of the draft Regeneration and Housing Bill. However, since taking up office, I have had some useful discussions with a number of Ministerial colleagues and I have taken their concerns on board. Concerns were raised regarding the proposed transfer of the Housing functions from the NIHE and, having discussed these concerns with Executive colleagues, I decided to remove the relevant provisions from the Bill. I recently brought a paper on a proposed new regulatory regime for HMOs to the Executive which was agreed, and in the Housing Strategy 2012-17, there is a commitment to review the statutory fitness standard across all tenures over the lifeline of the Housing Strategy Action Plan. I have therefore concluded that it is more appropriate to consider this work separately from the Bill.

In addition, I recently brought a paper on a proposed new regulatory regime for HMOs to the Executive which was agreed, and in the Housing Strategy 2012-17, there is a commitment to review the statutory fitness standard across all tenures over the lifeline of the Housing Strategy Action Plan. I have therefore concluded that it is more appropriate to allow this work to complete before any decisions are taken on the future of these functions.

As well as removing the transfer of specific housing functions from the Bill, an additional provision has been inserted requiring Departmental approval for any use of the new regeneration powers in respect of housing. I have also provided more detailed explanations in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum about the Bill's policy context, its relationship to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and the safeguards in place regarding compulsory purchase powers and other constraints that it would place on councils.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that the Executive has now agreed for the Bill, which has been renamed the Regeneration Bill, to proceed to Introduction. Unfortunately, the timetable for passage of the Bill through the Assembly means that I cannot be certain that the legislation would become law in time for an April 2015 transfer. Without that certainty there are unacceptable risks to the smooth transfer of these important responsibilities to the new councils. I have carefully considered the options available to me. In trying to come to a decision on the way forward, it was important to consider the impact any further delay and uncertainty would have on the detailed planning by the Department and the receiving councils for the handling of this work from April 2015. At this stage I had planned to be in a position to be able to finalise the planned handover of work to councils and to reach agreement between the Department and the new councils on the arrangements for transfer of budgets, assets, staff etc. In the interests of business continuity it is crucial that there is clarity on the way forward.

After due consideration, and with the full support of the Executive, it has been decided that the best course of action is to defer the transfer of responsibilities from my Department to councils for one year until April 2016. This decision means that my Department will continue to have responsibility for the delivery of these key services to the community, retaining its statutory powers, control of the overall budget and ownership of the associated physical assets and it will continue to deliver the relevant programmes until April 2016.

I can assure you that I am still fully committed to the Reform of Local Government and the transfer of key powers and responsibilities from my Department to the new Councils and I intend to introduce the Regeneration Bill, with the Speaker's consent, to the Assembly as soon as possible.

I am certain that the excellent arrangements and relationships that have been put in place between the councils and the Department will continue as we work together to bring forward this key programme of work.

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 31 October 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their vision for the future role, purpose and functions of the Community Relations Council.
(AQW 32716/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The future role of CRC, in the context of delivering Ministerial good relations objectives, is still being considered. As stated in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy the Equality and Good Relations Commission will extend the roles and responsibilities of the current Equality Commission to include good relations. Legislation is currently under discussion to bring this about.

The responsibility for the delivery and administration of a proportion of good relations funding currently resides with the CRC. There are a range of options for the future delivery of good relations funding and through the Strategy we have committed to establish structures and mechanisms that can target funding to where it is most needed and in a way that best meets emerging good relations need. This commitment is being progressed through the ongoing Review of Good Relations Funding. The remit of this review includes the funding currently being administered by CRC.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken to reduce poverty amongst people with disabilities and their families since the launch of the strategy to improve the lives of people with disabilities.
(AQW 35913/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive's Disability Strategy provides a framework for all departments to drive improved service delivery, increase awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and improve opportunities for people with disabilities across all policy areas. It includes a specific priority to reduce poverty among people with disabilities and their families. The Strategy also seeks to protect the right to an adequate standard of living, as well as to address the identified inequalities experienced by people with disabilities and tackle the barriers that they continue to face in their daily lives.

Work is being taken forward, across all departments, to reduce poverty amongst families with children and young people with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities have particular needs in relation to childcare and may need additional support. The development of childcare services for children with a disability is being taken forward through Bright Start. This will include providing training and small grants to enable childcare providers to meet the needs of children with a disability for childcare services. Through the Family Fund, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety provides grant support to low-income parents raising disabled and/or seriously ill children to help with essentials. Children with a statement of special educational needs and who require a special diet are entitled to Free School Meals, regardless of other criteria.

OFMDFM hosted a major, inclusive disability awareness conference to consider how current arrangements meet the needs of all people with disabilities on the basis of equality in May 2013.

A 2013/14 annual report on the delivery of the Disability Strategy will set out the actions that all departments have undertaken under the Strategy in its first year. We hope to publish the report in Autumn 2014.

We are currently considering a number of further projects submitted by departments to deliver outcomes under the Disability Strategy, to be taken forward within the Delivering Social Change Framework.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the (i) salaries; (ii) allowances; and (iii) expenses paid to members of the Maze Development Corporation, for each year since its inception.
(AQW 35992/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Details of salaries, allowances and expenses paid to date to the members of the Maze Development Corporation, for each year since the Board was appointed in 2012, are provided in the table below.

	2012/13 10/09/12 – 31/03/13 £	**2013/14 1/4/13 – 31/3/14 £**	**2014/15 1/4/14 – 31/8/14 £**
Salaries	52,500	85,250	34,000
Employer costs	2,456	3,246	1,267
Allowances	-	-	-
Expenses	1,305	2,606	309

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 35191/11-15, when the annual report on the delivery of the Disability Strategy for 2013/2014, setting out the actions that all Departments have undertaken under the Disability Strategy in its first year, will be published.
(AQW 36610/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The first Annual Report on the delivery of the Executive's Disability Strategy, setting out the actions that all departments have undertaken during the first year, is currently being developed.

It is anticipated that following Committee consideration and subject to Ministerial and Executive approval, the report will be published later in the autumn.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many victims of the Troubles are being assisted by the Victims and Survivors Service for the treatment of chronic pain; and how this figure compares with the numbers prior to the restriction which required that Disability Living Allowance entitlement was a qualifying factor.
(AQW 36642/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Table 1 outlines the number of Chronic Pain and Disability Support award letters issued and the number of awards paid out in 2013/14. As some clients availed of an award under both Chronic Pain and Disability Support the total number of unique individuals receiving assistance was 902*.

Table 1: 2013/2014 Awards made on basis of assessed and agreed need.

Scheme	**Number of Award Letters Issued**	**Number of Awards Paid**
Chronic Pain	884	805
Disability Support	410	358
Total	**1294**	**1163***

In 2014/15 Chronic Pain and Disability Support have been merged and the new scheme 'Support for the Injured' has been opened to those on High and Middle Rate Care Component of DLA as a result of a troubles/conflict related injury.

Table 2 below shows the number of individuals that the Victims and Survivors Service can support and the number of individuals who have registered with the Service for 2014/15 to date.

Table 2: **2014/2015**

Scheme	**Number of individuals VSS can support**	**Number of individuals who have registered with VSS for 14/15 to date for support**
Support for the Injured – High Rate Care	333	241
Support for the Injured – Middle Rate Care	300	243
Total	**633**	**484**

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why Industrial Injury Benefit is not a qualifying benefit to allow victims to receive assistance from the Victims and Survivors Service in the treatment of chronic pain.
(AQW 36644/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Victims may be eligible for the new scheme, 'Support for the Injured', if they are in receipt of the middle or high rate DLA Care Component. This criterion was introduced as a standard measure and is consistent with the approach used by the Department for Social Development.

Mr McGimpsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proportion of senior civil service posts in their Department is held by females.
(AQO 6744/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are currently 25 senior Civil Service posts within the Department. This includes two vacancies. Seven (30.4%) of the remaining 23 posts are filled by females.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether in the period May 2007 to May 2011 any Rural Development funding, or other departmental funding, was paid to Foyle Recyclers Limited; and, if so, (i) when payment was awarded; (ii) how much was awarded; and (iii) for what purpose was the funding to be used.
(AQW 37398/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Foyle Recyclers Ltd. received funding of £25,000 in 2007 from the LEADER+ Programme for the purchase of equipment to set up a scrap metal recycling plant at Derry Port.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether licence holders under the Mourne Herring Fishery will benefit from the announced scheme by the EU Fisheries Council to permit the industry to bank 25 per cent of the 2014 quota.
(AQW 37410/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Mourne Herring Fishery is a small artisanal fishery with a quota allocation that comes out of the overall Irish Sea herring quota.

Last week the EU Fisheries Council amended the 2014 Total Allowable Catch Regulation (EC) 43/2014 and agreed that exceptionally and only in respect of the stocks that are most severely or directly affected by the Russian embargo, an increase in the percentage of the quantities unused in 2014 could be carried over to 2015. The Irish Sea herring quota is not one of these stocks and the normal arrangements for "banking" unused quota will apply.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the fact that the price of herring has dropped by 40 per cent and that under proposals by the EU Fisheries Council licence holders may bank this year's quota for herring, whether she has any plans to implement a short term compensation scheme for licence holders under the Mourne Herring Fishery.
(AQW 37411/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Mourne herring fishery is a small artisanal fishery that normally operates over a few weeks each autumn. When fish are less plentiful, or the financial returns from the fishery are poor, participants take other fishing opportunities or return to their normal full-time employment.

I therefore have no plans for a compensation scheme.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funding opportunities exist under the Rural Development Programme for the implementation of the new Millisle Village Plan.
(AQW 37486/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 provided funding of £4,770 to develop the village plan for Millisle. This Programme is now closed for applications. However, a new Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 will open for applications next year. This will be delivered by new Local Action Groups that are now being formed. The Programme will provide opportunities for funding projects identified in local village plans if the new LAG's identify this as a priority in their strategy.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of reserve funds held by her Department.
(AQW 37530/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Reserves or Taxpayers' Equity held in the Department is published in its Annual Report and Accounts and details of the Reserves held at the most recent year-end is provided in the table below.

Table 1: Reserves held in DARD

Departmental Reserves balance as at year ended:	**DARD 31/3/14**
General Fund Reserve	£507,321k
Revaluation Reserve	£517,595k
Total Reserves (equals total assets less total liabilities)	**£1,024,916k**

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to improve the quality and clarity of her Department's communications; and whether her Department has links with the Plain English Campaign.
(AQW 37548/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department is continually aiming to improve upon the effective communications which already exist between DARD and its wide customer-base. The way in which the Department communicates and conducts its business will continue to evolve in order to meet the needs of customers and support further growth within the agri-food and rural sectors.

An example of the Department's commitment to improve the quality and clarity of communications is the forthcoming consultation on the "Adoption of Online as the primary Channel for Communicating and Transacting with Customers" (due to commence in November 2014). This will be aimed at improving the way in which the Department engages with applicants on EU area-based schemes and highlights the potential for improvements to the Animal & Public Health Scheme, two significant examples of the services being delivered by DARD which affect a broad range of customers in the farming sector and wider rural community.

DARD has links with the Plain English Campaign Ltd and has regularly used the Campaign to provide training for DARD staff, and to quality assure documents, for example, the Campaign assisted DARD in preparing the 'Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances Scheme' explanatory notes booklet in 2012.

Customers are encouraged to provide feedback in order to help improve future communication.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions the Loughs Agency is taking to support the granting of warrant cards to allow members of the Camowen Community Angling Association to act as Bailiffs for the Upper Camowen River, Omagh.
(AQW 37632/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I understand from the Loughs Agency that it can confirm receipt of an application for the appointment of Private River watchers from the Camowen Community Angling Association. This matter is currently in the hands of the Loughs Agency's Solicitors who are in correspondence with the Solicitors representing the Association.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many fishing rods have been seized by Loughs Agency staff on the Upper Camowen River; (ii) how many cautions have been issued; and (iii) how many prosecutions are (a) pending; and (b) complete.
(AQW 37633/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) The Loughs Agency has seized 2 fishing rods in this area in 2014.

(ii) The Agency has not issued any formal cautions in this area.

(iii) (a) There are 2 case files under consideration for prosecution in this area and (b) No prosecutions have been completed in this area in 2014.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what strategy her Department has in place to reduce the turnaround time for processing single farm payment applications.
(AQW 37714/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has made considerable efforts in recent years to improve Single Farm Payment performance. In 2013, the Department delivered a record payment performance with 90% of claims finalised in December and 96% of claims finalised by the following February. All inspection cases were finalised by April 2014 which was two months earlier than 2013 and four months earlier than 2012. The Department has built upon these successes for 2014. The proportion of claims submitted online has increased from 21.5% in 2013 to 38% in 2014. Inspections have commenced earlier in 2014 and the increase in the proportion of inspections carried out through Control with Remote Sensing will accelerate the throughput of cases. The Department has recognised the importance of an effective and efficient Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) in reducing the level of error in claims made and increasing the level of integration and automation.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what support or funding is available to rural schools to open the school building in evenings to cater for community groups operating classes, such as ICT for farmers and rural dwellers.
(AQW 37895/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I understand that you have tabled a similar question to the Minister for Education.

Under Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 my Department provides a programme of support for farmers and farm families to improve skills and awareness on farm-related issues. This training is co-ordinated by the Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership which is my Department's external delivery agent for Axis 1 Measures.

Currently training is provided on ICT Skills and Health and Safety Awareness at various locations throughout the north of Ireland. To date payments totaling £565.32 have been made to 3 rural primary schools for hire of venues for this training.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the work to upgrade the North Down Coastal Path between Seahill and Cultra, that is being funded by her Department under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme, including details of the work undertaken and timescale for completion.
(AQW 37995/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: North Down Borough Council received funding under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme, through DRAP, to upgrade and make improvements to the North Down Coastal Path at Seahill, and between SeaPark to Cultra.

The Seapark to Cultra phase of the project is complete. Unforeseen delays have been experienced at Seahill but work is progressing. As this is a Strategic Project it is scheduled to complete by 31 December 2014.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the budgets of (i) Foras na Gaeilge; and (ii) the Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch in each of the years since they were established, broken down by the contributions in each year from the (a) Northern Ireland Executive; and (b) government of the Irish Republic.
(AQW 37528/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The North South Language Body, comprising Foras na Gaeilge and the Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch was established on 2 December 1999.

Both Agencies are funded by the Department for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht (DAHG) and the Department for Culture Arts and Leisure. Foras na Gaeilge receives 75% of its funding from DAHG and 25% from DCAL. The Ulster-Scots Agency received 75% of its funding from DCAL and 25% from DAHG.

Foras na Gaeilge also receives funding from the Department for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht for the Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge programme which is delivered solely in the south.

In 2004 Foras na Gaeilge were awarded funding of £86,000 from the Department of Education (DENI) to add a further four steps to the "Step by Step" reading scheme and to prepare a translation of the standard maths examination for use in the North's Irish medium schools.

Since 2009 the Colmcille initiative (a tri partite arrangement between the Executive, Southern government and Scottish government) has been administered by Foras na Gaeilge and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Foras na Gaeilge receives equal amounts of funding for this from the Executive and the Southern government. Funding for both of these initiatives is included in the details provided in the tables, which show the annual budgets, allocated by the Executive and the Southern government to Foras na Gaeilge and the Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch from 2000 to date.

At present, Foras na Gaeilge can only provide the DAHG contributions for 2014 in Euros.

DCAL:DAHG (25%:75%)

Foras na Gaeilge	DCAL	DCRGA/DAHG*	Total
2000	£1,837,700	£4,777,755	£6,358,455
2001	£1,678,356	£7,870,620	£9,548,976
2002	£2,963,243	£8,446,812	£11,410,055
2003	£2,850,368	£9,040,337	£11,890,705
2004	£3,084,857	£9,223,244	£12,308,101
2005	£2,977,366	£8,957,547	£11,934,913
2006	£3,261,164	£9,796,419	£13,057,583
2007	£3,459,391	£10,314,545	£13,773,936
2008	£3613,079	£12,147,651	£15,760,730
2009	£3,885,900	£12,288,294	£16,174,194
2010	£3941,605	£11,697,840	£15,639,445
2011	£3,816,012	£11,607,889	£15,423,901
2012	£3,605,080	£10,671,549	£14,276,629
2013	£3,502,961	£10,519,432	£14,022,393
2014	£2,115,102	€7,790,371	

Other Government Income

Foras na Gaeilge	DCAL	DCRGA/DAHG*	DENI	Total
2000				
2001				
2002				
2003				
2004			£86,000	£86,000
2005	£169,290			£169,290
2006	£45,195			£45,195
2007	£64,346	£53,355		£117,701
2008	£396,556	£2,144,106		£2,540,662
2009	£163,245	£1,583,235		£1,746,480
2010	£93,804	£1,380,511		£1,474,315
2011	£133,164	£1,282,409		£1,415,573
2012	£114,679	£1,138,077		£1,252,756
2013	£137,631	£1,107,774		£1,245,405
2014	£61,424	€815,959		

Total Income

Foras na Gaeilge	DCAL	DCRGA/DAHG*	DENI	Total
2000	£1,837,700	£4,777,755		£6,538,455
2001	£1,678,356	£7,870,620		£9,548,976
2002	£2,963,243	£8,446,812		£11,410,055
2003	£2,850,368	£9,040,337		£11,890,705
2004	£3,084,857	£9,223,244	£86,000	£12,394,101
2005	£3,146,656	£8,957,547		£12,104,203
2006	£4,850,168	£14,370,571		£19,220,739
2007	£3,523,737	£10,367,900		£13,891,637
2008	£3,928,857	£13,855,003		£17,783,860
2009	£4,049,145	£13,871,529		£17,920,674
2010	£4,035,409	£13,078,351		£17,113,760
2011	£3,949,176	£12,889,298		£16,838,474
2012	£3,719,759	£11,809,626		£15,529,385
2013	£3,640,592	£11,627,206		£15,267,798
2014	£2,176,526	€8,606,330		

Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch	DCAL	DCRGA/ DAHG*	Total
2000	£230,623	£76,875	£307,498
2001	£738,881	£245,120	£984,001
2002	£914,550	£304,274	£1,218,824
2003	£1,124,975	£375,918	£1,500,893
2004	£1,334,362	£433,336	£1,767,698
2005	£1,375,708	£444,943	£1,820,651

Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch	DCAL	DCRGA/ DAHG*	Total
2006	£1,587,052	£523,820	£2,110,872
2007	£1,946,069	£627,548	£2,573,617
2008	£2,481,932	£846,112	£3,328,044
2009	£2,304,267	£793,152	£3,097,419
2010	£2,226,694	£756,370	£2,983,064
2011	£2,062,067	£678,969	£2,740,763
2012	£2,022,487	£672,967	£2,695,454
2013	£1,914,095	£637,397	£2,551,492
2014	£1,188,732	£375,963	£1,564,695

* The Department for Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) was formerly known as the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs DCRGA).

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of reserve funds held by her Department.
(AQW 37531/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Used in the accounting sense, reserves equate to the stake the taxpayer has in publicly funded bodies. I have assumed that the question refers to reserves in the narrower sense of cash held by my Department.

The Department does not hold cash reserves. A major objective of my Department's cash management policy is to minimise cash balances held. It does so by making daily drawdowns of cash which are sufficient only to meet its immediate needs.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 36895/11-15 and in relation to the funding provided to Cycling Ireland, how this body apportions funding between different cycling disciplines.
(AQW 37549/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither my Department, nor Sport NI hold information on how Cycling Ireland apportions funding between the different cycling disciplines, as this is an internal matter for that body.

Over the last 3 years, Sport NI has provided funding to the Governing Body of cycling, Cycling Ireland, under the Investing in Performance Sport Programme; the Athlete Investment Programme and more recently the Performancefocus programme.

Funding from Sport NI under its Athlete Investment Programme was provided to Cycling Ireland on the basis of agreed targets and it is required to report on its performance against these. Funding under the Performancefocus Programme for the period 2013-17 has been made on the basis of a 2013 strategic review of High Performance Cycling in Ireland.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the refurbishment of Windsor Park will be complete.
(AQW 37695/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Funding Agreement was issued to the IFA and the successful contractor (O'Hare and McGovern) was appointed in December 2013.

Design development by the contractor is complete and the release of the Construction Notice by the IFA was made on 2 May 2014. Construction works commenced on site on 6 May 2014 after the Irish Cup Final.

Construction work is on-going and progressing well, with the Phase 1 works (construction of the pitch) completed on time for the European Championship Qualifier on 11th October 2014.

Provided that significant delays around any legal issues are avoided, then the Windsor Park development can remain on programme with completion of the construction works planned for October 2015.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the number of work placements in the Upper Bann area that are available to students at the Southern Regional College.
(AQW 37104/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): According to the Southern Regional College, there were 189 work placements in training provision and 942 further education placements in the Upper Bann area in the 2013/14 academic year.

The process of obtaining, monitoring and evaluating work placements takes significant effort by colleges, but is a key element of the student experience and an integral part of their study.

Research emphasises the importance of work placements. In particular, learners benefit from experience of the work environment to complement their main studies. This is also a very effective way for learners to acquire the all-important employability skills required by employers.

My Department's current reviews of further education and youth training are considering how work placements can be included in the most effective way in individual students' programmes of learning.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department has taken to promote areas outside of Greater Belfast as locations for US companies who are seeking to invest in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37392/11-15)

Dr Farry: Working with Invest NI, the Assured Skills programme is designed to help attract new foreign direct investment companies to Northern Ireland by assuring them that the skills they need to be successful are available in Northern Ireland.

Working in partnership with Invest NI ensures the best possible proposition to potential investors. The programme not only delivers a boost to employment but also our local skill base. Assured Skills support is also available to encourage existing companies who are considering expansion.

My department has no input as to where a foreign direct investment company, who is thinking of investing in Northern Ireland, should locate its office. This is a decision entirely for the company with support from Invest NI.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how spending cuts will affect provisions for university students with special education requirements.
(AQW 37465/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise that the current Disabled Students' Allowances for higher education students with special educational requirements will remain in place and I have no plans to change the funding available in light of the spending cuts.

The following is available in academic year 2015/16: A specialist equipment allowance of up to £5,266 for the whole course; a non-medical helper's allowance of up to £20,938 per year; a general allowance of up to £1,759 per year to help towards other disability related spending such a printer cartridges and Braille paper; and, any extra travel costs the student may have to pay to attend University or College because of their disability.

In their Widening Access and Participation Plans, all of the Higher Education Institutions have identified students with learning difficulties / disabilities as a target group for interventions aimed at raising aspiration and educational attainment and have set out their participation targets for these students for each academic year in the period 2015/16 – 2016/17. The institutions also detailed the additional measures they plan to introduce to support their retention and completion rates. The above support measures will be funded out of the tuition fee income raised by each institution and since there will be no reduction in tuition fee levels the Department would not anticipate any reduction in the support provided by institutions to students from disadvantaged backgrounds including students with special education requirements.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the number of people completing Post Graduate Diplomas in Education in the last three years, compared with the number of newly created jobs in this field.
(AQW 37467/11-15)

Dr Farry: In Northern Ireland, the post-graduate qualification for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) rather than a diploma. At undergraduate level a Bachelor of Education (BEd) is the relevant qualification.

For the 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 academic years, the number of graduates achieving a PGCE is detailed below:

	Queen's	Ulster	Stranmillis	St Mary's	Open University	Total
2010/11	165	140	15	20	15	355
2011/12	165	140	15	20	10	355
2012/13	130	110	15	20	20	300

Figures in this table have been rounded to the nearest 5.

My Department's responsibility for teacher education relates to resourcing the ITE providers to deliver both the PGCE and BEd programmes. Responsibility for determining the number of teachers required falls to the Minister of Education. My Department does not therefore hold information on the number of newly created jobs in this field.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Development in relation to improving the rights of student tenants in private houses.
(AQW 37474/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides funding to the Higher Education Institutions for teaching and learning and research purposes. The Universities are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including those relating to student accommodation.

I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Social Development in relation to improving the rights of student tenants in private houses. However, I am advised that the Department for Social Development was present at recent University and further education college 'freshers' events across Northern Ireland and communicated directly with students about the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords particularly in relation to the Tenancy Deposit Scheme and Landlord Registration.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what actions he has taken to preserve and expand full time and part time courses offered by further and higher education colleges, especially in respect of (i) the future impact on the local economy and workforce; and (ii) the health benefits for course participants.
(AQW 37491/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further education colleges are key deliverers of my Department's skills strategy and of the wider economic strategy for Northern Ireland. Providing individuals with the skills to obtain a job or to progress within employment is one of the best ways to support learners and impact on the local economy and workforce.

My Department promotes further and higher education actively through the 'Skills to Succeed' communications campaign, including strands on Essential Skills, Apprenticeships, Training for Success, Foundation Degrees and 'Reach Higher' (encouraging wider participation in higher education).

Using the latest available validated data, over the period 2010/11 – 2012/13 both funding and enrolments in further education have increased. The number of funded further education enrolments has grown by over 6,000 to 100,266 in 2012-13, an increase of 8.92%. Furthermore, funding has risen by £1.3m, a growth of 1.85% over the period.

It is also worth noting that between 2007/08 and 2012/13 there was an increase in the proportion of the Department's funded further education enrolments that lead to qualifications on the regulated qualifications frameworks – from 63% to 80%.

Under the current strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, Further Education Means Business, the primary purpose of further education colleges is to strengthen and support economic and workforce development, to advance individuals' skills and learning and to meet the skills needs of employers.

My Department's curriculum policy for further education has been developed to ensure that through their curriculum colleges achieve an appropriate balance between provision that strengthens economic and workforce development and enhances social cohesion.

Therefore, I have been able to preserve and expand further education provision in recent years. However, this will become increasingly difficult in the current very difficult budgetary position.

Finally, colleges offer provision to students of all ages. However, while any associated health benefits for participants are to be welcomed, this is not the main responsibility of my Department.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the level of reserve funds held by his Department.
(AQW 37533/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department does not hold any budgeting reserves. Accounting reserves are reflected in the Department's Statement of Financial Position and do not represent reserves held to fund future projects.

The Departments Resource Accounts at 31 March 2014 detail the Statement of Financial Position regarding Taxpayers' Equity and other reserves as follows:

	£'000
General Fund	1,438,523
Revaluation Reserve	11
Total equity	**1,438,534**

The General Fund of £1.4b represents the total assets less liabilities of the Department excluding the Revaluation Reserve, it is a technical accounting reserve and does not represent funds available for expenditure purposes.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the range of programmes delivered through The Idea Centre in the Omagh Campus of South West College; and how The Idea Centre is helping to increase the competitiveness of local students in their pursuit of employment.
(AQW 37590/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Idea Centre is an interactive learning and exhibition space where South West College students, post-primary school children, community groups and local industry are encouraged to interact and participate in a creative process of generating ideas and rapidly creating prototypes to establish proof of concept.

Students and staff work together to identify problems and find solutions. Students learn by 'doing'. They identify the problem and work together to develop a range of possible solutions. Students have the opportunity to use the latest technology to develop solutions, thereby providing them with the skills, experience and knowledge needed to succeed in industry and to help them become more competitive in the job market.

The Centre delivered 186 classes/workshops and 17 events between September 2013 and May 2014, involving around 2,100 students, covering Design Process and Digital Fabrication, and areas such as Laser Cutting, 3D Printing, CNC Machining and Design Thinking.

Other examples include Coder Do Jo, providing an opportunity for children to come to learn about coding through play. Projects include creating computer games using scratch and HTML, 3D scanning and 3D printing and also building 3D printers.

The Idea Centre also opens as a MakerSpace which enables members of the local community to work on their own projects, with Idea Centre staff on hand to provide assistance and training on all available equipment.

These classes provide students and the wider community with the opportunity to gain skills central to both economic and social well-being, providing a close fit with elements of the revised curriculum and associated curriculum entitled framework, and supporting skills development to provide a value-added, highly skilled, innovative and enterprising economy.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the reduction in part time employment opportunities for further and higher education students, as a result of the growing under unemployment of graduates and skilled workers, on the ability of students to cope financially.
(AQW 37595/11-15)

Dr Farry: I recognise that the economic downturn has had an impact on employment opportunities and on family incomes. I am however encouraged by recent statistical data published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency which has confirmed that the Northern Ireland economy continues to improve. In the latest summary of the economic and labour market indicators, for example, September data shows growth in employment for the fifteenth consecutive month. I accept however that many students and their families continue to face financial hardship and I acknowledge the importance of the financial support my Department provides to students in both further and higher education.

In order to alleviate the pressures faced by both Higher and Further Education students I have ensured that appropriate funding is available to help remove financial barriers to education. My Department, through Student Finance NI, provides financial support for students attending higher education courses. In academic year 2014/15 Northern Ireland domiciled students studying full time are eligible for a non-means tested tuition fee loan of up to £3,685 if they are studying in Northern Ireland or up to £9,000 if studying in Great Britain.

Students following vocational courses at further education colleges may be eligible for financial support through Further Education Awards and / or college Hardship Funds, both of which are funded by my Department. Both funds are means-tested to ensure that support is directed at those students most in need and who would, otherwise, not be able to attend a further education college. The maximum amount payable through a combination of both FE Awards and Hardship Funds is £3,500 per annum in total. Over the last five years, there has been a net increase of approximately £800,000 of the total amount available in the combined funds. This increase in the overall budget has ensured that applications for support are not refused due to lack of available funding.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what efforts his Department is making to increase the provision of foundation and undergraduate degrees onffer at the Enniskillen campus of the South West College.
(AQW 37596/11-15)

Dr Farry: South West College's allocation of full-time higher education places has increased from 186 in academic year 2008/09 to 565 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. This includes 68 places that I awarded in academic year 2013/14 and an extra 23 places awarded in the 2014/15 academic year, to accommodate new Foundation degree qualifications in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. These allocations of additional places demonstrate my continuing commitment to increasing higher education provision in the south west.

South West College has received the largest increase in allocation of full-time higher education places across the sector, in recognition of its excellent performance as a provider of higher education in further education across a range of metrics, including the provision of STEM courses and Foundation Degrees.

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 committed to carrying out further reviews of college allocations in the future and to providing additional places if resources can be identified, but there can be no guarantee that any additional full-time places would be allocated to South West College.

At the same time my Department does not place a cap on part-time higher education places and expansion of that provision therefore offers South West College another route to increase higher education opportunities at the Enniskillen campus.

In Graduating to Success, the higher education strategy, my Department is committed to developing a pilot scheme for the creation of university bases at the FE Colleges.

The aim is to improve rural access to higher education, in partnership between the higher education and further education sectors. Project 10 of this strategy involves a pilot in South West College. Progress has been made with SWC to deliver programmes through blended / distance learning and summer schools.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 36921/11-15, whether he recognises a link between recreational courses provided at Regional Colleges and public health.
(AQW 37686/11-15)

Dr Farry: As I have indicated in recent responses to similar questions, public health is not my Department's responsibility. However, any health benefits that are associated with individuals' participation on further education provision of any type are to be welcomed.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what correspondence he has had with the University of Ulster on deploying student places from Coleraine to Magee, in order to meet the 'One Plan' target.
(AQW 37702/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have on several occasions mentioned publicly and in correspondence that the University of Ulster is at liberty to deploy its MaSN allocation across its campuses as it sees fit. I have asked the University to consider moving places to the Magee campus in order to help achieve the One Plan interim target of 1,000 additional undergraduate places by 2015. However, I have not suggested from which campus the places should be moved as that is a matter entirely for the University.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many places the University of Ulster at Coleraine has lost to the Magee campus, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37704/11-15)

Dr Farry: This is not information that my Department holds. However, the University of Ulster has confirmed that over the last three years, no places have been lost from the Coleraine campus to the Magee campus.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) male; and (ii) female (a) Research Associates; (b) Senior Research Associates; and (c) Research Fellows in each local university.
(AQW 37711/11-15)

Dr Farry: The breakdown of researchers in our local universities, using each university's staffing structure, is set out below. It should be noted that not all of the job titles used in the question are applicable to Northern Ireland universities.

University of Ulster

Job Title	Male	Female	Total
Research Assistant	7	9	16
Research Associate	62	53	115
Research Fellow	10	10	20
Senior Research Fellow	3	2	5
Total	**82**	**74**	**156**

Queen's University

Job Title	Male	Female	Total
Research Assistant	30	40	70
Research Fellow	209	208	417
Senior Research Fellow	16	6	22
Total	**255**	**254**	**509**

Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College have advised that they do not employ staff specifically as researchers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what opportunities exist for universities to use their reserves to meet funding shortfalls.
(AQW 37759/11-15)

Dr Farry: Universities are expected to earn surpluses of between 3% and 5% per annum to ensure their ongoing sustainability. The surpluses contribute to the universities' reserves position. Reserves represent income that is retained by the universities but they are not the same as cash. To realise cash, assets need to be sold. Whilst the universities can draw on their reserves, this is a short-term measure only. If the universities were to use their reserves to fund their operations over the medium to long-term, this will damage their ability to invest in new facilities and equipment for students and staff, to manage financial risk, to manage cashflow, to invest in curriculum development and to maintain existing facilities for students and staff. Once used, the reserves are gone and cannot be easily replaced. Drawing on reserves in time of financial need is a last resort and if we expect our universities to do this, we may reconcile ourselves to having to smaller, less competitive and insular universities which is not in the best interests of Northern Ireland.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the level of reserves held by each of the local universities.
(AQW 37771/11-15)

Dr Farry: The latest published and audited figures available for the two local universities is at 31 July 2013. At that date their reserves position is show in the table below.

The position as at 31 July 2014 will not be available until early December.

	Queen's University £'000s	**University of Ulster £'000s**
Income and Expenditure Reserve	133,042	118,579
Pension reserve	(49,937)	(36,914)
Revaluation reserve	22,169	83,578
Total	**105,274**	**165,243**

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many additional PhD places, which are financially supported by business and philanthropy, his Department has matched funding for in each year since 2012.
(AQW 37795/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department funds a baseline number of 495 postgraduate awards (PGAs) each year. Through the Higher Education strategy, I committed to considering funding additional places in areas of economic relevance and matching funding for places which are financially supported by business and philanthropy. The overall outcome reflected in the Strategy was to double the number of awards to 1,000 by 2020.

In response to this commitment, I have secured resources for an additional 351 PGAs, which are being funded from the Executive's Jobs and Economy Initiative and from my Department's Higher Education resources. These additional PGAs are being phased in from academic year 2013/14 at the rate of 117 per year and, rather than specifically match funding business or philanthropy places, the additional PGAs are targeted towards subjects deemed to be economically relevant.

Based on the current arrangements, the Department will be directly funding 846 postgraduate awards by 2015/16.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many additional PhD places his Department has provided funding for in areas of economic relevance, since 2012.
(AQW 37800/11-15)

Dr Farry: Under the Jobs and Economy Initiative and the Higher Education Strategy, I secured funding for a further 351 additional PhD places, all of which are in areas of economic relevance. Starting in 2013/14, in line with the previous approach, these have been phased in at a rate of 117 per year, meaning that, at this point, my Department is providing funding for 234 additional PhDs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what monetary reserves are held by Stranmillis College.
(AQW 37804/11-15)

Dr Farry: The latest set of audited published accounts available for Stranmillis University College are as at 31 July 2013. At that time the College reported cash at bank and in hand of £445,085. The position as at 31 July 2014 is due to be reported by the College in early December.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by his Department.
(AQW 37808/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not own any land.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what monetary reserves are held by Queen's University Belfast.
(AQW 37903/11-15)

Dr Farry: The latest set of audited published accounts available for Queen's University and St. Mary's University College are as at 31 July 2013. At that time Queen's University reported cash at bank and in hand of £10.008m whilst St Mary's reported £3.804m. The position as at 31 July 2014 is due to be reported by both institutions in early December.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what monetary reserves are held by the South Eastern Regional College.
(AQW 37905/11-15)

Dr Farry: The six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland had cash balances as at the 31st July 2013 as follows:

College	£'000
Belfast Metropolitan College	6,204
Northern Regional College	2,226
North West Regional College	8,248
South Eastern Regional College	1,451
Southern Regional College	11,757
South West College	6,264

The figures are the cash at bank and in hand balances, extracted from the most recent audited financial statements available. These financial statements are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and are also available on the individual college websites.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what monetary reserves are held by Belfast Metropolitan College.
(AQW 37906/11-15)

Dr Farry: The six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland had cash balances as at the 31st July 2013 as follows:

College	£'000
Belfast Metropolitan College	6,204
Northern Regional College	2,226
North West Regional College	8,248
South Eastern Regional College	1,451
Southern Regional College	11,757
South West College	6,264

The figures are the cash at bank and in hand balances, extracted from the most recent audited financial statements available. These financial statements are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and are also available on the individual college websites.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what monetary reserves are held by Northern Regional College.
(AQW 37907/11-15)

Dr Farry: The six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland had cash balances as at the 31st July 2013 as follows:

College	£'000
Belfast Metropolitan College	6,204
Northern Regional College	2,226
North West Regional College	8,248
South Eastern Regional College	1,451
Southern Regional College	11,757
South West College	6,264

The figures are the cash at bank and in hand balances, extracted from the most recent audited financial statements available. These financial statements are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and are also available on the individual college websites.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the steps his Department is taking to improve job opportunities for people with degrees in science and technology; and (ii) whether his Department has worked with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in order to see job growth in this sector.
(AQW 37935/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) Steps to improve job opportunities

Developing the skills of our current and future workforce will be essential if we are to achieve our economic aspirations of export led economic growth.

The Department's Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and the STEM Strategy both highlight the need to increase the number of people qualifying from local higher education institutions with graduate and post graduate level qualifications in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

With the world becoming increasingly dependent on technology, it is envisaged that the range of businesses opportunities in these areas will grow significantly. If we are to ensure a steady pipeline of STEM skills for the future and support these economic prospects it is essential that our young people are encouraged to study STEM subjects at school, college and university. The business community, the education sector and my Department will all continue to have a fundamental role to play if we are to achieve our STEM aspirations. In particular, I have brought together government, academia and local employers in the areas of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Services; Food and Drink Manufacturing and Processing; and Information and Communication Technology, and through Ministerial led groups I am working with them to identify and address skills needs in these sectors.

Other key achievements include: an additional increase of 1,350 undergraduate places and 350 post graduate places in STEM subjects; the establishment of industry backed scholarships in the computing and engineering sectors; a wide range of skills intervention programmes such as academies in software testing, data analytics, cloud computing, a computer numerical control machining conversion course, and ICT apprenticeships.

(ii) Working with DETI

My Department works closely with both DETI and InvestNI in the development of skills provision in order to achieve economic goals, with particular reference to the importance of science and technology.

In particular, working in partnership with Invest NI, the Assured Skills programme is designed to help attract new foreign direct investment companies to Northern Ireland by assuring them that the skills they need to be successful are available in Northern Ireland, and also to support existing companies who are considering expansion.

The job creation and skills development potential that the Assured Skills programme brings is directly linked to the Programme for Government, with particular emphasis on the following key commitments:

- contribute to rising levels of employment by supporting the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs;
- achieve £1 billion of investment in the Northern Ireland economy; and
- increase uptake in economically relevant Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) places.

Since the commencement of the Assured Skills programme (2010/11) my Department has been involved in the creation of 3,736 potential new jobs. When all of the jobs are created they will be worth an additional £96m per year to the economy. The projects are mainly in the Financial Services, ICT, Legal Services and advanced manufacturing sectors. By the very nature of the jobs created a considerable number of these jobs will be in IT.

Further Assured Skills interventions are designed to enhance the capability of Northern Ireland in emerging skills areas, through either up-skilling lecturers, providing conversion courses for graduates in economically important sectors, or creating pools of potential employees with the skills that investors want, for example in cloud computing, software testing and data analytics.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what cash reserves are held by the North West Regional College.
(AQW 37964/11-15)

Dr Farry: The six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland had cash balances as at the 31st July 2013 as follows:

College	£'000
Belfast Metropolitan College	6,204
Northern Regional College	2,226
North West Regional College	8,248

College	£'000
South Eastern Regional College	1,451
Southern Regional College	11,757
South West College	6,264

The figures are the cash at bank and in hand balances, extracted from the most recent audited financial statements available. These financial statements are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and are also available on the individual college websites.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what cash reserves are held by the Southern Regional College. **(AQW 37965/11-15)**

Dr Farry: The six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland had cash balances as at the 31st July 2013 as follows:

College	£'000
Belfast Metropolitan College	6,204
Northern Regional College	2,226
North West Regional College	8,248
South Eastern Regional College	1,451
Southern Regional College	11,757
South West College	6,264

The figures are the cash at bank and in hand balances, extracted from the most recent audited financial statements available. These financial statements are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and are also available on the individual college websites.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what cash reserves are held by the South West Regional College. **(AQW 37966/11-15)**

Dr Farry: The six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland had cash balances as at the 31st July 2013 as follows:

College	£'000
Belfast Metropolitan College	6,204
Northern Regional College	2,226
North West Regional College	8,248
South Eastern Regional College	1,451
Southern Regional College	11,757
South West College	6,264

The figures are the cash at bank and in hand balances, extracted from the most recent audited financial statements available. These financial statements are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and are also available on the individual college websites.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs created by international investors with assistance from InvestNI in each parliamentary constituency in (i) 2011-12; (ii) 2012-13; and (iii) 2013-14. **(AQW 36637/11-15)**

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Information relating to job creation is commercially sensitive at business level while a project is still 'live'. In order to ensure that individual companies are not identifiable, Invest NI therefore applies statistical disclosure controls.

In Foyle, 214 jobs were created by international investors in 2011-12 and 134 in 2012-13.

In 2012-13, 15 jobs were created in Fermanagh & South Tyrone and 96 in Mid-Ulster.

In Belfast East, there were 333 jobs created by international investors in 2011-12, 426 in 2012-13 and 649 in 2013-14. In Belfast South there were 428 jobs created in 2011-12, 522 in 2012-13 and 70 in 2013-14, whilst, in Belfast North, there were 69 jobs created in 2011-12.

Specific information for other years and PCA's cannot be provided as, in these instances, there would be less than 5 companies in each individual year. Information relating to job creation by specific companies will become publically available once a project is complete and the control period has ended.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions are planned to address the lack of Grade A Type Office Accommodation for potential investors.
(AQW 37484/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The availability of suitable office accommodation is an important part of Northern Ireland's investment proposition. I am conscious of the concerns that have been raised from various quarters over the current level of availability.

An Invest NI commissioned review of the commercial property market has recently completed and the organisation is currently considering its findings and recommendations. Central to this was a need to ascertain the nature and extent of any market failure and whether government intervention would result in any demonstrable market advantage.

Once Invest NI has completed its deliberations it will decide on the most appropriate course of action. It does, however, remain of the opinion that the current level of availability of Grade A office space is not negatively affecting its ability to secure investment projects.

There have been a number of recent positive announcements concerning both new Grade A office developments and the refurbishment of existing office stock. Once completed these will be welcome additions to the local office market and can only enhance Northern Ireland's attractiveness as an investment location.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the road haulage contractors who have applied for financial support from InvestNI in each of the last five years.
(AQW 37494/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Below is a list of transport companies who have applied for Invest NI financial or advisory support in each of the last five years.

2009-10
- McCulla (Ireland) Limited
- Dsv Road Limited

2010-11
- McKnight Transport Limited
- McCulla (Ireland) Limited

2011-12
- M.B. Freight Forwarding Limited
- McCulla (Ireland) Limited
- Countrywide Freight Group
- Hawkes Transport

2012-13
- Derry Refrigerated Transport Limited
- McCulla (Ireland) Limited
- Montgomery Distribution Limited
- PRM Logistics Limited
- Roadliner International
- Sawyers Transport

2013-14
- Derry Refrigerated Transport Limited
- McCulla (Ireland) Limited
- McMullan International Logistics

Donnelly Transport In line with European guidelines, particularly due to issues with displacement, Invest NI is, in the vast majority of cases, limited to the provision of advisory support to companies operating within the haulage sector.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures have been put in place by her Department to ensure that companies with a mineral prospecting licence comply with the licence terms; and to detail the implications should a company breach the terms.
(AQW 37519/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Licensee's proposed work programme is detailed in the terms and conditions of the Mineral Prospecting Licence as issued by my Department under section 11 of the Mineral Development Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.

Licensees must provide my Department with an annual report on the results of the work programme. The Department assesses this annual report to satisfy itself that the Licensee has fully observed and performed the terms and conditions of the licence.

In addition Licensees are required to furnish DETI with a detailed Annual Auditor's statement.

Each Licence is treated on its own merits. In the event of breach or non–observance by a Licensee of any of the terms and conditions of a Licence, DETI has the power to revoke the licence under the Mineral Development (Applications, Fees and Model Clauses) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1970.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's support for credit unions; and to outline her Department's vision for any increased services which could be delivered by local credit unions in the future.
(AQW 37592/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recognise the importance of a thriving, and growing, credit union sector. My Department has taken the lead in introducing reforms which have placed credit unions in Northern Ireland on a more secure footing. I intend to build on the good work already done, and to continue the reform process by removing further restrictions on Northern Ireland credit unions and thereby permit them to expand the range of their activities, and reach out to new groups.

It will be for each credit union to determine the range of services they are able to provide in meeting the needs of their current and future members.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what impact the cancellation of Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Tourism Events Fund for 2014-16 will have on events in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballymena; and (iii) Moyle council areas.
(AQW 37635/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There is no way to gauge impact at present.

Currently international events which straddle these areas have already received 3 year funding offers from 2014 and will not be affected by the current funding situation. Letters' of Offer and contractual commitments have already been issued and signed.

The nature of the Events Sponsorship Fund is that organisers apply to the fund annually and therefore there is never any guarantee of receiving funding. When applicants apply to the scheme, applications are assessed alongside all the other applications through a competitive process therefore no one has ever any guarantee of funding any year.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she expects the enterprise zone in Coleraine to be confirmed by Her Majesty's Treasury.
(AQW 37643/11-15)

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 and it is anticipated that formal designation of the zone by HMT will be progressed as soon as those discussions have concluded.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the success of the Giro d'Italia, whether her Department has had any discussions with the relevant bodies on the possibility of hosting stages of the Tour de France.
(AQW 37706/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is currently implementing the Events Strategic Vision to 2020 and working in partnership with key stakeholders to identify and bid for major global events and achieve the objective of attracting at least one major event per annum.

As with all major global events, any future event will require a dedicated budget to enable bidding to take place and for an event to be secured.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQO 6832/11-15, why a number of the portfolio companies are facing winding up proceedings from the fund manager E Synergy; and what action InvestNI is taking to address this situation.
(AQW 37733/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is aware that E-Synergy is pursuing certain portfolio companies in respect of outstanding debts. Invest NI has requested that E-Synergy does not pursue these debts and a meeting has been arranged between E-Synergy directors and Invest NI officials to discuss how this issue will be resolved.

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the plans, including the timeframe, to ease visa restrictions for Chinese visitors.
(AQW 37870/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The British-Irish Visa Scheme was officially announced by the UK and Irish Governments on 6th October 2014 and will be introduced in the autumn.

Under the first phase of this scheme Indian and Chinese nationals applying in their countries of origin (India and China respectively) will be able to visit the UK and Ireland using one visa. This will remove the need for Indian and Chinese nationals visiting Northern Ireland to apply for a separate visa to travel onto the Republic of Ireland, and vice versa.

This promotes travel throughout the island as a whole, with a view to promoting tourism here. Subject to the success of this first phase consideration will be given to further expansion of the scheme to other nationalities.

Department of the Environment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment whether Regulation 13(I) of the Public Service Vehicles Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1985 is unenforceable.
(AQW 37322/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Regulation 13 (I) of the 1985 PSV Regulations enables my Department to endorse a condition on a PSV Vehicle Licence that prohibits the vehicle to which the licence refers from waiting in an area outside 45m from the licensee's place of business.

In practical terms it would not be possible to have the large number of taxis that are often affiliated to licensed taxi operators wait within a 45m distance from their place of business nor would parking restrictions necessarily afford compliance with such a requirement.

Therefore, the Department has never endorsed or imposed such a condition on a PSV Vehicle Licence.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the implications for Local Government Reform and for prospective developers/investors seeking the certainty that a 'plan led' system provides to the business community, following the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's initiation of judicial review proceedings against his decision to adopt the Belfast Metropolitan Action Plan.
(AQW 37452/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Given that the Adoption of BMAP is subject to current legal proceedings it would be inappropriate for me to make any specific comment until these proceedings have been concluded.

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 will come into effect on 1 April 2015 when planning powers transfer to local councils. In making any determination under the Act, regard is to be had to the local development plan, and the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is commonly referred to as being 'plan-led'.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has sought the creation of a dedicated telephone number for (i) elected representatives; and (ii) car dealers to contact the Driver and Vehicle Agency given the recent transfer of services to Swansea.
(AQW 37473/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Vehicle registration and licensing services were centralised within the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea on 21 July 2014. From that date, responsibility for the delivery of vehicle registration and vehicle excise duty in the North transferred to DVLA.

My officials wrote to local elected representatives prior to centralisation, setting out contact details for DVLA. There is a dedicated telephone number and dedicated email address for MPs and other elected representatives, including MLAs, to contact DVLA on behalf of their constituents. Emails should be sent to dvlaministerials@dvla.gsi.gov.uk, alternatively the telephone number is 01792 788585.

In addition, commercial customers have various means of contacting DVLA:

- **General vehicles enquiry line** - Individual enquiries regarding specific applications should be addressed via our Contact Centre's general vehicles enquiry line telephone number 0300 790 6802. The general enquiry line is open Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm and Saturday between 8am to 2pm.

- **General vehicles enquiry email** - Alternatively general vehicle enquiries can be submitted via email at https://emaildvla.direct.gov.uk/emaildvla/cegemail/dvla/en/index.html. The email service is offered by our Contact Centre and is operational Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm and Saturday between 8am to 2pm.
- **Trade licence plate enquiries** - Commercial customers with trade licence plate enquiries have a dedicated team that they can contact on **0300 300 1495**, phone lines are open between 8.30am and 4.30pm on Monday to Friday. This number is for checking the progress of trade licensing applications only. Alternatively they can contact the team to check the progress of an application via email on TradeLicensing@dvla.gsi.gov.uk.
- **Commercial Vehicles Team** – deal with commercial fleet companies, where that company has registered their fleet with DVLA, enquiries can be made on telephone number **0300 083 0016** or via email fleetshd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk. Phone lines are open between 8.00am and 4.30pm on Monday to Friday. This number can also be used for companies wishing to join the fleet company scheme.
- **AFRL** - Commercial customers who use the Automated First Registration and Licensing service are able to contact a dedicated team with enquiries regarding use of the system on **0300 123 1345** option 1 or via email to afrl@vla.gsi.gov.uk. This service is available during office hours.

In addition, as an interim measure, there is a dedicated email address for Northern Ireland commercial and general customers to offer support during the change in processes and procedures, NIEVS.oproject@dvla.gsi.gov.uk . This email is still available for general change enquiries but is expected to close at the end of the year.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment why the two main private hire taxi companies were given a special dispensation to dispose of booking records after six weeks, instead of the regulation six months; and to detail who authorised this dispensation.
(AQW 37480/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There were no private hire taxi companies given a special dispensation to dispose of booking records after six weeks.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the role of the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) within Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) enforcement; and how many occasions CJI has completed inspections of DVA enforcement, including the dates of inspection, from 2007 to date.
(AQW 37482/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) assesses the contribution that the Department of the Environment and its executive agencies are making to the criminal justice system including how it carries out its regulatory responsibilities in protecting the environment and improving road safety.

The CJI carried out an inspection of the Department of the Environment and its agencies in 2007 with a follow up review of inspection recommendations completed in November 2011.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment what funding opportunities exist for the implementation of projects within the new Millisle Village Plan.
(AQW 37485/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Coastal Communities Fund (CCF) promotes sustainable economic growth and jobs in coastal communities. The scheme therefore constitutes a funding opportunity for the implementation of the Millisle Village Plan.

The current round of funding for this scheme has now closed, however the scheme may re-open in the future if available funding is not fully utilised and the fund is extended beyond 2017.

No other funding opportunities currently exist in my Department for the implementation of projects within the new Millisle Village Plan.

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the status of a Conservation Officers report when determining a planning application within a Conservation Area.
(AQW 37492/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A Conservation Officer's report is an important material consideration in assessing any consent or application within a Conservation Area.

It is necessary to give full regard to all material considerations including the policy guidance set down within Planning Policy Statement 6 – Planning Archaeology and the Built Heritage - Chapter 7.0; the advice and guidance in the relevant Conservation Area Document; the relevant Development Plan; consultee responses; Council views; objections and any other representations made.

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment whether it is obligatory for the Planning Office to request a report from the Conservation Officer when considering a planning application within a Conservation Area.
(AQW 37493/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas in accordance with (Article 50 (5)) of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. In exercising this duty Conservation Officers must be consulted on all planning applications and consents within Conservation Areas.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on plans to review legislation regarding dilapidated buildings and neglected sites, in order to provide the new councils with an effective legislative framework for addressing and reducing the negative impacts caused by the sites.
(AQW 37505/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A discussion document on legislation regarding dilapidated/dangerous buildings and neglected sites was issued to key stakeholders on 31 March 2014 with a request for responses by 30 June. By the closing date 20 substantive responses had been received, primarily from the local government sector, highlighting a range of complex policy and legal issues. A synopsis of these responses has been prepared and is available to view on the DOE website. Officials are currently in the process of engaging with stakeholders to discuss these issues with a view to issuing a formal public consultation on policy proposals by 31 March 2015. The link between dilapidation and anti-social behaviour is one of the important issues under consideration and I am committed to ensuring that District Councils have access to effective and fit for purpose legislation to address this and other significant issues throughout Northern Ireland. Another DOE initiative, the Dereliction Intervention Funding programme, has been accessed to great effect by a number of councils, including those within the East Londonderry constituency, and it is hoped that further funds for this scheme will be made available in the future.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to address dilapidated buildings in East Londonderry, which attract anti-social behaviour, in order to maintain the area as an attractive tourist destination.
(AQW 37507/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A discussion document on legislation regarding dilapidated/dangerous buildings and neglected sites was issued to key stakeholders on 31 March 2014 with a request for responses by 30 June. By the closing date 20 substantive responses had been received, primarily from the local government sector, highlighting a range of complex policy and legal issues. A synopsis of these responses has been prepared and is available to view on the DOE website. Officials are currently in the process of engaging with stakeholders to discuss these issues with a view to issuing a formal public consultation on policy proposals by 31 March 2015. The link between dilapidation and anti-social behaviour is one of the important issues under consideration and I am committed to ensuring that District Councils have access to effective and fit for purpose legislation to address this and other significant issues throughout Northern Ireland. Another DOE initiative, the Dereliction Intervention Funding programme, has been accessed to great effect by a number of councils, including those within the East Londonderry constituency, and it is hoped that further funds for this scheme will be made available in the future.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of times he sought to present the matter of the adoption of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan to the Northern Ireland Executive; and what reasons were given by the Executive for its failure to engage with his Department.
(AQW 37518/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This is already a matter of public record. I would refer the member to my oral statement on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan which I made to the Assembly on 8 September 2014.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 35963/11-15, whether his Department has set aside the requirement for planning permission for sand extraction taking place in Lough Neagh Special Protection Area in favour of pre-1972 onshore operations in order to facilitate the granting of Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS) certificates, and in so doing, whether this facilitated the circumventing of the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitats and Wild Birds Directives.
(AQW 37520/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have previously advised that my Department is aware of the unauthorised sand dredging operations on the Lough and my officials have set about regulating this activity.

Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme certificates were issued following confirmation from Planning Service and other regulatory authorities that sites were operating within the regulatory framework. This assessment was based upon the on shore operations being lawful.

NIEA monitors the conservation status of the site selection features of Lough Neagh SPA. In the last 2 monitoring rounds a number of features were in unfavourable condition. In 2004, 6 site selection features were considered ‘favourable’ and 5 ‘unfavourable’. While in the most recent conservation assessment 7 selection features were ‘favourable’ and 5 ‘unfavourable’. (One new feature was added during a review of the SPA).

Of the ‘unfavourable’ features 4 are related to declines in diving duck populations, which research shows is unlikely to be related to sand extraction and one is related to international declines in Bewicks swans.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the recent work completed by his Department to improve bathing water on the Lecale coastline; (ii) how many Lecale beaches currently meet Northern Ireland Environment Agency standards to be designated as bathing waters; and (iii) when these beaches will be designated as healthy bathing waters.
(AQW 37537/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is the competent authority for identifying bathing waters in Northern Ireland. Implementation of any treatment works or upgrades are the responsibility of Northern Ireland Water, the provider of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.

In order to meet the requirements of a number of European Directives with the objective of protecting the water environment, there are 7 Waste Water Treatment Works delivering primary or secondary treated sewage to the Lecale coastline. These treatments remove polluting organic material from waste water.

There are currently 23 formally identified bathing waters in Northern Ireland, one of which is Tyrella on the Lecale coastline. The bathing water result for Tyrella for 2014 was "Excellent". This bathing water has consistently been assessed as "Excellent" since 1998.

For a site to become listed as a formally identified bathing water it must first be nominated and accepted as a candidate bathing water. The main criteria to be met for a nominated site to be listed as a candidate bathing water are as follows:

- Evidence of usage – 45 bathers on 1 occasion or 100 beach users on 2 occasions;
- Confirmation that bathing is not prohibited or inadvisable for safety reasons;
- Confirmation from an appropriate body that they are willing to take on bathing water operator responsibilities; and
- Provision of a bathing water management plan which should provide details of facilities at the site.

Nominations for candidate bathing waters can be made to the Department at anytime. However, the Department will be writing to councils and stakeholders in early 2015, inviting nominations for consideration in the next formal review of bathing waters, scheduled for completion in 2017. Nominations will be requested to be with the Department by the end of April 2015, to allow monitoring and usage surveys to be carried out in the 2015 and 2016 bathing water seasons.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to the pumping of raw sewage into bathing waters on the Lecale coastline.
(AQW 37538/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to the pumping of raw sewage into bathing waters on the Lecale coastline. I can confirm that no raw sewage is discharged into bathing waters on the Lecale coastline. All discharges from waste water treatment works are subject to either primary or secondary treatment.

My officials in NIEA work in conjunction with officials from both the Department for Regional Development and Northern Ireland Water on the identification and prioritisation of NIW assets and non-compliant works which require investment within the overall Price Control Regime. The prioritisation programme focuses on those works which are not compliant with the quality standards set within the consents to discharge.

Funding has been made available for any necessary upgrades for Ardglass and Ballyhornan Waste Water Treatment Works within the Price Control (PC) process.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment how many sanctions or penalties his Department have imposed on NI Water in relation to the mismanagement of waste water in the South Down area.
(AQW 37539/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In the last three years the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has taken successful prosecutions against Northern Ireland Water for causing pollution from two wastewater treatment works, one water treatment works and three sewage pumping stations in the South Down Constituency. The fines imposed total £10,550.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 35878/11-15, to detail the nature of advice or direct engagement with InvestNI, including who represented his Department.
(AQW 37541/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Officials from my Department's Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division engaged with officials in Invest NI on behalf of Belfast Public Hire (BPH), by way of telephone conversations and emails. The purpose was to identify the most appropriate contact information within Invest NI. These details were then forwarded to BPH representatives, providing them with the necessary contact information so they could obtain help and advice on business start up.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36863/11-15, whether Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement or any departmental officials had any contact with the PSNI regarding ongoing taxi problems centred on illegal pick ups by private hire taxis in the area of the Kingspan Stadium/Mount Merrion Avenue/Onslow, in (a) 2011; (b) 2012; and (c) 2013.
(AQW 37543/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Departmental Officials have had no formal contact with the PSNI regarding ongoing taxi problems centred on illegal pickups by private hire taxis in the area of the Kingspan Stadium/Mount Merrion Avenue/Onslow in 2011, 2012 or 2013.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36336/11-15, whether the Head of Enforcement authorised the use of video footage in advance of the assessment on 23 August 2013; and if not, whether this was completed without the specific authorisation of the Head of Enforcement.
(AQW 37544/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 introduced a system of authorisation and monitoring of surveillance activities by way of 'directed surveillance' that includes the use of video recording equipment, to ensure that the rights of individuals are not unnecessarily compromised in the pursuance of regulatory compliance.

In advance of the observations carried out on 23 August 2013, the Head of Enforcement authorised the use of 'directed surveillance' at Kingspan Rugby Ground.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of occasions local councils have seized noise making equipment and applied for forfeiture under the Noise Act 1996, broken down by (a) year; and (b) council.
(AQW 37552/11-15)

Mr Durkan: When the Noise Act 1996 came into operation, district councils had discretion as to whether they would adopt the provisions of the Act. Belfast City Council was the only council who adopted it. Chapter 2 of Part 6 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011, which came into operation on 1 April 2012, amended the 1996 Act to remove the requirement for adoption thereby allowing councils the discretion to use the Noise Act powers as and when it was deemed appropriate. Section 10 of the 1996 Act provides powers of entry to enable district council officers to seize equipment.

The Department has been collecting information about noise complaints from district councils since 2003-04 for its annual report on Noise Complaint Statistics for NI. As the years have passed, additional information has been requested for the publication. However, details of the seizure of equipment under the Noise Act 1996 have only been collected since 2012-13. Belfast City Council recorded no seizures that year. The Department does not hold information for previous years for equipment seizure or forfeiture.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment how many occasions have local councils issued an abatement notice under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environments Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, broken down by (a) year; and (b) council.
(AQW 37553/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 came into operation on 1 April 2012. Part 7 of the Act deals with a range of statutory nuisances set out in Article 63 of the Act and gives district councils powers to serve an abatement notice where it is satisfied that a statutory nuisance exists, or is likely to occur or recur.

The information relating to the number of occasions district councils have issued noise abatement notices under Article 63 is published in the Department's annual Noise Complaint Statistics for NI and at present the only figures available relate to the 2012-13 year. The Department does not collect information on abatement notices served by Councils for other prescribed statutory nuisances. The details for noise abatement notices served by each council for 2012-13 are as follows:-

Notices issued under CNEA (NI) 2011

Antrim	0
Ards	0
Ballymena	3
Ballymoney	0
Banbridge	4
Belfast	66
Carrickfergus	1
Castlereagh	0
Coleraine	0
Cookstown	5
Craigavon	3
Derry	3
Down	0
Dungannon	0

Fermanagh	1
Larne	0
Limavady	1
Lisburn	0
Magherafelt	1
Moyle	1
Newry & Mourne	7
Newtownabbey	1
North Down	5
Omagh	0
Strabane	1
Total	**103**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will investigate why a staff member was removed from working for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency within one week of making whistle blowing allegations.
(AQW 37559/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am unable to comment on individual staffing matters, or on the detail of any case involving whistle blowing as the whistleblower's identity must be protected.

However, I can assure you, that where any allegations or concerns are raised under the Civil Service whistle blowing policy, these are investigated in line with relevant Civil Service policy and guidance, and the whistleblower concerned will be appraised of the progress of such an investigation.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) whether he is aware of problems faced by the local motor trade whereby vehicles that have been registered with different owners in a short period of time cannot be taxed in post offices, over the phone or via the internet as they have been labelled as 'Renewal Reminder Prohibited' meaning that all documents have to be sent to Swansea, which causes a significant increase in the length of time it takes for a dealer to sell a vehicle; and (ii) what steps he is taking to rectify this problem.
(AQW 37569/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Vehicle registration and licensing services were centralised within the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea on 21 July 2014. From that date, responsibility for the delivery of vehicle registration and vehicle excise duty in Northern Ireland transferred to DVLA.

While the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) no longer has any role in the delivery of these services, I understand that a 'renewal reminder prohibited' notice does not mean that the vehicle has to be taxed by postal application to Swansea. It is still possible to tax the vehicle at the Post Office using the V5C Registration certificate/motor tax book, or V5C/2 new keeper supplement.

Whilst I am sympathetic to the issues now being faced by the local motor trade, I must refer you to DVLA to address any specific query in relation to the delivery of this service.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 35963/11-15, to detail the pre-1972 operations which were used to justify each of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS) certificates which were granted in relation to unauthorised sand extraction taking place from Lough Neagh Special Protection Area.
(AQW 37576/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department does not hold records of pre 1972 operations. The then Planning Service's response to the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme appears to have taken account of planning permissions associated to the onshore operations of the respective companies.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 35963/11-15, whether the pre-1972 onshore sites used as the basis for granting Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme certificates for unauthorised mineral extraction from Lough Neagh Special Protection Area were exempt from the lawful requirements of Class 13, Schedule 1 of the Planning (General Development) Order 1973.
(AQW 37577/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Class 13 of The Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1973 was applicable to the winning and working of minerals. Plant and buildings for processing of sand around Lough Neagh do not constitute winning and working of minerals.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 35963/11-15, whether the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme certificates were granted in relation to the operations taking place from the onshore sites, or for the extraction taking place within Lough Neagh; and whether his Department was aware at the time certificates were granted that the extraction taking place required, but did not have, planning permission and represented unauthorised Environmental Impact Assessment development.
(AQW 37578/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme certificates were issued for the onshore sites at Lough Neagh.

I have previously confirmed my Department's knowledge of historic and on-going sand extraction on Lough Neagh which is subject to current enforcement investigations.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the effectiveness of televised road safety campaigns in increasing awareness.
(AQW 37582/11-15)

Mr Durkan: DOE's road safety campaigns play a significant part in our aspiration of working towards zero road deaths in Northern Ireland; we have extensive evidence that the Northern Ireland public are aware of and are influenced by these campaigns.

Our campaigns consistently achieve awareness levels of over 90%. The average awareness level for TV advertising is 50%. The campaigns also achieve levels of influence ranging between 72% and 93%, indicating that road safety advertising has been very influential in improving road user attitudes and in producing positive change in behaviours. The industry norm for achieving levels of 'fairly influenced' is 30%.

It is difficult to measure the sole or unique contribution that any specific road safety intervention, including advertising, makes towards reducing casualties. However, work by Oxford Economics isolated the importance of the role of DOE advertising and calculated that from 1995 to 2011, some 21,977 men, women and children in Northern Ireland were saved from death and serious injury on our roads. This prevention of death and serious injury means that the economic payback was £10 per £1 invested by DOE, excluding human costs; and £42 per £1 invested including human costs.

I recognise that some of our campaigns can make uncomfortable viewing, but research and tracking evidence has consistently confirmed that they are effective, and that our 'tell it as it is' approach is a key reason for that.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to address the risk factors associated with road fatalities amongst young people.
(AQW 37583/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020 recognises that younger people are disproportionately likely to die on Northern Ireland's roads. The Strategy contains two targets, two of which focus on reducing significantly the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road collisions. I have outlined below some of the actions that my Department is taking to achieve these targets.

Young drivers – many of them newly qualified – are disproportionately involved in fatal and serious collisions compared to other drivers. This suggests that we need fundamentally to change how new drivers are trained, tested and gain experience. For this reason, the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill contains enabling provisions for a system of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) in Northern Ireland. The premise of GDL is to prepare new drivers for the challenges of driving on their own – and to protect both them and other road users as they gain experience. The provisions aim to strike a balance between achieving road safety outcomes while not being unduly prohibitive. The Bill is currently at Committee Stage and the detailed provisions will be shaped by the Assembly process.

In addition, much of the focus of our Road Safety Education Officer Service (RSEOS) is on supporting teachers and other professionals to deliver road safety messages to young people, both at primary and increasingly at post primary schools. In primary schools this work includes the Junior Road Safety Officer Scheme, the Cycling Proficiency scheme, the Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training scheme and Theatre in Education.

For post primary schools, we have developed a series of road safety lessons, presentations and education packs. These resources allow teachers to provide road safety lessons, involve students in discussions about aspects of road safety and ultimately encourage good road safety behaviours. RSEOS also provides support to schools which participate in the Motor Vehicle & Road Users Studies - a GCSE course which helps students prepare for driver training and the driving test and to become informed and responsible road users.

These resources are available on C2K, the ICT platform used by grant aided schools. Most of the information is also available on NI Direct, to cater for independent schools that do not have access to C2K and for other citizens.

My Department's advertising campaigns also aim to change those attitudes and behaviours which lead to death and serious injury on our roads. The campaigns are data-led, research-led and psychology-led. The messages that they contain are relevant to all road users. However, as young people are significantly over-represented in the casualties, many of the ads highlight young people at risk – whether as drivers, passengers, pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the urgent need for progress on the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, in light of the recent road fatalities in Coleraine and Belfast.
(AQW 37585/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is taking a broad range of actions to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Our work centres around the main factors that cause collisions – excessive and inappropriate speed, drink/drug driving, and driver carelessness. It also focuses on groups which are over-represented in the casualty figures. This commitment is reflected in the Road Safety Strategy to 2020.

The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill is critical to delivery of a number of the Strategy's commitments. The Bill addresses key road safety challenges, as seen in the numbers of casualties which involve drink driving and young and novice drivers. Its final provisions will be subject to Environment Committee scrutiny and Assembly approval. However, the Bill as drafted provides for:

- lower drink driving limits and new powers for police to stop and test drivers at the side of the road;
- a new graduated penalty regime to match the penalty to the amount of drink taken;
- a new graduated driver licensing regime with fundamental changes in how new drivers are trained, tested and gain experience.

The Bill is currently at its Committee stage. The Environment Committee is receiving evidence from key stakeholders and over the next few weeks my officials will be briefing the Committee on the detail of the Bill's provisions.

I am of course anxious to avoid any slippage in the legislative passage of this important Bill. At the same time, however, I am conscious of the need for effective Committee scrutiny and Assembly discussion. Once Committee stage has concluded, I will be seeking to schedule Consideration Stage of the Bill as quickly as possible.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of fatalities from road traffic collisions in Northern Ireland, compared to the rest of the UK, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37586/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Available information is provided in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1: Number of fatalities from road traffic collisions

Year	Northern Ireland	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
2011	59	1,594	121	186	1,901
2012	48	1,491	93	170	1,754
2013	57	1,430	111	172	1,713

Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland, Department for Transport

Table 2: Rate of road deaths from road traffic collisions per million population

Year	Northern Ireland	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
2011	32.5	30.0	39.5	35.1	30.9
2012	26.3	27.9	30.3	32.0	28.3
2013	31.2	26.5	36.0	32.3	27.5

Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland, Department for Transport, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and the Office for National Statistics.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department might recognise compelling or particular circumstances where a local government authority might allow a proprietor of a burial ground to transfer a burial space to someone who is not a member of their family.
(AQW 37593/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is responsible for legislation governing council burial grounds. Under the Public Health Act 1878 councils may sell the rights of burial in its burial grounds, either in perpetuity or for a limited period, under such restrictions and conditions as they think proper.

My Department has no powers to intervene in whatever arrangements a council has agreed.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Lead Enforcement Officer on duty at Ravenhill Stadium on 23 August 2013 has met with (i) him; and (ii) the departmental solicitor to discuss observations and a formal report; and if not, to outline the reasons for this.
(AQW 37601/11-15)

Mr Durkan: None of the enforcement officers on duty at Ravenhill Stadium on 23 August 2013 have met with me or with the departmental solicitor to discuss observations, since there was no particular reason to do so.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36336/11-15, given the conclusions were approved by his officials, to detail (i) whether this approved request, under Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Directed Surveillance Application, was a waste of resources, particularly given the hours of evidence gathering meant the staff in question would have been on overtime; and (ii) whether the full criteria consideration applied before approval was granted for this operation.
(AQW 37602/11-15)

Mr Durkan: DVA enforcement officers were granted approval to assess taxi services at Kingspan Stadium following full and proper consideration of all the relevant facts by the Head of Enforcement who deemed the proposed investigative approach to be justified and proportionate.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, following Driver and Vehicle enforcement inspections by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, to detail (i) all recommendations made, per inspection; (ii) dates when recommendations were (a) implemented; and (b) not implemented, including the reasons for this.
(AQW 37603/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) completed an inspection of the Department of the Environment, which included the Driver & Vehicle Agency, in 2007. The CJI report made 12 broad-based strategic recommendations which included elements of commonality across the Department.

A follow up report on the recommendations made is contained in the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Report entitled 'Enforcement in the Department of the Environment NI – A follow-up review of inspection recommendations' dated November 2011. All of the agreed Driver & Vehicle Agency related recommendations have largely been implemented.

I have placed a copy of the CJI Report in the Assembly Library.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is a problem with toxic waste arising from salmon farming; and how it has manifested itself in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37604/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Salmon farms have the potential to cause waste to accumulate on the seabed, which when it accumulates in high concentrations, can become increasingly toxic. This occurs through poor management practices and the utilisation of sheltered locations which allow for increased settlement below the cages.

Within Northern Ireland there is only one company operating marine based salmon farms, Glenarm Organic salmon. The company has two licensed locations at which they farm Salmon, one at Glenarm and the other at Red Bay. Both sites are monitored by my Department.

As a result of the organic farming methods used at both and the strong tidal currents, there is no problem with toxic waste at either site.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment, following the switch from paper tax discs to digital registration, whether he will consider engaging with the PSNI, noting the example set by Warwickshire and West Mercia Police, to repurpose vehicle tax disc holders with emergency contact information and medical alert cards for drivers.
(AQW 37624/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I agree that this idea merits further investigation. My officials have had initial discussions with PSNI road traffic policing officers, who are liaising with the Warwickshire and West Mercia force about the scheme.

I have asked them to report back to me with a view to further consideration if such a scheme would be beneficial here.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant AQW 36581/11-15, whether it would have been permissible to have assessed the environmental impact of, and approved the full planning application for K/2014/0387/F, had the constructional detail set out in his answer not been provided as part of that planning application.
(AQW 37628/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information required to assess a planning application will depend on the nature of the proposals in each case. In the case of K/2014/0387/F, sufficient information was provided in order to allow the Department to determine the application.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current number of refurbished wind turbines, broken down by local council
(AQW 37630/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Information on whether a wind turbine is new or refurbished is not required in the submission and determination of a planning application for a wind turbine(s) under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 18 - Renewable Energy. This information is therefore not collected by the Department.

Information and statistics relating to all renewable energy planning applications including wind turbines can be found at the following link, and is updated on a monthly basis.

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/asb/statistics/planning_statistics.htm

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether a British Standards number is required for a wind turbine.
(AQW 37631/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is no requirement within Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 18 Renewable Energy to provide a British Standard number for a proposed wind turbine in submission of a Planning Application.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36929/11-15, how many times Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers visited Kingspan Stadium to monitor taxi operations, in each of the last two years prior to and up to the dates provided.
(AQW 37647/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Driver & Vehicle Agency enforcement officers visited the Kingspan Stadium to monitor taxi operations on 3 occasions in 2013. To date there have been no visits to the stadium during 2014.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37092/11-15, given the connection between his Department and the taxi service provider, whether the Driver and Vehicle Agency or his Department is facing a conflict of interest by attempting to develop a taxi system which is beneficial to the contracted taxi provider as one of the top two taxi companies who stand to gain most from Single Tier, but detrimental to smaller private hire companies and public hire taxi operators.
(AQW 37649/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is no connection between my Department and any specific taxi operator or group of taxi operators. I am not, therefore, of the view that there is a conflict of interest.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the progress on the proposed reforms to taxi legislation.
(AQW 37699/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Taxi Drivers' Licences Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014, which introduce a new taxi driving test for those who wish to become taxi drivers and periodic training for all taxi drivers, came into force on 31 October 2014.

The proposed Taxi Licence Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, which introduce single tier licensing throughout Northern Ireland, and other changes including redesigned roof signs and taxi plates, are being finalised and I intend to lay them before the Assembly in November.

The proposed regulations on the retention and disposal of seized motor vehicles, which introduces new powers to seize vehicles suspected of being used for taxiing without a taxi licence, have received Executive approval and are due to come into operation from the end of January 2015.

The policy in respect of the introduction of a new and higher specification for wheelchair accessible taxis is being finalised and an SL1 is due to be considered by the Environment Committee in November prior to the regulation beings developed.

Finally, the proposed delivery model for the introduction of mandatory taximeters (including fitment, sealing and testing) is being finalised in advance of a revised SL1 being submitted to the Environment Committee for their consideration. This will also see the introduction of a maximum fare.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the convergence process in local government; and whether all eleven councils will be operating as intended on the 1 April 2015.
(AQW 37707/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Significant progress has been made in local government reform and important milestones have been met including the Local Government Act receiving Royal Assent in May 2014; the appointment of Chief Executives for the new councils; and the May elections, leading to the creation of the 11 new councils which are now operating in shadow form alongside the existing 26 councils.

A staff transfer scheme has been developed for Local Government staff. Capacity building plans have been developed with councils, the local government training group, DOE and others aimed at ensuring that elected members, local government staff and civil servants who are directly affected by reform are supported through the major change process.

Locally, the new councils are working through a number of issues, including how they will organise their new governance structures, organisational design and the development of corporate, business and financial plans.

The programme is subject to robust reporting arrangements. A critical path has been established for the programme with the interdependencies between tasks identified. The Regional Transition Operational Board meets every month to exercise operational oversight and ensure timely implementation of the programme. Each month, councils and departments report progress to me, through this group.

While Local Government reform is largely on track for achievement in April 2015, you will already be aware that I am concerned by the continued delay in Executive agreement to the introduction of the DSD Bill which is required to provide councils with regeneration powers. Whilst a failure to provide councils with urban regeneration and community development will not prevent the rest of the reform programme from going ahead, it is nonetheless an important element enabling new councils to shape their communities.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37176/11-15, whether private hire taxi regulation could be rectified directly with the relevant operators bringing them in line with legislation instead of changing the system to the detriment of other service providers.
(AQW 37731/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Taxis Act 2008 is the product of extensive consultation with the taxi industry, its customers and other interested parties on the issues around carrying passengers for reward. I remain of the view that the best way to achieve the objectives of the Act is to implement it in full.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36336/11-15, on how many occasions in the last four calendar years has a request been made under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Directed Surveillance Application; and of these, how many were (i) granted/approved; (ii) refused; and (iii) pending.
(AQW 37735/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below refers to the number of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 Directed Surveillance Applications that were authorised and refused by the Driver & Vehicle Agency in each of the last four calendar years.

	RIPA Applications[1]	
Year	**Authorised**	**Refused**
2011	13	0
2012	25	0
2013	28	1
2014 (to date)	12	0

There are currently no RIPA authorisations pending.

1 These figures are based on DVA information management counts and are not part of DOE Official Statistics reporting.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment why elected representatives have been unable to contact the Coleraine and Londonderry planning offices by telephone or email for over a week.
(AQW 37790/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am unaware of any difficulties with either the telephone system or the Divisional electronic mail box for either the Coleraine or Londonderry offices. Both systems have been operating normally apart from a brief 3 minute break in the telephone system on the morning of 17 October 2014 when two calls failed to get through.

If an elected representative attempts to call a specific member of staff there is always the chance that they are out of the office on a site visit, in a meeting with colleagues or applicants and their representatives, or on leave. In these instances if the call is placed through NI Direct the call back system is initiated and the Department has 24 hours to respond.

In an effort to improve customer service I recently asked officials to set up a Duty Planner on-call rota. This has been in place for a few months now and this has proved to be very successful.

However, it is recognised that some minor disruption may occur over the next few months as staff move between offices to align with the new Council clusters in preparation for the transfer of planning functions and staff to local government on 1 April 2015. Officials are aware of the importance of providing a high quality customer service and will work with NI Direct to ensure that any disruption is kept to an absolute minimum over the coming months.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment when the Planning Service must contact the PSNI as a consultee.
(AQW 37867/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not have a statutory obligation under Article 15 of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 to consult the Police Service of Northern Ireland with regard to planning applications.

Under Article 15 of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 the Department is required to consult the District Council and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI). These bodies are referred to as statutory consultees. In addition, the Department may also consult with a range of other bodies depending on the location and nature of the planning application. Organisations falling within this category are referred to as non-statutory consultees. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is categorised as a non-statutory consultee.

Some of the types of application the Department may consult the PSNI will include applications for wind turbines, with respect to any potential impact on the NI Emergency Services Radio Communications and Public Safety Telecommunications Infrastructure; applications for pistol and/or rifle ranges, with respect to design, construction and authorisation of such, given they are responsible for the safety of civilian shooting ranges in Northern Ireland; and applications for gun shops or gun stores, with respect to specifications of the building as fire arms licensing will be required.

This is however not an exhaustive list of where the PSNI may be consulted. Each individual planning application is assessed on a case by case basis, depending on the location and nature of the proposal.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment whether the PSNI has any consultative or statutory standing when the Planning Service make a recommendation to approve or refused a planning application.
(AQW 37902/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not have a statutory obligation under Article 15 of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 to consult the Police Service of Northern Ireland with regard to planning applications.

Under Article 15 of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 the Department is required to consult the District Council and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI). These bodies are referred to as statutory consultees. In addition, the Department may also consult with a range of other bodies depending on the location and nature of the planning application. Organisations falling within this category are referred to as non-statutory consultees. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is categorised as a non-statutory consultee.

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This is however not an exhaustive list of where the PSNI may be consulted. Each individual planning application is assessed on a case by case basis, depending on the location and nature of the proposal.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his decision to permit unregulated sand extraction to continue from the bed of Lough Neagh is likely to be giving rise to adverse cumulative effects from this unauthorised Environmental Impact Assessment development; and whether this is placing the UK in an indefensible position, given that infraction complaints have already been submitted to the European Commission.
(AQW 37924/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have not made a decision to permit unregulated sand extraction from the bed of Lough Neagh. My Department has issued letters to operators advising that their works are unauthorised and that the activity should cease until this situation has been addressed. In the interim, my officials will continue to investigate activity on the Lough.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the dates of all emails sent from the Chief Enforcement Officer to the Passenger Transport Licensing Division, or any name by which it was formerly known within the Driver and Vehicle Agency, in relation to taxi operator licensing from January 2013 to date.
(AQW 37944/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department's records reveal that from January 2013 to date there were no emails sent by the Chief Enforcement Officer to the Passenger Transport Licensing Division, or any name by which it was formerly known within the Driver and Vehicle Agency, in relation to taxi operator licensing.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36078/11-15, to provide a copy of the stated overall consideration of the arrangements which were passed to the Departmental Solicitors Office for their legal clarification and advice.
(AQW 37946/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The concept of legal professional privilege safeguards the rights of a person or organisation, including the Department, to obtain legal advice on a confidential basis and not to disclose such information in the interests of the wider administration of justice. It has been the settled view that in this context, legal advice is not disclosed and that privilege applies to the information sought.

The Department is, therefore, unable to provide the information sought.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of fines issued for dog fouling, broken down by local council, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37969/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Details of the number of fines issued in each of the last three financial years are set out in the attached table.

		Dog Fouling Number of Fixed Penalty Notices Issued		
New Council District	**Council District**	**2011/12**	**2012/13**	**2013/14**
Antrim & Newtownabbey	Antrim	0	2	1
	Newtownabbey	17	16	24
Mid & East Antrim	Ballymena	9	6	8
	Carrickfergus	3	0	2
	Larne	2	8	6
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	Armagh	5	3	7
	Banbridge	1	3	1
	Craigavon	38	48	44
Belfast	Belfast	92	189	223
Causeway Coast & Glens	Ballymoney	0	1	1
	Coleraine	17	8	25
	Limavady	0	1	0
	Moyle	1	2	1
Derry City & Strabane	Derry City	3	1	11
	Strabane	2	7	7
Fermanagh & Omagh	Fermanagh	0	1	9
	Omagh	1	2	3
Mid Ulster	Cookstown	0	1	0
	Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	3	3
	Magherafelt	0	0	2
Newry, Mourne & Down	Down	16	9	13
	Newry & Mourne	4	4	3
North Down & Ards	Ards	13	15	5
	North Down	1	5	1
Lisburn & Castlereagh	Castlereagh	0	14	6
	Lisburn	6	15	2
Totals		**231**	**364**	**408**

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 35889/11-15, to provide a copy of the internal guidance; and to confirm when the guidance was first issued.
(AQW 37977/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A copy of the internal guidance that was issued to staff in September 2010 is provided below. As has been advised in AQWs 35889/11-15, 37039/11-15 and 37080/11-15, this guidance for staff was withdrawn on 4 April 2014 and is therefore no longer a material consideration.

PPS 21
Advice on the implementation of Policy CTY 10 –
Dwellings on Farm - Criterion (c) where there are no buildings on the farm

The above policy in PPS21 will allow for a dwelling to be permitted on an active farm, every 10 years, subject to certain criteria.

Criterion (c) of CTY10 requires that the new building be visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm. Policy CTY10 does not make reference to circumstances where the farm holding has no building or group of farm buildings for a dwelling to visually link or cluster with.

PNRD has advised that as applications for a house on a farm without any buildings was considered by DARD to be a rare occurrence no references were made to this situation in the final document.

Therefore, for the purposes of determining applications where there are no buildings on the farm, the site should comply with policies CTY13(a-f), CTY14 and CTY16, similar to applications where an alternative site is being considered under criterion (c).

Where there is one building on the farm holding, the farm dwelling should cluster with that building unless it is considered as an exceptional case for an alternative site in which case policies CTY13(a-f), CTY14 and CTY16 apply.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to apartment reform, what results, recommendation, or decisions has evolved from the Apartments Interdepartmental Implementation Group.
(AQW 36044/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): As a first step the Apartments Report Implementation Group was asked to consider the Law Commission's recommendations with regard to the regulation of managing agents and advisory services. The Commission has recommended the introduction of a registration scheme for managing agents, similar to that which operates in Scotland under the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011, and the Group has been considering how that statutory scheme might be amended to take account of the Northern Ireland context. Any Bill will be subject to Executive approval and will go to consultation, but the work on the required instructions for Legislative Counsel has commenced. With regard to advisory services, it is hoped that existing services, such as Consumerline, can be called in aid, thereby obviating the need for a separate service.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he expects the findings of a review of MS services to be published; and whether he intends to place a MS specialist in the Causeway Hospital in the interim period.
(AQW 37370/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The HSC Board and PHA are due to commence a short review of MS services in December 2014 with a view to establishing agreed patient pathways. The findings of the review, which is part of a wider neurology service initiative across Northern Ireland, should establish agreed patient pathways and help develop service specification and agreed service profile for MS. The Board expects that the development of draft patient pathways anticipated from this work will be available by summer 2015.

Until recently, the gap left by the retirement of the full-time MS Consultant at Causeway Hospital in March 2012 was bridged by providing services on a part-time basis by this consultant.

A final decision on service requirements will be made when the draft patient pathway has been developed and agreed. In the interim a Consultant Neurologist based at BHSCT now provides clinics at Causeway Hospital as a visiting consultant. In addition, the MS Nursing Team in BHSCT continues to provide a range of MS Nursing Services that are not provided locally in other Trusts in Northern Ireland and a community-based MS Nurse is in place to receive telephone calls from patients and their families and visit them in their own homes if required and liaise with the multidisciplinary team.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans for screening or other measures in respect of the Ebola virus, at sea and airport entry points into Northern Ireland, or elsewhere.
(AQW 37428/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have no plans at this time to introduce entry screening at sea ports or airports in Northern Ireland. Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham Airport, Manchester Airport and St Pancras Station are major international passenger hubs, and Heathrow receives around 85% of UK-bound air passengers, identified by the Border Force, coming on the main routes from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. This is a proportionate, risk-based approach. At this stage there are no plans to roll out entry screening to other airports in Great Britain or to seaports, and my Department is monitoring developments.

In order to reduce the risk of international spread of the disease, and in line with World Health Organization guidance, the affected countries have introduced exit screening at airports to ensure that individuals who are unwell do not board flights.

It is important to note that the UK has robust systems in place already for infectious disease control, including at airports and ports.

Advice for UK border staff has been circulated to all UK ports. In Northern Ireland the Public Health Agency, through its Health Protection Service, has communicated with colleagues covering all sea ports and airports in Northern Ireland informing them of the current situation in relation to the outbreak and directing them to sources of further information, including the actions to be taken should a sick traveller, potentially with an infectious disease, come to their attention. Posters have been sent to all airports and sea ports in Northern Ireland to advise arriving travellers about risk factors for Ebola, symptoms and signs and how to seek medical advice.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of fully equipped isolation units to deal with infectious diseases there across the Health Service.
(AQW 37429/11-15)

Mr Wells: Across the health service in Northern Ireland there is one fully equipped isolation unit which is located in the Royal Victoria Hospital. In the event of a case of Ebola being confirmed in Northern Ireland, it is intended that the patient would be cared for in this unit while awaiting transfer to an appropriate High Level Isolation Unit in Great Britain. This will depend on the clinical requirement of the patient as assessed by their care team.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will review the current support provided to parents who's child has passed away whilst attending a hospital outside Northern Ireland for a medical procedure or treatment.
(AQW 37432/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is reviewing its arrangements for the repatriation of live and deceased patients whose transfer for treatment outside of Northern Ireland they have approved on request by clinicians. This is being considered within a revised HSCB travel policy, which is in the process of being finalised.

The Board has also recently funded a paediatric patient experience officer post, based at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children (RBHSC). The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust requested this funding following the outcome of focus groups held with families that had travelled outside of Northern Ireland for care, who felt that it would be helpful to have a single contact point at RBHSC to discuss any travel, accommodation, expenses or care requirements that they may have.

From 6 October 2014 the patient experience office at the RBHSC is available Monday to Friday 09:00-17:00 and the patient flow coordinator at RBHSC is available at all other times to provide guidance and support via telephone and email to all families travelling for care outside of Northern Ireland. This service is available to all families, regardless of the Trust area in which they reside, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. All decisions regarding travel, accommodation and expenses are guided by the HSCB travel policy to ensure a consistent and fair service for all families in Northern Ireland.

In addition to the above, the Belfast Trust Cardiology Department has a transport coordinator nurse, a paediatric and an adult liaison nurse in post. Their role is to provide support to the patients and parents in the time preceding, during and after their treatment. They do this in a number of ways, either face to face, electronically or with regular phone calls before they travel, during their time away or in the period after their return.

The aircraft used under the Board's contract for air transport services are not contracted or intended for the repatriation of deceased patients. However, there have been a small number of cases, involving paediatric patients, in which exceptions have been made due to exceptional circumstances cited by clinicians and the availability of the aircraft.

Each Health and Social Care Trust also has a bereavement counsellor who provides dedicated support and information. This can be particularly relevant in circumstances of sudden, unexpected deaths and in the context of those dying in hospital and undergoing procedures, including children.

I also acknowledge the important support services provided by the voluntary sector for families who have lost a child in a hospital setting while undergoing medical treatment include Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, Clic Sargent for Children with Cancer, Cruse Bereavement Care, Barnardo's Child Bereavement Service as well as various charities providing support for children with long term and chronic conditions and disabilities (see www.familysupportni.gov.uk). These services are accessible to families irrespective of whether the child concerned died in Northern Ireland or outside Northern Ireland.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding provided to (a) Cara-Friend; (b) the Rainbow Project and (c) Here NI; and to provide breakdown of the funding received since 2007.
(AQW 37457/11-15)

Mr Wells: Funding towards the organisations' administrative costs since 2007 has been provided as follows:

	Cara-friend	The Rainbow Project	Here NI*
07/08	£30,178	£30,880	-
08/09	£30,932	£31,652	-
09/10	£31,705	£32,443	-
10/11	£31,705	£32,443	-

	Cara-friend	The Rainbow Project	Here NI*
11/12	£31,705	£32,443	-
12/13	£31,705	£32,443	NIL
13/14	£31,705	£32,443	NIL

* Prior to August 2012, Here NI was formerly the Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative

The Rainbow Project and Cara-friend use the above core funding as a contribution towards their central administrative costs such as salaries and rent. In addition, a project grant was awarded to the Rainbow Project towards a sexual and physical health project for a two-year period commencing in April 2006, and funding of £42,922 was provided in 2007/08. In 2008/09, funding of £17,554 was provided to Cara-friend towards a printed resource of lesbian and bisexual women's health guidelines for health professionals.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown to the total cost relating to the International Working Group on the future of Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services.
(AQW 37458/11-15)

Mr Wells: The International Working Group (IWG) was appointed by my predecessor and Minister James Reilly TD on a no-fee basis. The costs arising from the assessment they carried out therefore relate to travel, accommodation and other costs incurred during their visit to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) from
7-11 April 2014. The costs are to be funded by the Department of Health (ROI) and my Department. My Department has estimated that its contribution will be approximately £8,500.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why cancer patients are being asked to pay for their drugs, even though they have previously received them via the Health Service.
(AQW 37510/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health service treatment is free at the point of delivery of care. No patient receiving approved health service treatment in any specialty should be asked to pay.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has responsibility for commissioning cancer drugs in Northern Ireland. All NICE approved cancer drugs are either recurrently funded or available via a cost per case mechanism in Northern Ireland. No patient should be asked to pay for approved cancer drug therapy.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cancer patients have paid for Health Service treatment in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37511/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health service treatment is free at the point of delivery of care. No patient receiving approved health service treatment in any specialty should be asked to pay.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has responsibility for commissioning cancer drugs in Northern Ireland. All NICE approved cancer drugs are either recurrently funded or available via a cost per case mechanism in Northern Ireland. No patient should be asked to pay for approved cancer drug therapy.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who have signed the Organ Donor Register in each month of the last three years.
(AQW 37522/11-15)

Mr Wells: As at 20 October 2014, new registrations added on to the NHS Organ Donor Register for residents in Northern Ireland over the past three years are as follows:

Month	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
October	3,788	2,427	2,723
November	2,824	2,895	3,947
December	2,311	1,955	1,903
January	1,766	1,918	1,841
February	2,702	3,803	3,505
March	2,620	2,506	3,593
April	2,784	2,827	2,514

Month	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
May	2,371	2,344	2,586
June	2,498	2,382	2,387
July	2,223	2,747	2,335
August	2,170	2,334	1,945
September	2,322	2,492	2,644
Total	**30,379**	**30,630**	**31,923**

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will make a decision on an air ambulance service for Northern Ireland in the near future.
(AQW 37523/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is in receipt of a report from the Health and Social Care Board on the feasibility and appropriateness of establishing a dedicated Helicopter Emergency Medical Service in Northern Ireland. In addition, my officials are participating in a working group led by the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland to make recommendations on how best to provide a dedicated Emergency Aeromedical Support service in the Republic, including recommendations in relation to the potential for expansion of the geographical reach of the service, including an all-island service. The group's report is not yet published. I will wish to consider the recommendations of both reports carefully before making a decision about an air ambulance service.

Definitive information is not available on the number of air transfers and trauma transfers which would benefit from an air ambulance service annually. I am not yet in a position to announce criteria for development of an air ambulance service.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the annual number of air transfers and trauma transfers which would benefit from an air ambulance service.
(AQW 37524/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is in receipt of a report from the Health and Social Care Board on the feasibility and appropriateness of establishing a dedicated Helicopter Emergency Medical Service in Northern Ireland. In addition, my officials are participating in a working group led by the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland to make recommendations on how best to provide a dedicated Emergency Aeromedical Support service in the Republic, including recommendations in relation to the potential for expansion of the geographical reach of the service, including an all-island service. The group's report is not yet published. I will wish to consider the recommendations of both reports carefully before making a decision about an air ambulance service.

Definitive information is not available on the number of air transfers and trauma transfers which would benefit from an air ambulance service annually. I am not yet in a position to announce criteria for development of an air ambulance service.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the criteria on which he will judge the development of an air ambulance service for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37525/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is in receipt of a report from the Health and Social Care Board on the feasibility and appropriateness of establishing a dedicated Helicopter Emergency Medical Service in Northern Ireland. In addition, my officials are participating in a working group led by the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland to make recommendations on how best to provide a dedicated Emergency Aeromedical Support service in the Republic, including recommendations in relation to the potential for expansion of the geographical reach of the service, including an all-island service. The group's report is not yet published. I will wish to consider the recommendations of both reports carefully before making a decision about an air ambulance service.

Definitive information is not available on the number of air transfers and trauma transfers which would benefit from an air ambulance service annually. I am not yet in a position to announce criteria for development of an air ambulance service.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to ensure the early diagnosis of lung cancer by GPs.
(AQW 37550/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Public Health Agency (PHA) is currently developing a three year campaign programme of activity to improve knowledge and awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer. As part of this work a Cancer Awareness Campaign strategy is being developed which aims to disseminate the proposed campaign strategy and enable all stakeholders to engage positively in the delivery of the campaign programme over the next 3 years. The PHA recently hosted a workshop to ensure that key individuals and stakeholders, including cancer charities, are fully engaged in planning and supporting the development of a cancer awareness campaign.

Whilst the campaign programme plans include a focus on a number of prioritised major cancer tumours it is envisaged that the programme will also incorporate information relating to a wide range of cancers and promote better awareness and early detection across the range, including lung cancer.

GPs currently have access to a multitude of learning resources which are available for them to utilise, including lecture courses, on line materials, e-learning resources and also useful patient information from various sources e.g. cancer charities. The HSCB has also made investment through the appointment of Macmillan GP facilitators who educate and update GPs on aspects of all cancers.

This work will continue and hopefully the secure improvements in diagnosis and care that we all would wish to see.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 36930/11-15, whether he will give a commitment that there are no plans to reduce the number of examinations and assessments of infants for hip conditions.
(AQW 37551/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board has confirmed that it has no plans to reduce the number of examinations and assessments of infants for hip conditions from the level currently carried out as outlined in my response to your previous question AQW 36930/11-15.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the schedule for the establishment of services crucial to the success of the agreed all-island solution for the provision of paediatric cardiac surgery, including (i) a mobile extra corporeal life support service; (ii) an all-island governance committee; (iii) adequate specialist bed provision in Dublin; and (iv) mechanisms for the timely reimbursement of expenses incurred by families who are required to travel.
(AQW 37579/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department and the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland are working closely to prepare an action plan which we aim to have in place by the end of 2014. I will announce details of this plan as soon as it has been agreed with Minister Varadkar. This will include planning for implementing all of the recommendations of the International Working Group's (IWG) proposed model, pending my final decision after the public consultation, and will ensure continuity of care for all patients through the extension of current service level agreements as required. Emergency cases will therefore continue to be managed through existing arrangements with Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Birmingham Children's Hospital and Evelina Children's Hospital.

Families who are required to travel outside Northern Ireland for treatment will continue to have expenses reimbursed by the Health and Social Care Board's (HSCB) patient travel office. The Board is in the process of finalising a revised travel policy, having taken account of concerns raised by families in focus groups earlier this year which included the reimbursement of expenses. Families, regardless of where their child is being treated, can also benefit from a 24/7 patient experience service based within the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children since early October 2014.

Patient representatives will continue to be involved in the process of planning the future of this service, as they have been since the formation of the Board's PCCS Working Group in 2012. The public consultation, which is due to be launched shortly, will provide an opportunity for further engagement with stakeholders.

The IWG report provides a clear recommended way forward for congenital cardiac services. The deployment of personnel across both jurisdictions is a key element of the proposed service model, as it will help to ensure that essential life-saving skills are maintained in Belfast. My joint policy statement with Minister Varadkar on
14 October 2014 ended the uncertainty about the future of this service by confirming our commitment to bring about full implementation of the model as soon as possible, whilst giving full consideration to the consultation outcome. In doing so my expectation is that such posts will be more attractive as they will offer experience and opportunities to nurses and clinicians which previously were not available.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the precise mechanisms by which the care of children requiring emergency paediatric cardiac surgery or interventions will be managed during the eighteen months expected to elapse before an all-island solution can be fully implemented; and (ii) the measures he will take to keep families and their representatives, such as the Children's Heartbeat Trust, informed of any changes to these mechanisms which may occur throughout this interim period.
(AQW 37580/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department and the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland are working closely to prepare an action plan which we aim to have in place by the end of 2014. I will announce details of this plan as soon as it has been agreed with Minister Varadkar. This will include planning for implementing all of the recommendations of the International Working Group's (IWG) proposed model, pending my final decision after the public consultation, and will ensure continuity of care for all patients through the extension of current service level agreements as required. Emergency cases will therefore continue to be managed through existing arrangements with Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Birmingham Children's Hospital and Evelina Children's Hospital.

Families who are required to travel outside Northern Ireland for treatment will continue to have expenses reimbursed by the Health and Social Care Board's (HSCB) patient travel office. The Board is in the process of finalising a revised travel policy,

having taken account of concerns raised by families in focus groups earlier this year which included the reimbursement of expenses. Families, regardless of where their child is being treated, can also benefit from a 24/7 patient experience service based within the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children since early October 2014.

Patient representatives will continue to be involved in the process of planning the future of this service, as they have been since the formation of the Board's PCCS Working Group in 2012. The public consultation, which is due to be launched shortly, will provide an opportunity for further engagement with stakeholders.

The IWG report provides a clear recommended way forward for congenital cardiac services. The deployment of personnel across both jurisdictions is a key element of the proposed service model, as it will help to ensure that essential life-saving skills are maintained in Belfast. My joint policy statement with Minister Varadkar on
14 October 2014 ended the uncertainty about the future of this service by confirming our commitment to bring about full implementation of the model as soon as possible, whilst giving full consideration to the consultation outcome. In doing so my expectation is that such posts will be more attractive as they will offer experience and opportunities to nurses and clinicians which previously were not available.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the paediatric cardiac surgery International Working Group's fourth recommendation that nurses and physicians should be deployed across both jurisdictions on the recruitment of appropriately qualified personnel, given that it has already proved challenging to attract such staff without the additional requirement for cross border travel.
(AQW 37581/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department and the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland are working closely to prepare an action plan which we aim to have in place by the end of 2014. I will announce details of this plan as soon as it has been agreed with Minister Varadkar. This will include planning for implementing all of the recommendations of the International Working Group's (IWG) proposed model, pending my final decision after the public consultation, and will ensure continuity of care for all patients through the extension of current service level agreements as required. Emergency cases will therefore continue to be managed through existing arrangements with Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Birmingham Children's Hospital and Evelina Children's Hospital.

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Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether, in light of recent concerns raised by General Practitioners regarding the provision of appropriate medical evidence to the Social Security Agency, he would consider issuing advice to all GP practices regarding the availability of guidance for medical professionals published on the Department of Social Development website.
(AQW 37625/11-15)

Mr Wells: Responsibility for medical reports and their assessment as part of the benefit claims and appeals process rests with the Department of Social Development and therefore I regard that as a matter for DSD to address. The availability of any guidance on the completion of forms, which is currently held on DSD's website, should be drawn to the attention of GPs when DSD issue the form for completion.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 36829/11-15, to detail the number of patients who have been (i) referred for surgery; and (ii) referred for shoulder surgery to Spire Fylde Coast Hospital in Blackpool in each month of the last three years.
(AQW 37650/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are two distinct processes for referring patients to providers outside the Health Service. Patients may be referred via an Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) or as part of the independent sector/waiting list initiative process. An ECR is a referral to a provider for which there is no existing contract.

Information provided in AQW 36829/11-15 referred only to patients transferred via the ECR process. The Health and Social Care Board has reported that there have been no patients referred for surgery to Spire Fylde Coast Hospital, Blackpool, as part of the ECR process in the past three years.

Patients that are referred by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland for treatment in the Independent Sector are referred to a specific Independent Sector provider. The HSC Trust that refers the patient to the Independent Sector retains responsibility for both the patients waiting time and their ongoing treatment.

The Western HSC Trust referred 15 patients to Spire Fylde Coast Hospital, Blackpool, for Trauma and Orthopaedic surgery during 2013/14. No patients were referred during 2012/13 or 2014/15. Of those 15 patients who were referred during 2013/14, 4 were transferred for shoulder surgery. To preserve patient anonymity, it is not possible to provide the actual numbers per month.

The Belfast HSC Trust has stated that they refer patients to 'Spire Healthcare' Group, which uses a number of different hospitals depending on the procedure or consultants location. They have advised that the number of patients referred to each hospital within the Spire Healthcare Group is not available. As a consequence, they are not in a position to provide details of the number of patients referred specifically to Spire Fylde Coast Hospital.

The Northern, South Eastern and Southern HSC Trusts have advised that they have not made any referrals to Spire Fylde Coast Hospital in the past three years.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what cycling facilities he plans to provide on departmental property.
(AQW 37652/11-15)

Mr Wells: All staff in my Department are based in Castle Buildings, within the Stormont Estate. The NICS estate is managed by DFP and whilst bicycle parking facilities are available I understand that there are currently no plans to extend the facilities offered.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what preventative spending his Department has planned to reduce rates of diabetes and obesity.
(AQW 37653/11-15)

Mr Wells: The current Programme for Government commits to investing a total of £7.2 million in programmes to tackle obesity in support of the Department's 10 year Obesity Prevention Framework; A Fitter Future for All 2012-2022.

Preventing the rise of overweight and obese people in the population will help reduce the risk of developing a range of health conditions which includes Type 2 Diabetes.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of how investing £10 a year per person on cycling could save the Health Service money.
(AQW 37654/11-15)

Mr Wells: All forms of physical activity, including cycling, can play an important role in improving physical and mental health and wellbeing. By encouraging people to take part in physical activity, and to eat a healthy balanced diet, we can reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity. This will reduce the risk of developing long term health conditions such as heart disease and stroke, Type II diabetes, some cancers and mental health issues and therefore potentially lower costs to the Health Service.

My Department works closely with Department for Regional Development who are leading on the development of a draft Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland, currently out for public consultation and we will play an active role in the development of its delivery plan.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what correspondence he has had with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to cycling.
(AQW 37655/11-15)

Mr Wells: I recognise the importance for health and wellbeing of creating an environment that promotes walking and cycling, and my Department is represented on the DRD – led Cross Sectoral Cycling Group. My officials have also provided evidence to the Committee for Regional Development's Inquiry into the benefits of cycling to the economy. Previously, DHSSPS was a member of the Active Travel Forum.

My Department will continue to work with DRD to deliver the health, economic, social and environmental benefits already identified in the Active Travel Strategy and will assist in the development of a Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland.

This work supports the delivery of my Department's obesity prevention framework, A Fitter Future for All (2012), DRD's Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland (2013), and the Active Travel Action Plan (2013). The need for this collaboration is further reinforced by the new strategic framework for public health, Making Life Better (2014).

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to bring forward legislation to protect the elderly.
(AQW 37663/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is taking forward the development of an Adult Safeguarding Policy in partnership with the Department of Justice. We intend to go to consult publicly on the draft policy, commencing in November 2014. Subject to the outcome of consultation, it is intended to publish the final policy in early 2015. In consultation, we will seek views on whether legislation is required to underpin the policy, and will include the proposals for legislation contained in the Commissioner for Older People's report "Protecting our Older People in Northern Ireland: A Call for Adult Safeguarding Legislation." Any adult safeguarding legislation introduced would need to extend to all adults at risk.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the plans to increase services for dementia care.
(AQW 37666/11-15)

Mr Wells: Since the publication of the Regional Dementia Strategy in 2011, work has been continuing to take forward implementation of the Strategy recommendations in order to deliver a significant improvement in the quality of dementia care, and to provide support to people living with dementia to enable them to maintain their independence and live well with the condition for as long as possible.

Recurrent investment over the past 2 years has led to the enhancement of memory services, and an increase in the level of psychological support to individuals and carers. Criteria and protocols have been developed for referrals into memory services and work is ongoing to achieve timely assessment and diagnosis. Work is also on-going with GPs to enhance referrals to memory clinics.

Over the next 3 years, in addition to those plans already in place, the Dementia Strategy Implementation Group will focus on the key target areas of (i) awareness raising, information and support, (ii) training and (iii) short-breaks, respite and support to carers, using funding provided through the Delivering Social Change Signature Programme.

All five Trusts are committed to providing timely diagnosis, and services are being developed to include pre and post diagnostic counselling, comprehensive assessment, support and education.

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the attendance figures for Emergency Departments in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 37678/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on new and unplanned attendances at emergency care departments is published on a quarterly basis, and available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-emergency.htm

The number of new and unplanned review attendances at emergency care departments is detailed in the table overleaf for each of the last six years only, as this information was not collected prior to 1st April 2008.

Attendances at Emergency Care Departments (2008/09 – 2013/14)

Emergency Care Department	New & Unplanned Review Attendances					
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Belfast City	44,769	42,840	43,990	24,701	.	.
Mater	41,220	39,457	41,405	42,845	43,087	44,397
Royal Victoria	68,428	67,457	73,677	81,094	92,618	93,663
RBHSC	31,372	30,727	31,683	32,478	32,976	33,153
Antrim Area	64,612	65,594	70,902	71,175	70,859	72,037
Whiteabbey	20,955	19,006	9,860	8,614	8,306	8,643
Mid Ulster	17,700	17,251	7,587	6,133	7,115	7,978
Causeway	40,232	41,367	43,695	43,080	42,771	41,798
Ulster	71,301	72,110	73,833	77,757	82,436	82,692
Ards	9,545	9,144	9,122	9,076	9,071	9,852
Bangor	10,550	11,384	12,308	12,240	10,154	11,670
Lagan Valley	31,775	32,128	32,559	27,443	26,297	25,786
Downe	23,209	23,398	22,064	20,124	20,697	20,250

Emergency Care Department	New & Unplanned Review Attendances					
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Craigavon Area	70,093	71,281	71,522	71,645	71,746	72,976
Daisy Hill	33,411	34,269	36,464	37,927	39,373	41,198
South Tyrone	14,946	15,491	17,151	18,751	19,902	21,089
Armagh Community / Mullinure	8,086	7,574	7,763	7,793	7,320	6,789
Altnagelvin Area	50,748	53,455	53,570	53,045	53,826	55,543
South West Acute / Erne	23,547	26,296	26,806	27,662	28,387	29,182
Tyrone County	19,992	12,732	13,920	15,258	15,474	15,922
Northern Ireland	696,491	692,961	699,881	688,841	682,415	694,618

Source: EC1 Information Return

1 Belfast City emergency care department closed on a temporary basis on 1st November 2011

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of attendance at Emergency Departments has been recorded as non-emergency issues in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 37679/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on attendances at emergency care departments for non-emergency issues is not available.

However, information is available on the proportion of attendances (new and unplanned reviews) at emergency care departments which were assessed as non-urgent on the Manchester Triage Scale (MTS) for each of the last two years, the most recent period for which information is available. This information is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of Attendances Assessed as Non-Urgent on the Manchester Triage Scale (2012/13 – 2013/14)1

Department	2012/13	2013/14
Mater	1.7%	1.7%
Royal Victoria	1.2%	1.0%
RBHSC	5.6%	6.9%
Antrim Area	1.4%	0.7%
Causeway	1.9%	1.7%
Mid-Ulster	7.1%	12.3%
Whiteabbey	0.0%	0.0%
Ards	1.7%	1.9%
Bangor	2.3%	4.2%
Downe	1.7%	2.4%
Lagan Valley	2.1%	1.9%
Ulster	0.4%	0.4%
Armagh Community	84.9%	91.2%
Craigavon Area	0.5%	0.3%
Daisy Hill	0.5%	0.4%
South Tyrone	0.5%	0.4%
Altnagelvin	1.3%	1.0%
South West Acute	0.9%	0.4%
Tyrone County	1.3%	0.4%

1 Source: Regional Data Warehouse

Information is provisional and may be subject to change.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many locum doctors have worked for the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts through the HSC Regional Medical Locum Service since it was introduced.
(AQW 37683/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board administer the HSC's regional e-Locum Service. The service advises that since its inception in January 2014, 161 doctors have worked shifts for all HSC Trusts.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an overview of the current provision of out-of-hours GP services in North Down.
(AQW 37690/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) commissions GP Out of Hours (OOHs) services in the North Down area from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SE Trust). There are 3 centres in the SE Trust where patients can be seen, Newtownards, Lisburn and Downpatrick. The service operates from 6pm each evening until 8am when GP practices open the following morning and 24/7 at weekends and public holidays. The SE Trust deals with over 105,000 calls annually.

The HSCB is working with all Trusts and OOHs providers in supporting GP and nursing colleagues working in the service. The HSCB has invested an additional £1.5m in the OOHs budget during 2014/15 in order to support OOHs services across NI.

The HSCB has made additional funding to the SE Trust in 2014/15 of £179k for additional clinical staff at weekends and £30k for training. Further funding has also been provided to enhance clinical staffing at public holidays.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 36800/11-15, whether the scanner due to be replaced in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area will be in place and operational by March 2015.
(AQW 37694/11-15)

Mr Wells: The scanner in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area is located at Antrim Area Hospital. The project for its replacement is currently on programme for completion in March 2015 and the Trust is planning to have the new scanner operational from April 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of staff at each grade employed at the Ulster Hospital; and of these, how many (i) are currently absent from work due to ill health and receiving statutory sick pay; and (ii) have been off work for longer than one week due to ill health.
(AQW 37718/11-15)

Mr Wells: Due to the amount of time necessary to record absences for monthly and fortnightly payrolls, and the fact that statutory sick pay (SSP) is not payable until after the fourth consecutive day of absence and is not paid after the 28th week, it has not been possible to produce a contemporaneous account of the number of staff who are absent from work due to ill health and who are receiving SSP (or will receive it on their next pay date). The following figures therefore represent the situation at the Ulster Hospital as at the 28th of August 2014, being the most recent closed payroll month at the date of writing.

Because SSP eligibility is determined by a number of factors and thresholds aside from the four-day rule, it has not been possible for the Trust to supply a headcount figure of the number of staff receiving SSP within the timeframe for this question. However, included below is the amount of SSP paid at 28th August 2014, broken down by personnel area, for staff working at the Ulster Hospital as well as the headcount of staff who have been on sickness absence for longer than seven days.

The table below shows the number of staff based in the Ulster Hospital by personnel area, the amount of SSP payable to absent staff in each personnel area for the month of August 2014, and the number of staff who had been absent from work due to ill health for over 7 days. Figures are as at the 28th of August 2014.

Personnel Area	Staff In Post (Headcount)	SSP Amount	Staff Absent for Over 7 Days (Headcount)
Admin & Clerical	562	£23,264.83	22
Estates	50	£550.33	1
Medical & Dental	439	£4,902.86	5
Nursing & Midwifery	1,621	£80,361.34	92
Professional & Technical	533	£19,397.43	21
Social Services	94	£4,490.10	4
Support Services /User Experience	532	£35,254.94	36
Total	**3,831**	**£168,221.83**	**181**

Source: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

In regards to AQW 37719, the Trusts' adoption of the new Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system over the last year has significantly changed and improved the method used to calculate and record sickness absence. However, the discontinuity in data caused by the changeover and the differences between the systems mean that it is not yet possible to produce comparable twelve-month figures.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of supportive housing units in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 37740/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not held centrally and was therefore requested from Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Their responses can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The number of supported housing units by service and HSC Trust

	Service			
HSC Trust	**Elderly**	**Learning Disability**	**Physical Disability**	**Mental Health**
Belfast[1]	89	167	66	194
Northern	26	282	0	250[2]
South Eastern	71	105	1	103[2]
Southern	41	226	21	160[3]
Western[4]	0	10	12	43

1 Figures provided by Belfast HSC Trust relate to the number of tenancies.

2 Figure relates to places for service users in supported living schemes as opposed to units.

3 Figure includes 23 places provided by the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH).

4 Figures provided by Western HSC Trust do not include independent home providers who provide supported housing when contracted by the Trust.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of supportive housing units required in each Health and Social Care Trust to comply with Transforming Your Care.
(AQW 37746/11-15)

Mr Wells: Supported Living provides an environment that is designed to help vulnerable and older people retain their independence in their local community, and as such is an important part of services for older people in the community.

Transforming Your Care identified that a diverse choice of provision should be available to meet the individual health and social care needs of older people, and supported the trend towards independent living at home or in supported accommodation, with appropriate regulation and safeguards in place to protect the vulnerable. It does not specify the solutions required to deliver that choice.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he supports the Action on Hearing Loss lip reading campaign and their call for all hearing aid users to be referred to a lip reading class.
(AQW 37760/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am supportive of the Action on Hearing Loss (AHL) lip reading campaign however it is important to note that not everyone who is prescribed a hearing aid would require or benefit from a lip reading intervention.

In addition, the Regional Strategy Implementation Group (RSIG), tasked with the implementation of specific actions contained in the Physical & Sensory Disability Strategy Action Plan Action Plan (2012 – 2015), recommended that the Health and Social Care Board should commission lip reading teacher training to be delivered locally in Northern Ireland. This training has been commissioned and is due to commence in November 2014 with a class size of 12 candidates, 2 per HSC Trust and 2 places are allocated to AHL.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to monitor Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that they comply with the agency ranking system when recruiting locum doctors.
(AQW 37761/11-15)

Mr Wells: Procurement and Logistics Service within Business Service Organisation (BSO), in conjunction with Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, has worked to establish a Medical and Dental Agency Workers Framework. The day to day operation of the Framework lies with HSC Trusts who have responsibility for the issuing of this guidance to the relevant managers within their organisation to ensure compliance when recruiting locum doctors from agencies.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic in Belfast City Hospital has closed.
(AQW 37764/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust did not provide a commissioned service for CFS/ME patients. A non-commissioned CFS/ME clinic was offered by Dr Welby Henry in Belfast City Hospital from approximately 1986 until his retirement in early 2014. This clinic was provided on a 'special interest' basis.

Following Dr Henry's retirement, there were no staff with sufficient expertise to continue providing a CFS/ME clinic on this basis.

The Trust now provides an occupational therapist service for patients with a definitive diagnosis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome from GPs in line with NICE guidelines.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37022/11-15, whether a complex case panel is only constituted to deal with complex child protection cases.
(AQW 37765/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust complex case panel is normally only convened to discuss 'complex child protection cases'.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his proposals to support the Healthy Living Alliance.
(AQW 37777/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Public Health Agency (PHA) currently invests £1.1m p.a. through contracts with 14 Healthy Living Centres (HLCs) for example in relation to physical activity, smoking cessation, mental health and wellbeing and suicide prevention.

The PHA places considerable value on its working relationship with the HLC Alliance, which represents the HLCs. Examples of the joint work between PHA and the Alliance include support for showcase events promoting programmes delivered by the HLCs, sharing learning across HLCs and exploring further opportunities for HLC delivery.

The Public Health Agency is obliged to ensure that all existing contracts are subject to appropriate procurement processes. Funding for existing providers for 14/15 and 15/16 has been confirmed, subject to satisfactory performance and related monitoring of existing contracts. In 2016/17 a regional and sub-regional tender process will be undertaken. An evaluation of community health initiatives, including HLCs, is currently being finalised and this report will help inform future commissioning, planning, impact and implementation.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what initiatives will be taken to reduce the current waiting times for orthopaedic surgery for people living in County Fermanagh.
(AQW 37784/11-15)

Mr Wells: Over the last three years the demand for orthopaedic treatments in Northern Ireland has continued to increase. The changing demographic profile of the population, increasing demand for revision surgery and changing clinical practice continues to put increasing pressure on the service.

I have been advised by the Western Trust that it has introduced a number of initiatives to reduce waiting times for orthopaedic surgery including:

- increased pre-operative assessment to prevent cancellations, including dedicated anaesthetic roles;
- Introduction of Band 3 healthcare assistants to take patients to theatre, to prevent delays between cases;
- discussions with the local and Board commissioners regarding other roles that need commissioned: e.g. specialist anaesthetic roles to improve throughput, Kit Co-ordinators in theatres to prevent cancellations;
- Procurement of an imaging machine to allow high volume lists for joint injection to be carried out outside theatres; and
- Use of non-operative interventions for some procedures, e.g. Dupytrens injections

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all legal costs incurred by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland since its establishment.
(AQW 37789/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) has advised that since its establishment in September 2012 it has incurred legal costs amounting to £9,171.54. This includes legal costs of £2,244.99 associated with the SBNI's statutory Case Management Review function and £6,926.55 associated with the ongoing Thematic Review directed by the Department.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37022/11-15, whether a complex case panel deals with a child with complex medical needs where there is no child protection issue.
(AQW 37816/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust complex case panel does not deal with children with complex medical needs where there is no child protection issue.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current average waiting time for GPs.
(AQW 37820/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not available.

As independent contractors, GPs are responsible for the day to day management of their Practice, including patient appointment arrangements

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of home safety checks which have been conducted by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in each month of the last three years.
(AQW 37824/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below details the number of Home Fire Safety Checks conducted by NIFRS in each month of 2011/12, 2012/13, and 2013/14.

	Year		
Month	**2011/2012**	**2012/2013**	**2013/2014**
April	807	737	523
May	602	610	547
June	359	571	661
July	583	520	871
August	1,271	705	681
September	978	635	773
October	1,064	738	888
November	1,025	604	722
December	529	676	740
January	1,527	762	881
February	1,150	1,039	1,124
March	998	1,064	1,179
Total	**10,893**	**8,661**	**9,590**

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current level of resource wastage in the Health Service, in relation to unused drugs and dietary supplements in hospital and residential care environments.
(AQW 37834/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have been advised by each of the HSC Trusts that they are fully aware of the need to minimise medicines wastage and a range of systems and initiatives are in place to keep wastage to a minimum. However, it is not possible to fully quantify the amount of wastage in relation to unused drugs and dietary supplements in hospital and residential care environments.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial support has been provided by his Department to assist public health initiatives in East Londonderry, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37835/11-15)

Mr Wells: This information is available on two levels -

(i) direct public health investment in the Coleraine and Limavady areas specifically.

(ii) funding, on a capitation basis, invested in Trust wide areas and accessible to the local population in East Londonderry. This would include for example training, public health awareness campaigns and local projects.

Table: Summary of Public Health Investment in East Londonderry 2012-15

Level	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
Local Direct Investment	£126,814.00	£98,364.00	£86,834.00	£312,012.00
Trust Capitation Share Investment	£212,713.00	£197,821.00	£205,305.00	£615,839.00

Level	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
Total	**£339,527.00**	**£296,185.00**	**£292,139.00**	**£927,851.00**

These figures do not include wider investment in health and social care services, eg screening, immunisations and child health services which will also support public health, nor in regionally available programmes.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Chronic Pain Department at the Ulster Hospital, to detail (i) the current average waiting time for initial assessment; (ii) the current average waiting time for a review appointment; and (iii) whether clinical targets for repeat steroid injections required by patients are being met.
(AQW 37840/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has stated that, in relation to the Chronic Pain Department at the Ulster Hospital,

(i) The average waiting time for initial assessment is 12 weeks.

(ii) and (iii) The local clinical target for review of steroid treatment is six months. The average waiting time for a review appointment is 8.5 months. These patients are currently waiting between 4 and 14 months depending on the consultant's area of expertise.

The figures in the answer refer to the waiting time position as at the week beginning 20th October 2014.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the efforts which are being made to seek alternative sources of funding for the illustrative hub and spoke model within Transforming Your Care.
(AQW 37861/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Lisburn and Newry primary care centre schemes are proceeding as Third Party Developments (3PD) to test how the 3PD approach might incentivise developers in the local market to achieve the required accommodation standards at a lower Whole Life Cost than would be the case using conventional capital funding.

The Southern and South Eastern Trusts, supported by HSCB and SIB are progressing these developments and we expect the procurement process for these schemes to move to preferred bidder status early in 2015 and subject to final contract negotiation and approval, begin construction by late 2015.

We have agreed with DFP that the evaluation of the procurement stages of these projects will be used to inform whether or not a similar 3PD approach can be used to finance the wider programme. In parallel with this process, my officials have been working closely with DFP and SIB to consider whether ring fenced financial transactions capital (FTC) funding can be used within a wider 3PD programme.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the decision taken by the Health and Social Care Board to cease elective care in private clinics in relation to (i) patient care; and (ii) waiting times for surgery.
(AQW 37862/11-15)

Mr Wells: A decision was taken by the Health and Social Care Board in July 2014 to pause waiting list initiative arrangements pending clarification of the 2014/15 financial position. The Board wrote to independent sector providers on 1 October 2014 to say that pending further clarification of the 2014/15 financial position, no new patients would be transferred to the independent sector for assessment, diagnostics and/or treatment in this financial year.

I regret that the HSC Board had to take this measure however it is necessary to constrain spending in light of the significant financial pressures which my Department is facing. The HSC Board and its Local Commissioning Groups are continuing to work with the HSC Trusts to address shortfalls in elective capacity within the resources available. As I said in my statement to the Assembly on 14 October 2014, whilst the additional £80 million is most welcome, there will still be consequences for the provision of health and social care as it will simply not be possible to maintain current levels of service provision in the absence of all the required levels of funding. I will allocate the funding I have received to those areas that will minimise the impact on front line patient care and I intend to make those decisions shortly.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has received following the introduction of the latest 2014 Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme; and how this has been spent to fund new medicines.
(AQW 37918/11-15)

Mr Wells: Returns to Northern Ireland from the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) which started on 1 January 2014 have totalled £3.53 million. The bulk of the return covers the period 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2014 and a small amount is a residual payment in respect of 2013.

The £3.53m has been used to off-set any increase in the cost of branded medicines in the period 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2014 and has already been included in the final budget position for the 2013/2014 financial year. The monies are therefore not available for redeployment.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to the NHS Pay Review Body's recommendations, including the actions that are being taken to implement the recommendations.
(AQW 37921/11-15)

Mr Wells: The NHS Pay Review Body recommendations are being considered in the context of the current financial challenges alongside the need to maintain the safe and effective delivery of services for patients and clients. I am considering all options available to Northern Ireland before issuing my response to the NHS Pay Review Body 28th Report.

I have not personally discussed this issue with UK Government counterparts. My officials have, however, been involved in some discussion and have taken account of each administration's response to the NHS Pay Review Body recommendations to inform our considerations on the way forward.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 36952/11-15, to detail the five ring-fenced projects that will not progress at the timescale initially estimated.
(AQW 37932/11-15)

Mr Wells: The five ring-fenced projects which were identified as not going to progress to the timescale initially estimated are:

- Regional Children's Hospital and Energy Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) (£10.45m)
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) Logistics Support Centre (£2.6m)
- Wind Turbine at the Causeway Hospital (£1.2m)
- Paediatric Ward and Ambulatory Unit at the Craigavon Area Hospital (£0.5m)
- Paediatric Centre of Excellence at the Daisy Hill Hospital (£0.5m)

The largest of these is the RVH Children's Hospital. The original 2014-15 expenditure profile for this £223m project was made in June 2013 before the business case was finalised in February 2014 and it proved to be an over-estimate of expenditure in the first year as the project was in its early stages. This project remains on schedule to be completed in 2020-21.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the administrative costs incurred by his Department in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37976/11-15)

Mr Wells: Total administrative expenditure by my Department over the last 3 years was as follows:

- 2011/12 £29,335k
- 2012/13 £29,685k
- 2013/14 £29,979k

This relates to the Department alone and excludes the equivalent costs in sponsored bodies.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 36645/11-15, to state the instances that these in-cell use computers, or any others, have been misused by a prisoner, including non-approved adaptions, internet accessed or any other use which is not permitted.
(AQW 37468/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Between September 2011 and October 2014 there have been seven reports of misuse by prisoners outlined in the table below.

2012	**3 incidents of unauthorised access to the internet**
2012	1 incident of unauthorised access to a user account, resulting in unauthorised access to the internet
2013	1 incident of unauthorised access to the internet
2013	1 incident of unauthorised access to a user account
2014	1 incident of unauthorised access to the internet

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice why the terminology 'lethal foetal abnormality' is used in his current consultation on abortion, rather than 'fatal foetal abnormality'; and what are the resulting imports of the chosen terminology.
(AQW 37476/11-15)

Mr Ford: As explained in the glossary of terms on page 4 of the consultation paper, lethal foetal abnormality is to be read as synonymous with terminal or fatal abnormality/condition. One term has been used for consistency throughout the document but the Department regards their use as interchangeable.

The consultation focuses on the criminal law in relation to abortion in two specific areas. It does not seek to open a debate on the wider issues concerning abortion. Therefore, only responses, or parts of responses, relating to those aspects of the law identified in the consultation will be considered in deciding on future legislative proposals. This is explained in the introduction on page 3.

As regards petitions, they will be accepted, and I will carefully consider them in the wider context of information and evidence, alongside the various views provided by respondents. However, this is not an opinion poll and although the number of signatures to a petition will be noted, they will not count as individual responses.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice why responses to the abortion consultation which object in principle to abortion are to be ruled inadmissible, even if additionally they raise issues specific to the identified topics in the consultation.
(AQW 37478/11-15)

Mr Ford: As explained in the glossary of terms on page 4 of the consultation paper, lethal foetal abnormality is to be read as synonymous with terminal or fatal abnormality/condition. One term has been used for consistency throughout the document but the Department regards their use as interchangeable.

The consultation focuses on the criminal law in relation to abortion in two specific areas. It does not seek to open a debate on the wider issues concerning abortion. Therefore, only responses, or parts of responses, relating to those aspects of the law identified in the consultation will be considered in deciding on future legislative proposals. This is explained in the introduction on page 3.

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Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether submitted petitions in response to the consultation on abortion will be accepted; and if so, whether each signature will be counted as a response to the consultation.
(AQW 37479/11-15)

Mr Ford: As explained in the glossary of terms on page 4 of the consultation paper, lethal foetal abnormality is to be read as synonymous with terminal or fatal abnormality/condition. One term has been used for consistency throughout the document but the Department regards their use as interchangeable.

The consultation focuses on the criminal law in relation to abortion in two specific areas. It does not seek to open a debate on the wider issues concerning abortion. Therefore, only responses, or parts of responses, relating to those aspects of the law identified in the consultation will be considered in deciding on future legislative proposals. This is explained in the introduction on page 3.

As regards petitions, they will be accepted, and I will carefully consider them in the wider context of information and evidence, alongside the various views provided by respondents. However, this is not an opinion poll and although the number of signatures to a petition will be noted, they will not count as individual responses.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission is running out of funds for Legal Aid payments and warnings have been issued as to delays, including a number of claims submitted in this financial year not being considered and paid until 2015/16.
(AQW 37542/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Executive faces a challenging financial environment. Following budget cuts in the June Monitoring Round, in-year cuts have been applied across all justice organisations including legal aid expenditure.

In response to these financial pressures, the Legal Services Commission adjusted its payment profile to live within the available resources. However, I have successfully bid for additional resources which have allowed the original profile to be restored and have informed the Law Society and Bar Council.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how many anti-social behaviour orders have been applied for since 2004, broken down by (a) year; and (b) local council.
(AQW 37554/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of applications made for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, by Local Government District of defendant from 2007 to September 2014P, is shown in the table below.

Identification of applications for Anti-social Behaviour Orders prior to 2007 would require a manual trawl of court records and would therefore incur a disproportionate cost.

Local Government District	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Jan to Sep 2014
Antrim	2	0	3	4	0	4	2	1
Ards	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	1	3	2	3	0	0	0	1
Ballymoney	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	2	2	1	5	8	0	3	1
Carrickfergus	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	1	0	6	1	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Craigavon	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0
Derry	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Down	2	1	1	1	0	3	0	2
Dungannon	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lisburn	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	2
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	0	1	0	3	2	2	1	0
North Down	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Defendant's Postcode Not Recorded	1	1	4	4	1	1	0	0
Total	**16**	**13**	**28**	**26**	**14**	**10**	**10**	**8**

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

P 2014 data is currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether, and by what agencies, information is obtained in Northern Ireland from The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, or has a failure to extend the operation of National Crime Agency impeded the flow of such information.
(AQW 37555/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI are able to access information and advice from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, which is an integral part of the National Crime Agency (NCA). What is missing, however, is access to operational support. Unless the Assembly agrees to a legislative consent motion, and the Westminster Parliament passes related legislation, then the NCA will not have this ability. Clearly that places the PSNI at a distinct disadvantage compared to other police services in the United Kingdom. This is especially relevant given the current pressures on the police budget.

Discussions are ongoing with the main political parties and others to seek to reach agreement on a way forward regarding the NCA.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether he was aware in advance of the letters in September and October 2014, to the legal profession from the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, warning of a funding shortfall in Legal Aid; (ii) if so whether he approved these letters; and (iii) if not has he now been furnished with the correspondence.
(AQW 37600/11-15)

Mr Ford: In July I commissioned all of the spending areas in my Department to prepare for reductions in budget due to in-year cuts. As part of this work, and following the outcome of the June Monitoring Round, the budget available for the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) was reduced. The Chief Executive of NILSC wrote to the legal profession advising of the impact of the revised budget. I support the NILSC in taking this step.

I have been kept fully briefed by my officials on the impact of cuts across the justice system, the on-going pressures within the legal aid budget and the actions taken by the NILSC to live within the revised budget allocation. I have been provided with copies of the correspondence. I have also met with representatives of the Bar Council and the Law Society to discuss the implications of the potential budget shortfall. However, I have successfully bid for additional resources which will alleviate the potential impact.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether people tasked with compiling pre-sentence reports routinely verify what they are told by defendants on whom reports are based, particularly in relation to personal and financial circumstances, medical assertions and separate pending court cases.
(AQW 37609/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the preparation of pre-sentence reports, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland will liaise with the Police Service of Northern Ireland Investigating Officer, general practitioners and any other relevant services to substantiate information provided by defendants. When attending for interview, defendants are required to produce verification of financial circumstances. Through an arrangement with the Public Prosecution Service, staff have access to the Criminal Records viewer, which is routinely reviewed to determine if there are separate pending court cases.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the disposal of Bangor courthouse.
(AQW 37621/11-15)

Mr Ford: In May 2014 the Northern Ireland Executive formally approved delivery of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government 2011/15. A demonstration Programme has been established by Development Trusts NI (DTNI), a body appointed as the delivery partner to implement CAT. Bangor Courthouse is one of the eight pilot projects DTNI is using to test the policy framework. My Department is working with Department of Social Development and DTNI colleagues to progress this programme.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice how his Department is working with relevant bodies, including the Irish Football Association, to address violent and anti-social behaviour by football fans attending Irish league matches.
(AQW 37642/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department worked closely with the Irish Football Association and other sporting bodies in the development and creation of Part 4 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Part 4 provides a package of powers to regulate conduct at sporting events including offences around throwing articles, offensive chanting, pitch incursion and possession of fireworks.

The IFA was particularly supportive of the football banning order provisions also created in the Act and undertook to support these with its own Code of Conduct. By way of IFA training programmes my Department was involved in briefing soccer clubs on the legislation. Giving effect to these powers is now an operational matter for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

In addition to this legislative work, through my Department's Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) network, a number of sports-based diversionary and education initiatives are delivered in conjunction with a number of bodies.

For example, with District Councils, Churches and voluntary bodies, PCSPs help provide Midnight and Twilight Soccer programmes; cage soccer and sports facilities; and residential courses, many on a cross-community basis to divert young people from anti-social behaviour.

Many of these projects are jointly funded with assistance by the IFA, churches, voluntary bodies and PCSPs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will conduct a review or audit into how the NI Legal Services Commission is facing a funding shortfall in respect of Legal Aid, with a view to establishing what is causing the drain on resources, to identify how this can be addressed, particularly in relation to the eligibility criteria of Legal Aid and how robustly and routinely the criteria is enforced.
(AQW 37676/11-15)

Mr Ford: Legal aid is a demand led service providing access to justice to those in greatest need. On devolution, I inherited a situation where the demands on legal aid outstripped the available budget. My legal aid reform programme has delivered a number of measures which have reduced costs and further steps are being implemented. This will include consideration of eligibility for legal aid.

Initially I prioritised reform of criminal legal aid and since devolution I have introduced measures to deliver some £20m of annual savings in criminal legal aid. Legal aid expenditure, however, continues to rise.

In order to bring expenditure within budget, I am now focussing on a number of reforms to reduce civil legal aid with the aim of introducing a more cost-effective Justice system without compromising the principle of Access to Justice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether unpaid offender levies are subject to a fine default review, as is currently underway for the outstanding monetary penalties handed down at courts.
(AQW 37677/11-15)

Mr Ford: All unpaid offender levies for which the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has responsibility for collection will be subject to a Fine Default Hearing.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has any plans to discuss with Westminster colleagues any new legislation aimed at combatting internet trolling.
(AQW 37692/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am aware of the Justice Secretary's proposed legislative changes for England and Wales in relation to malicious communications or "internet trolling". My officials are already in touch with their Westminster equivalents as to the detail. As a devolved issue any proposal to change the law in Northern Ireland would be subject to public consultation and consideration by the Assembly. I will be keeping developments in Westminster under review.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) how the matters originally listed for hearing on 9 June 2014 at Newtownards Court under Proceedings ID 14/0353 were settled; (ii) if the matters were settled between the parties, was the Court advised of the basis of settlement; (iii) if so, when; and (iv) under what terms did the parties advise the Court that the matter was being settled.
(AQW 37721/11-15)

Mr Ford: Case ID 14/0353 was not listed for hearing at Newtownards court on 9 June 2014.

The charges brought in Case ID 14/0353 were withdrawn on 21 February 2014 after the defendant accepted a caution.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37143/11-15, how it was determined that the provision of an in-house translation service would cost more than the current system of £1.3m per annum; and, given the sums paid in E and F District, how an in-house service is deemed too costly.
(AQW 37737/11-15)

Mr Ford: The procurement of the translation service for the criminal justice sector commenced with the preparation and approval of a business case which set out a number of options, associated costs and a preferred option. The in-house option of employing translators was considered too costly and logistically difficult to manage. Salaries, retainers or fees would have to be paid to a large number of interpreters across a range of languages and there would have been a requirement to have a team of staff in place to manage bookings and ensure payments were made. The business case was approved by the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland also considered the potential to employ interpreters directly, before the previous contract was let, but rejected this as impractical and uneconomical.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's requirements are met from the Northern Ireland Civil Service Interpreting Contract, which is based on the same hourly rates and provided by the same contractor as the DOJ contract. Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) was the lead in both contracts and DOJ has been in regular contact with CPD experts throughout the process.

Responsibility for this contract transferred to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service on 30 September 2014. NICTS has recently approached DHSSPS to discuss service delivery and contract management on the interpreting contract.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37143/11-15, what discussions his departmental officials have had with officials in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to translator costs.
(AQW 37739/11-15)

Mr Ford: The procurement of the translation service for the criminal justice sector commenced with the preparation and approval of a business case which set out a number of options, associated costs and a preferred option. The in-house option of employing translators was considered too costly and logistically difficult to manage. Salaries, retainers or fees would have to be paid to a large number of interpreters across a range of languages and there would have been a requirement to have a team of staff in place to manage bookings and ensure payments were made. The business case was approved by the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

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Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the costs awarded against the Police Federation of NI in relation to the Post-traumatic stress disorder class action, including when the ruling was made and how much has been paid to date.
(AQW 37809/11-15)

Mr Ford: This issue is outside of my remit and is a matter for the Police Federation for Northern Ireland's Central Committee and its members. You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PFNI.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why a member of staff was allowed to withdraw from the Prison Service Voluntary Early Retirment Scheme in March 2012.
(AQW 37842/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my response to AQW/35324/11-15.

545 staff formally applied to the Scheme. 520 staff left under the terms of the Scheme, with 25 withdrawals for a range of reasons.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many staff signed up to the Prison Service Voluntary Early Retirment Scheme.
(AQW 37843/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my response to AQW/35324/11-15.

545 staff formally applied to the Scheme. 520 staff left under the terms of the Scheme, with 25 withdrawals for a range of reasons.

Department for Regional Development

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to provide lighting along the Comber Greenway.
(AQW 36727/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Comber Greenway is a well used largely traffic-free route which continues to attract both walkers and people who use the bicycle for leisure and commuting. It forms part of Route 99 of the National Cycle Network between Titanic Quarter, Belfast, and Comber. A small part of this route is 'on road' and already illuminated, whilst the remainder is off-road.

In order to maximise the use of the Greenway and to promote and encourage people to use the bicycle throughout the year, there may be a case for lighting improvements on, at least, part of the route. Lighting may not be appropriate along the entire route for aesthetic and conservation reasons. Furthermore, the needs of adjacent properties and neighbours will also have to be considered. Following the conclusion of the public consultation exercise on the draft Bicycle Strategy my Department's Cycling Unit will consider whether this should be included in the proposed Bicycle Strategy delivery plan.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total budget allocation for gritting in winter 2014/15; and how this compares with 2013/14.
(AQW 36877/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The total budget allocation for TransportNI's winter service programme for the 2013/14 season was £6.2 million. This figure includes all aspects of the winter service provision, including snow clearance and the provision and maintenance of salt bins and grit piles.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has spent on hospitality in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 36906/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following are the relevant statistics in relation to hospitality extended by Translink:

Year	£
2011/12	30,716
2012/13	22,061
2013/14	21,539

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many job losses for outside contractors have resulted from the reduction in his Department's maintenance budget.
(AQW 37414/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will be aware, following the announcement on June monitoring, my Department's Resource Budgets, from which day-to-day maintenance of the road network is funded, have been cut. My Department no longer has sufficient funding to pay contractors and as a result has had no option other than to stop issuing new work instructions to the Department's contractors, who currently undertake a wide range of day-to-day maintenance activities.

I acknowledge this will have a detrimental impact on a number of companies and their staff and will have wider consequences both now and in the longer term, however, difficult decisions have had to be made regarding the deployment of my Department's limited resources. I appreciate the difficult situation which they and others find themselves in, but the Department simply cannot continue to spend money which it doesn't have.

There is little doubt these budget cuts will have an impact on the workload of external contractors, however, I do not have any information as to whether or not this has resulted in actual job losses to date.

I have met with representatives of the Quarry Products Association and plan to meet representatives of the Construction Employers Federation over the next few weeks to discuss a number of issues affecting the industry and I anticipate jobs will be one of the issues discussed.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the York Street Interchange road scheme.
(AQW 37463/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Design of the preferred option for the York Street Interchange, along with the associated work to inform and prepare the Statutory Orders, is progressing to schedule with publication of the draft Statutory Orders programmed for later this financial year.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 36516/11-15, to list the dates on which the functionality of cats eyes on the A4 from Dungannon to Ballygawley was inspected since the road opened; and for his assessment of their current state.
(AQW 37470/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The A4 from Dungannon to Ballygawley is maintained on behalf of the Department by Amey Lagan Roads Limited and its Operator, Amey Government, under the DBFO Package 2 Contract. This section of road opened on 17th November 2010.

Inspections of the road studs were carried out in November 2012, December 2013 and most recently during week commencing 6 October 2014.

The condition of the road studs during the inspections of November 2012 and December 2013 was excellent, however, in the most recent inspection their condition had deteriorated significantly to the extent that remedial works are now required. These remedial works are currently being programmed by the DBFO Company.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that his Department has been allocated additional funding through the October Monitoring Round, whether he intends to reinstate work to clear gullies and fix broken street lights.
(AQW 37471/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The additional funding of £4.5 million Resource DEL (cash) allocated to my Department as part of the October Monitoring Round is necessary to meet the Executive's commitment to concessionary fares. As such the allocation does not provide any additional funding for roads maintenance and street lighting repairs.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many street lights in Co Fermanagh are currently out of order.
(AQW 37472/11-15)

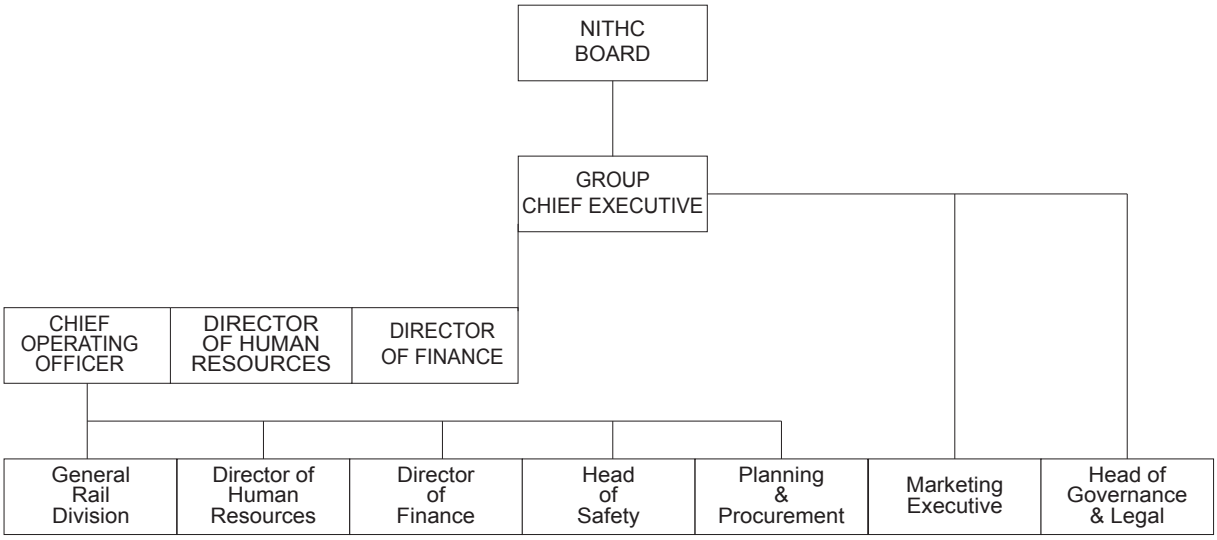
Mr Kennedy: The information requested is not available in the format requested as my Department does not maintain its street lighting records by County boundaries.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much NI Railways has in its cash reserves.
(AQW 37495/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Railways as a business does not generate cash surpluses and runs at a loss. From time to time it may have surplus balances in its bank account due to timing differences on amounts owed to and from other Translink group companies. It is important to consider NI Railways as part of the NITHC group consolidated accounts and its net assets will be included in these group accounts. Net assets for NI Railways at 30 March 2014 were £4.5 million.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the management structure of Translink.
(AQW 37497/11-15)

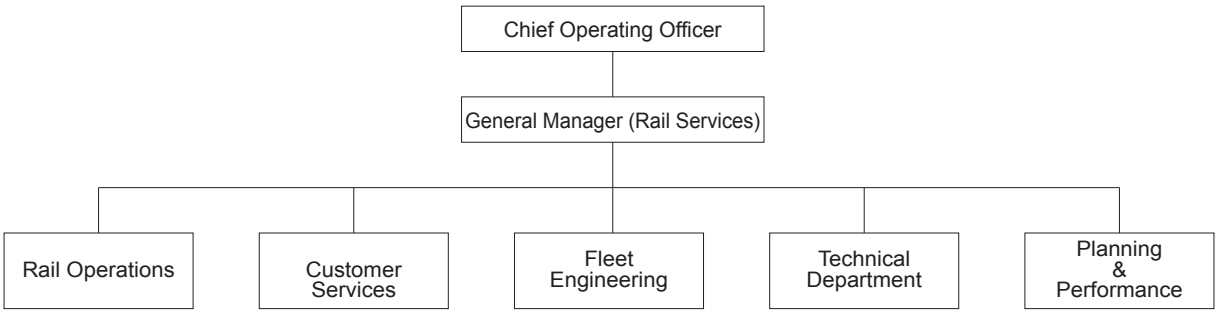
Mr Kennedy: This structure is outlined in the organisation chart below.



Management Structure of NI Railways

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the management structure of NI Railways.
(AQW 37498/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This structure is outlined in the organisation chart below. The Infrastructure Executive also reports to the Chief Operating Officer and this provides infrastructure support to maintain and upgrade the rail network.



Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 36599/11-15 and following the implementation of the passing loop between Coleraine and Londonderry, what scale of increase does he expect over the next ten years.
(AQW 37514/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Installation of the passing loop will in itself not affect ridership, however this measure will provide the necessary infrastructure capacity to operate an hourly service and this, if implemented, should stimulate growth.

Experience in Northern Ireland Rail in respect of service enhancement from near two-hourly frequency to hourly frequency (previous service enhancements between Coleraine and Belfast) is that it generated circa 25% increase in ridership within one year of implementation and potentially in excess of 50% in the first 10 years.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Railways plans to develop Adelaide Halt.
(AQW 37545/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is shortly going to carry out a feasibility study for the redevelopment of Adelaide halt. The main aims are to.

- Improve halt access and passenger facilities
- Make improvements to accessibility
- Increase platform capacity for 6-car train sets
- Improve operational efficiency and performance
- Improve the public perception of the halt within a clean, safe, secure and welcoming environment
- Improve corporate image
- Ensure service continuity with minimum disruption during construction

- Improve access/integration with proposed pedestrian path to Windsor Park Football Stadium.

Department for Social Development

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development whether the decontamination works at Fort George will be completed before the site is handed over to Derry City and Strabane District Council in April 2015.
(AQW 35952/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Decontamination works on Fort George cannot start until outline planning permission is secured for the Fort George Development Framework. My Department is working closely with the Department of the environment and the Department of Regional Development to resolve the outstanding issues. I am hopeful that the outline planning permission will be secured before the end of 2014.

The decontamination works themselves are expected to take between 12 and 18 months to procure and complete. Since the work will not be able to start until early 2015 at the earliest, it follows that the work will not be completed before 31 March 2015. I hope that the excellent arrangements and relationships which have been established between the new Council and my Department will continue as we work together to determine the strategy and timetable for the remediation of Fort George.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the communities identified as being 'Small Pockets of Deprivation'; (ii) the size of the population affected; and (iii) the funding allocation to support the development of each area, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 36748/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the communities identified as being 'Small Pockets of Deprivation', (ii) the size of the population affected; and (iii) the funding allocation to support the development of each area, broken down by constituency.

Answer

Constituency	Area	Population*	Total 13/14 Funding
North Down	Rathgill, Bangor	691	
	Harbour, Bangor	587	£117,732.23
Foyle	Strathfoyle, Londonderry	528	£76,189.37
Strangford	Westwinds, Newtownards	583	
	Glen, Newtownards	379	
	Bowtown, Newtownards	824	£71,502.66
East Antrim	Riverdale, Larne	579	
	Sunnylands, Carrickfergus	320	
	Greenisland, Carrickfergus	519	£86,486.28
North Antrim	Carnany estate	429	
	Glebeside estate	403	
	Castle St, Seymour Drive & Westgate	370	£22,715.96
Belfast North	Bawnmore, Newtownabbey	676	£10,801.89
Belfast South	Benmore, Finaghy	203	£21,781.41
South Antrim	White City, Belfast	**	£7,790.20

* Population at time when SPOD areas were identified.

** Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate the population figure for White City.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what degree of importance he will attach to the ongoing issue of recruitment levels within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in light of the community background of recruits over a number of years.
(AQW 36799/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that it has currently embarked on a significant period of transformation not only in relation to the way in which it delivers its services and manages its business, but also in relation to staff realignment to ensure workforce structures, existing staff and potential employees meet and have the requisite skill sets to ensure optimum efficiency going forward.

At the forefront of this journey, equality of opportunity in relation to employment remains an important priority for the Housing Executive and as such it continues to operate its Appointments and Promotions Policy within the Northern Ireland equality framework in relation to the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (NI) 1999 and the principles established by the Section 75 Regulations contained in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The organisation complies with the recommendations of good practice as contained in the associated Codes of Practice relating to discrimination and equality of opportunity and these are reflected with regard to all recruitment activity undertaken. All recruitment exercises complement the organisations Affirmative Action Strategy.

The main focus of that strategy, which has been developed and agreed with the Equality Commission, has been to implement measures specifically created to encourage applications from members of the Protestant community who are currently under represented in areas of the Housing Executives workforce. The Strategy focuses on four key areas, i.e. Recruitment; Community Outreach; a Schools Programme; and Research.

The Housing Executive has assured me that it will continue to work within the principles of equality of opportunity with appointments based on merit, implementing its affirmative action mechanisms where appropriate to ensure that the community background of its workforce is demonstrative of the Northern Ireland Economically Active population.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) Housing Association; and (ii) Housing Executive tenants have been subjected to court proceedings for alleged anti-social behaviour in the last three years.
(AQW 37065/11-15)

Mr Storey: In relation to (i) Table 1 below details the number of Housing Association tenants subjected to court proceedings for alleged anti-social behaviour in the last three years.

In relation to (ii) Table 2 below details the number of Housing Executive tenants subjected to court proceedings over the last three years, including the number of cases in which possession of a tenancy was achieved or an injunction granted.

Table 1 – Housing Association tenants
No. of Housing Association tenants subject to court proceedings for Anti social behaviour

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
27	30	36

Table 2 – Housing Executive tenants

Court Proceedings for Anti-Social Behaviour	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Possessions during period	51	24	24
Injunctions granted during period	3	3	3

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 Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment was made by Triangle Housing Association of the composition of the Coleraine waiting list when determining the house size of the twenty home development currently under construction.
(AQW 37335/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that in May 2013 Triangle Housing Association was nominated to develop surplus Housing Executive land at Lisnablagh, Harpurs Hill, Coleraine. In January 2014 the association received a letter of support from the Housing Executive which contained an assessment of need and details of new build requirements for the Harpurs Hill common landlord area. In addition, the Housing Executive identified a number of applicants with complex needs who required bespoke accommodation. Triangle Housing Association was asked to design an appropriate housing solution to meet the special requirements of these individuals and their families, following an options appraisal and based on recommendations specified within the Occupational Therapist report.

Taking account of these factors, the Housing Executive's Area Planner confirmed support for the following housing mix:

- 4 x 2 person, 1 bed apartments
- 8 x 3 person 2 bed houses
- 5 x 5 person 3 bed houses
- 3 x 4 person 3 bed wheelchair bungalows (for named applicants)

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development on how many occasions the Northern Ireland Housing Executive have sought an injunction restraining any person from engaging in conduct causing a nuisance or annoyance using their premises for immoral or illegal purposes or entering such residential premises since the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 came into operation.
(AQW 37350/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that since the introduction of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 they have sought and obtained 33 injunctions. The injunctions relate to their involvement in attempting to resolve cases of any form of anti-social behaviour.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he supports the Homeless Action Charter; and if so, what steps are being taken to implement its recommendations.
(AQW 37362/11-15)

Mr Storey: I have read this Charter and I believe that the Four Steps referred to in it are currently being addressed through either the Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy 2012 – 17 or through the Department's Fundamental Review of Allocations.

The two main steps directly relevant to the Housing Executive of creating individual support pathways and addressing repeat homelessness are dealt with through a recent prioritization of homelessness prevention measures in their Homelessness Strategy 2012-17. They have in place a range of individual support pathways which will prevent homelessness including repeat homelessness and reduce the length of time that people experience homelessness.

The Supporting People programme funds a range of support providers to assist households who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. Support providers focus on providing person centred support, through individual needs assessment, support planning and client involvement in service delivery and governance.

A Housing Options approach is being introduced which will ensure that housing and support solutions are found for many people who present to the Housing Executive in housing need without homelessness resulting or the household requiring temporary accommodation.

The Housing Executive has introduced a Private Rented Sector Access Scheme which provides a viable accommodation alternative to anyone in housing need by allowing them access to affordable housing of a good standard in the private sector without the need for large upfront deposits. They are also piloting a Housing First service to tackle serial homelessness among the most chronic and entrenched homeless population. The service provides individuals with wrap around support and other services in their own independent accommodation rather than in a room in a hostel.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what proportion of homeless people presented as homeless on more than one occasion, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 37365/11-15)

Mr Storey: The statistics below outline the proportion of homeless people who presented to the Housing Executive as homeless on more than one occasion from 2008/09 to present. In relation to 2010/11 and 2011/12, the statistics are unavailable due to work being carried out to introduce a changeover in computer recording mechanisms within the Housing Executive.

Year	Proportion of Repeat Homeless Presentations
2008/09	8.9%
2009/10	8.4%
2012/13	10.2%
2013/14	13%

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 Weir asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to correlate additional social housing provision with areas of the highest levels of homelessness.
(AQW 37368/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive's Strategic Guidelines set out priorities for the provision of additional social housing. These Guidelines, which are reviewed on an annual basis, are in place to target new social housing to where it is needed most. The Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) comprises schemes to target social housing requirements across a wide range of different needs. The SHDP is shaped by the Housing Executive's Strategic Guidelines which take into account waiting list statistics, in particular levels of housing stress, including homelessness, to ensure that resources are equitably distributed amongst the various competing needs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development why the 'Cavity Walls Insulation Report' by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive omitted a recommendations section.
(AQW 37408/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive released the Cavity Wall Insulation Report by the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) on the understanding that it is the outcome of a small scale, exploratory research study which aimed to provide an initial indication of the quality and performance of the cavity wall insulation inserted into the cavities of Housing Executive dwellings since the 1980s.

It did not include the recommendations as the Housing Executive did not accept them and believes that more work is required. A much larger survey has been commissioned as part of a Stock Condition Survey of Housing Executive properties which commenced in the Autumn of 2014. This will inform the future strategy and programmes required to address the issues raised in this report.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the proposals to increase the level of information provided to homeless applicants by the Housing Executive, including a full breakdown of points awarded.
(AQW 37415/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has a statutory duty under the Housing (NI) Order, 1988 to provide advice and assistance to anyone who presents as homeless. They do this through guidance at interview stage, letters, printed guidance and referrals to other advice agencies such as the Housing Rights Service.

As part of its strategy to prevent homelessness the Housing Executive has begun to introduce a Housing Options approach to how it delivers its frontline services. Housing Options will ensure information is available to applicants in a range of forms and will give Housing Executive customers an increased level of information on the housing choices and support available for them relevant to their individual needs

The Housing Options approach focuses on the specific needs of the individual or household and features early preventative intervention. It explores all possible housing options including social renting, private renting, owner-occupation and remaining in current accommodation. Frontline services will assess an individual or household's needs and draw upon a range of expert services to help meet those needs.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any plans to review or uplift the number of points awarded to a housing applicant as a result of living in hostel accommodation.
(AQW 37416/11-15)

Mr Storey: The current Housing Selection Scheme is operated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Under this Scheme, Interim Accommodation points will be awarded to a statutory homeless applicant who has been residing for six months in accommodation provided to him / her in discharge of the Housing Executive's interim duty under the Housing (N.I.) Order, 1988. These points will be in addition to 'Homeless / Threatened with Homelessness-Full Duty Applicant Points'.

In 2011, the NIHE consulted on a number of changes to the Scheme, including:

- whether additional interim accommodation points should be awarded after further periods spent in temporary accommodation; and
- whether any such additional points should be awarded to:
  - statutory homeless applicants placed in temporary accommodation arranged by the Housing Executive only;
  - statutory homeless applicants who are either placed by the Housing Executive or make their own alternative temporary accommodation arrangements; or
  - all statutory homeless applicants.

The proposed changes are still under consideration pending the fundamental review of social housing allocations policy, which is being led by my Department.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are target times for completing an assessment of housing need for homeless applicants to the Housing Executive.
(AQW 37419/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that it has the following two key target times when completing an assessment of housing/homeless need for homeless applicants:-

- 20 working days to complete a housing needs assessment after receipt of a housing application
- 33 working days to complete a homeless assessment after receipt of a homeless application.

The Homelessness assessment target is set at 33 days in line with UK DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) Guidelines. The longer timeframe reflects the statutory requirement to carry out such investigations as necessary to determine if the applicant is:

- Homeless
- Eligible for assistance

- In Priority Need
- Unintentionally homeless

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the costs of accommodating members of the Traveller community who have moved into temporary accommodation in Rathenraw, Antrim.
(AQW 37446/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that it has spent £4,186.76 to date accommodating members of the Traveller community who have moved into temporary accommodation in Rathenraw, Antrim. The following is a breakdown of the costs:

- Stand pipe £2,694.76
- Skip hire £450
- Portaloo £1,042.00

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development what funding opportunities exist for the implementation of projects within the new Millisle Village Plan.
(AQW 37487/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department for Social Development does not currently have any funding programmes open for application.

The Department's urban regeneration activities are restricted to settlements which have a population of 4,500 or more. According to the most recently published data at settlement level (NISRA Settlement Population Statistics 2008) the population of Millisle is 2,089 persons. Millisle is therefore classified as a rural settlement and does not fulfil the criteria for inclusion in any of my Department's funding programmes which seek to address spatial deprivation.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many accommodation units in North Down owned by Housing Associations have (i) one; (ii) two; (iii) three; and (iv) four or more bedrooms.
(AQW 37500/11-15)

Mr Storey: Housing Associations have reported the following accommodation units in North Down:

- One bedroom – 615
- Two bedroom – 580
- Three bedroom – 129
- Four or more bedrooms - 28

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many accommodation units in North Down owned by the Housing Executive have (i) one; (ii) two; (iii) three; and (iv) four or more bedrooms.
(AQW 37501/11-15)

Mr Storey:

No. of bedrooms	1	2	3	4 or more	Total
Total	473	1061	1035	51	2620

The Housing Executive has provided the table below which gives a breakdown of the bedroom sizes of properties owned by them in North Down.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant AQW 36466/11-15, to detail the size of the dwellings that will be completed in Coleraine in the next two years.
(AQW 37513/11-15)

Mr Storey: The size of the dwellings that will be completed in Coleraine Town in the next two years are as follows;

Scheme	Housing Association	Units	One bed	Two bed	Three bed	Four bed	Completion year
55 Mountsandel Road, Coleraine	Fold	5	0	5	0	0	2014/15
Harpurs Hill, Coleraine	Triangle	20	4	8	8	8	2015/16
Society Street, Coleraine	Fold	22	12	10	0	0	2015/16
31a Hazelbank Road, Coleraine	Apex Housing	11	0	7	4	0	2016/17

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 36679/11-15, whether it is intended that the post of Director of Transformation will be filled; and if so, to detail (i) when; and (ii) how.
(AQW 37558/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there is no current intention to fill the post of Director of Transformation.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many accommodation units in North Down owned by the Housing Executive have one bedroom, broken down by District Office area.
(AQW 37563/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that their Bangor District office which covers North Down currently manages 473 one bedroomed properties.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) one; and (ii) two bedroom accommodation units in North Down owned by (a) the Housing Executive; and (b) Housing Associations are specifically for allocation to the elderly.
(AQW 37564/11-15)

Mr Storey: In relation to (i) the Housing Executive has advised that they do not have any accommodation in the North Down area which is specifically for allocation to the elderly. The vast majority of Housing Executive accommodation is classified as general needs and can be allocated to any household composition. However, the rules governing allocations under the Housing Selection Scheme seek to match offers of accommodation to the specific needs of the applicant, taking into consideration the characteristics of the dwelling – ground floor, bungalow or level access accommodation and the locational features of the dwelling such as a block of accommodation which has been designed for applicants over 35 years. Many elderly applicants often have mobility and functionality needs and are often considered for such dwellings. As a general rule sheltered accommodation is normally allocated to older persons.

In relation to (ii) Housing Associations have reported the following number of one and two bedroom accommodation units in North Down which are specifically for allocation to the elderly:

- One bedroom units - 497
- Two bedroom units - 423

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down have purchased their homes from the Housing Executive in each of the last five years.
(AQW 37566/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below details the number of people in North Down who have purchased their homes from the Housing Executive in each of the last five years.

Year	Number of completed sales
2009	3
2010	5
2011	7
2012	7
2013	12
Total	**34**

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the spending on social security in (i) 2012/13; and (ii) 2013/14.
(AQW 37575/11-15)

Mr Storey: The amount of social security benefit expenditure paid by the Department for Social Development in 2013/14 and 2012/13 is disclosed in the tables below. The information is presented per benefit category.

Social Security Expenditure per benefit	2013/14 £000	2012/13 £000
Retirement Pension	1,986,379	1,908,856
Christmas Bonus	4,852	4,868
Attendance Allowance	201,625	203,169
Carer's Allowance	132,652	123,588
Disability Living Allowance	937,495	897,686

Social Security Expenditure per benefit	2013/14 £000	2012/13 £000
Pension Credit	325,463	333,889
Income Support	223,998	324,422
Job Seekers Allowance	211,505	219,253
Employment and Support Allowance	528,693	298,128
Industrial Injuries Benefits	29,748	29,494
Widows Benefits	20,998	21,435
Incapacity Benefit	73,731	197,479
Maternity Allowance	11,873	11,396
Job Grant	1,896	1,630
Budgeting Loans	53,724	51,768
Crisis Loans	14,423	14,663
Maternity Payments	1,673	1,730
Funeral Payments	2,642	2,690
Community Care Grants	13,747	13,497
Winter Fuel Payments	54,045	54,007
Repayments of Social Fund Loans	(67,104)	(65,038)
Statutory Benefits	65,500	61,401
Housing Benefits	677,615	658,549
Total Benefit Expenditure	**5,507,173**	**5,368,560**

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what help is available to groups who wish to set up social enterprises.
(AQW 37587/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has a Programme for Government commitment to 'support social enterprise growth across the broader voluntary and community sector.' Two social economy growth pilot projects are currently being supported by the Department in Lisburn and Omagh. The evaluation of these projects will inform future priorities in this area and provide an indication of how social economy growth can be supported across the Sector. In addition, one of the key priorities of the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme is 'Economic Renewal', which seeks to develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Groups setting up social enterprises within Neighbourhood Renewal areas may qualify for Neighbourhood Renewal funding.

In conjunction with DETI and Invest NI, my Department is piloting a Delivering Social Change signature project for OFMDFM to establish 11 Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs across Northern Ireland. These hubs deliver business support to anyone wishing to develop a social enterprise idea by providing training, hot desk facilities and test trading opportunities. Hubs are currently operational in Belfast, Londonderry, Ballymena, Enniskillen, Strabane, Lurgan, Lisburn and Downpatrick.

I also understand that Invest NI provides support to groups who wish to set up social enterprises through its Social Entrepreneurship Programme and that its Job Fund also offers support by way of a Social Enterprise Employment Grant and Franchise Programme.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many commercial units have been transferred to community organisations to set up social enterprises in the last five years.
(AQW 37608/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has not transferred any commercial units to community organisations in the last five years. The Housing Executive has advised that it currently has 34 commercial units let to community groups at a nominal rent charge. Of those, 12 have had their leases renewed in the past five years.

These units have been let to community groups where there was no commercial demand and are used for a variety of community purposes including social enterprises.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of neighbourhood wardens employed in North Down.
(AQW 37618/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that in relation to:

(i) There are two Neighbourhood Wardens employed to cover North Down.

(ii) One Neighbourhood Warden covers:

- Holywood
- Kilcooley
- Clandeboye
- Jubilee and
- Fern Grove

The other Warden covers:

- Crawfordsburn
- Groomsport
- Whitehill
- Breezemount and
- Bloomfield/Balloo/Rathgill

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timetable for the remaining installation of double glazing in North Down.
(AQW 37619/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that two double glazing schemes went on site on 13 October 2014 and they include all 432 Housing Executive dwellings in North Down which still have single glazing. These schemes are due to be completed by March 2015.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on decontamination works at Fort George.
(AQW 37793/11-15)

Mr Storey: Decontamination works on Fort George cannot start until Outline Planning Permission is secured for the Fort George Development Framework. My Department is working closely with the Department of the Environment and the Department of Regional Development to resolve the outstanding issues. I am hopeful that the Outline Planning Permission will be secured before the end of 2014.

The decontamination works themselves are expected to take between 12 and 18 months to procure and complete. I hope that the excellent arrangements and relationships which have been established between the new Council and my Department will continue as we work together to determine the strategy and timetable for the remediation of Fort George.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 7 November 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding that their Department, and its arm's-length bodies, invested in East Belfast between May 2011 and May 2014.
(AQW 35940/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Between May 2011 and May 2014, OFMDFM invested £478,085 in East Belfast.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what departmental services they have made available to the public via the post office network.
(AQW 36018/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM has no public services that it could appropriately deliver via the post office network.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) what consultation has taken place regarding the Household Energy and Thermal (HEaT) Efficiency Programme; (ii) what future consultation will take place regarding the HEaT Programme; and (iii) the (a) invitees and (b) attendees at any consultation events.
(AQW 36735/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

(i) Consultation has taken place with a wide range of stakeholders including householders, sector representative groups, insulation and heating contractors, product manufacturers, financial institutions, utilities, the Utility Regulator, the Housing Executive, Housing Associations, and Government Departments including DSD, DFP, DETI, DEL and DARD.

(ii) There are no immediate plans for any future consultations, however, this will be kept under review.

(iii) The consultation with householders involved a representative sample of over 600 households. Invitations for industry consultation events held in July 2014 were available through the eSoucingNI portal. In addition, there was a general notification published on the Central Procurement Directorate's website. In addition to 600 householders, some 47 companies were represented at two industry consultation events.

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the range of budgetary pressures faced by their Department which (i) they have identified as truly inescapable; and (ii) officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel have indicated as being truly inescapable.
(AQW 36955/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department has submitted the following three inescapable bids in October Monitoring:

- £1.341m - Victims and Survivors Service;
- £1.3m - Hillsborough Sites
- £0.376m - Exchange loss on EU Peace III programme claims

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their plans to reassess the designation of Social Investment Zones in order to allow for changes in need since May 2012; and what criteria an area is required to meet in order to be considered eligible for social investment funding.
(AQW 37020/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: From the outset our approach to the Social Investment Fund (SIF) has been bottom up and community led so that the projects have the support of the communities they are seeking to help. All SIF projects have

therefore been identified and prioritised according to need across communities by the nine Social Investment Zone Steering Groups.

The area planning process, completed in February 2013, has culminated with funding commitments to twenty three projects worth £34.4 million. These projects, and those others prioritised within the funding allocations in November 2013, have been and continue to go through a rigorous assessment process which includes consideration of evidence of need.

There are therefore no plans to reassess the area plans or projects proposed at this stage, but rather the focus is on moving to expedite delivery on the ground.

Details of the SIF eligibility criteria are available on the OFMDFM website at http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/delivering-social-change/social-investment-fund.htm

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will place a copy of the PEACE IV and INTERREG V draft programmes, as submitted to the EU Commission, in the Assembly library.
(AQW 37072/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As the draft programmes have not yet been finalised and are subject to ongoing discussions with the EU Commission, it would be inappropriate to place them in the Assembly Library.

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the planned investment of £365,000 through the Social Investment Fund to the 3G sports pitch in Kilcooley, Bangor.
(AQW 37217/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The 3G sports pitch at Kilcooley, Bangor was submitted by the Social Investment Fund (SIF) South Eastern Zone Steering Group as part of their Community Operated Sports Facilities cluster.

This cluster project is continuing to be considered for funding through the formal economic appraisal process and officials will continue to update the Steering Group as it progresses.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for a breakdown of their Department's bids in the forthcoming October monitoring round; (ii) which bids for funding are inescapable or required to meet the Department's statutory obligations; and (iii) whether they will deposit a copy of their Department's bid in the Assembly library for scrutiny ahead of the Assembly debate.
(AQW 37299/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

(i) The Department submitted the following bids in October Monitoring:

- £3.076m - Victims and Survivors Service - to meet a number of commitments in the Victims Support and Individual Needs programmes;
- £1.300m – Hillsborough Sites - to meet running costs eg Security, Maintenance;
- £0.376m – Exchange loss on EU claims; and

On behalf of all departments responsible for Delivering Social Change programmes, OFMDFM submitted a central bid of £7.15m.

(ii) The bids from the list above that were categorised as inescapable are:

- £1.341m - Victims and Survivors Service - to meet a number of commitments in the Victims Support and Individual Needs programmes;
- £1.300m – Hillsborough Sites - to meet running costs eg Security, Maintenance; and
- £0.376m – Exchange loss on EU claims.
- The £7.15m central funds bid submitted by OFMDFM on behalf of all departments responsible for Delivering Social Change programmes, was also classified as inescapable.
- At its meeting on 9 October 2014 the Executive agreed the position in respect of non ring-fenced Resource DEL in the 2014-15 October Monitoring Round. For OFMDFM this resulted in an allocation of £1.3m for Victims and Survivors Service.

(iii) It is not normal practice to deposit a copy of bids in the Assembly library for scrutiny ahead of the Assembly debate.

Mr Humphrey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on progress of the Together: Building a United Community redevelopment of the Girdwood site.
(AQO 6635/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The development of Girdwood Park is being taken forward under an agreed Masterplan Conceptual Framework (MCF) which has cross political and cross community support with the Department for Social Development responsible for the delivery of the infrastructure works (roads, public realm, landscaping and services required to support the various uses outlined for the site.

The procurement process to appoint a contractor for the infrastructure works is now almost complete with construction expected to commence in the next few weeks. The Belfast City Council led development of the Community Hub, with funding provided by SEUPB, is already under way and is expected to complete in June 2015, with Apex taking forward one of the housing elements due for completion in early 2016. DSD has appointed a consultant to take forward consultation and an economic appraisal on the options available in terms of the development of the indoor sports and mixed use facilities and this preparatory work is expected to complete by March 2015.

The total funding allocated to these projects is approximately £5.8 million representing a significant investment in the Belfast North area.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why, despite making the removal of all interface barriers by 2023 and the roll out of a nursery school buddy scheme key commitments of the Together: Building a United Community strategy published in May 2013, they are providing no sustainable long term funding to the existing Community Relations in Schools Buddy Scheme which brings children and parents of Holy Cross Nursery, Ardoyne and Edenderry Nursery, Shankill together across the Crumlin Road Interface for facilitated, meaningful contact that has significant community support, well over a year after this key commitment was made.
(AQW 37547/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education (DE) is taking forward the commitment, set out in the Together: Building a United Community strategy, to roll out a Buddy Scheme in all publicly funded nursery and primary schools.

DE officials met with Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) representatives in late 2013 to discuss the CRIS programme. They have also engaged with Education and Library Boards colleagues to discuss how a buddying scheme might be delivered across Northern Ireland. Proposals for the DE scheme are at an early stage of development.

CRIS is a partner, along with a number of primary and nursery schools in North Belfast, in the 'Active Respectful Communities: Ardoyne and Shankill Together' (ARC) initiative, which received funding from OFMDFM and Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) under the Contested Space/Interface Programme from 2011-2014.

This Programme was instigated by OFMDFM and AP with the intention of deriving learning from positive good relations outcomes in contested spaces, and ascertaining which elements of best practice might be mainstreamed into future intervention strategies. It was not intended to supplant or replace existing core funding initiatives.

OFMDFM has allocated a small grant to CRIS from the Central Good Relations fund in 2014/15 to fund a cross-community adult good relations programme.

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the operational costs, including the total funding distributed to clients, of the Victims and Survivors Service.
(AQO 6859/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Expenditure for the Victims and Survivors Service within 2013/14 totalled £12.8m, of this £10.7m related directly to funding distributed to clients through the Victims Support Programme and the Individual Needs Programme.

The remainder of expenditure relates to staffing and operating costs.

Funding for Victims per annum has increased threefold since 2002.

The Victims and Survivors Service annual report and accounts for 2013/14 are currently being audited by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and a further breakdown on expenditure is not possible until the accounts have been signed off.

Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the Disability Strategy.
(AQO 6863/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since the publication of the Executive's Disability Strategy in February 2013, departments have taken forward a number of actions to drive improved service delivery, increase awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and improve opportunities for people with disabilities across all policy areas.

We are currently considering a number of further projects submitted by departments to deliver outcomes under the Disability Strategy, to be taken forward within the Delivering Social Change Framework.

A 2013/14 annual report on the delivery of the Disability Strategy will set out the actions that all departments have undertaken under the Strategy in its first year. We hope to publish the report in Autumn 2014.

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the financial strain and resource limitations faced by all Departments and the Executive's acknowledgement that the work of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has the most pressing need, whether they will consider rebalancing ministerial priorities and making a strategic decision to reallocate junior ministerial posts to the DHSSPS.
(AQW 37779/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The number and functions of Junior Ministers are kept under review in the light of our assessment of changing needs and priorities. We have, however, no plans at this time to effect such a reallocation of posts.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total paid in salary costs to departmental staff in the last 12 months.
(AQW 37941/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister incurred a cost of £16,656,826 for the year ended 30 September 2014 in respect of salaries.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the impact of budgetary cuts on the ongoing work programme of the Rivers Agency and Drainage Council to maintain water courses and prevent flooding.
(AQW 37499/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): In the current year, my Department has faced Resource DEL reductions amounting to 4.4%. In the case of the Rivers Agency, a number of posts have been left vacant, which would otherwise have been filled. The Agency will continue to deliver its maintenance programme, to the extent to which funding permits. Work continues to be carried out on rural watercourse maintenance and I would want, as far as possible, to avoid any increased risk of flooding.

For clarity, the role of the Drainage Council is to make decisions on the designation of watercourses, based on recommendations from Rivers Agency. It also makes decisions on the acceptance of schemes and works. That will continue to be the case.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the prevailing licensing arrangements in regard to salmon farming at Glenarm and Redbay.
(AQW 37615/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The existing marine salmon farms at Red Bay and Glenarm Bay operate under a number of consents granted by DARD and NIEA/DOE. The Northern Salmon Company Ltd, which now trades as Glenarm Organic Salmon Ltd, was granted Fish Culture Licences authorising the cultivation of Atlantic salmon at each of its sites by my Department under the provisions of the 1966 Fisheries Act. The Licences for Red Bay and Glenarm Bay sites were granted on 24 October 1990 and 20 May 1994 respectively. DARD also granted the Company an additional optional Licence, a Marine Fish Fishery Licence, for its Glenarm Bay site on 3 June 1994.

Under the provisions of the 2009 Aquatic Animal Health Regulations, DARD granted the Company Aquaculture Production Business Authorisations for each of the sites on 21 March 2011.

The Company were granted revised Consents to Discharge Effluent under the 1999 Water Order by NIEA Water Management Unit on 11 February 2011.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the promotion of aquaculture; and to outline any established projects.
(AQW 37616/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have committed £648,034 under the European Fisheries Fund for eight Aquaculture projects to promote the sector. In addition, I have committed additional funding of £606,503 to Aquaculture Initiative projects under the European Fisheries Fund. I have also commissioned the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute to undertake environmental assessments on proposed aquaculture developments in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive and national environmental legislation.

The Aquaculture Initiative EEIG, currently funded under the European Fisheries Fund, promotes aquaculture development in the north of Ireland. The Initiative has established the Aquaculture Representatives Group (ARG) which gives a voice for the Aquaculture sector in the north. In the last three years, three collective action projects have been applied for and facilitated by the Initiative namely: A Diversification Report for Land Based Aquaculture Sector; Advance Through Disease Control (Oyster Herpes Disease); and Marine Stewardship Council certification for Bottom Grown Mussels in Ireland. Industry is currently represented by the Aquaculture Initiative on such relevant bodies as the Agri-Food Strategy Board who produced the Going For Growth Strategy and the Seafish NI Advisory Committee. The Aquaculture Initiative also acts as the secretariat to the All-Ireland Bottom Grown Mussels Forum.

The Loughs Agency, is lead on the INTERREG IVA IBIS (Integrated Aquatic Resource Management between the Island of Ireland and Scotland) project, with partners The Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Glasgow, has undertaken extensive research to underpin and aid the sustainable development of the aquaculture industry within the eligible programme area.

IBIS studies include developing science-based management strategies for improving the yield of blue mussels, Mytilus edulis, in benthic cultivation and developing science-based management strategies for environmental and commercial sustainability of native oysters, Ostrea edulis.

A number of Knowledge Transfer Workshops have taken place dealing with the history and future of shellfish, shellfish production, aquaculture processing and shellfish marketing.

In Going for Growth, the Agri-Food Strategy Board made a number of recommendations and outlined key growth targets for the fisheries and aquaculture sub-sectors, recognising their contribution to the wider agri-food sector. The Executive Response to Going for Growth has recently been published and sets out actions to be taken across Government to support the industry in achieving those targets. A copy may be accessed at the following link: http://www.dardni.gov.uk/ni_executive_response_to_going_for_growth.pdf

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for her assessment of the threat posed by the small hive beetle: (ii) what steps her Department can take to protect local beekeepers; and (iii) what plans her Department has in the event of the beetle being discovered in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37667/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) The small hive beetle has recently been detected in 49 apiaries in South West Italy. All known affected apiaries are within a 20km control zone. Within this zone, official controls including destruction of affected colonies are being implemented by the Italian authorities to control this outbreak. Controls in Italy will reduce the threat posed to both European and local beekeepers and assist in preventing the establishment and further spread of this serious pest. The potential for spread of this pest is mainly through movement of queens and package bees.

(ii) The risk of Small Hive Beetle arriving imminently in the north of Ireland is low. The main risk of the pest being introduced is through the trade or movement from Italy to here of queen and package bees that are infected with larvae. Restrictions in place in the 20km control zone and the further 100 km surveillance zone established by the Italian authorities, allied to a cessation of trade in bees due to the onset of winter, mean the risk in the north at this time is assessed as low as any known trade has ceased. DARD Bee Health Inspectors have maintained inspections of colonies of bees at higher risk apiaries in the north, including those near airports and ports. Bee health inspections have mostly concluded due to the onset of colder weather conditions and shorter day length which reduces the potential to detect the pest during this period. My officials have also maintained regular contact with the National Bee Unit within the Animal and Plant Health Agency who regularly inspect a network of Sentinel Apiaries in order to allow early warning of any spread of serious bee pests to Britain. It is intended to establish a number of Sentinel Apiaries locally in order to provide early intelligence on possible SHB introductions to the north. Officials have also maintained contact with officials in DAFM responsible for bee health.

Imports of fruit and produce from Italy and some African countries also present a potential but low risk pathway for entry of the beetle into the north. DARD Inspectors responsible for inspections at the ports and at the principal fruit import and distribution premises have received training on pest recognition to aid early detection and implementation of eradication measures in the event of a finding. CAFRE also facilitate training courses delivered by the Ulster Beekeepers Association which include content on disease and pest control.

Officials are working with local Beekeeping Associations to develop an awareness programme for beekeepers with the objective of preventing the introduction and spread of this potentially damaging pest of bees. Over the winter period briefings will take place to emphasise the need for those considering the importation of queens or package bees to be very careful from where and whom bees are imported and through the maintenance of strong vigorous colonies of bees that will be better placed to cope with an introduction of SHB.

(iii) As part of my Department's preparedness for dealing with serious pests and diseases affecting bees, officials maintain a contingency plan should there be a suspected outbreak in the north.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by her Department.
(AQW 37750/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has no surplus land identified at present.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she sought the advice of her College Advisory Group on the delivery of the Level 2 Agricultural Qualification for the Young Farmer Scheme delivered at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise; and to publish any advice she received.
(AQW 37775/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The College Advisory Group provides advice at a strategic and operational level to the Management Team at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). I have not received advice from this Group on the specific delivery arrangements for the Level 2 qualification currently being offered by CAFRE.

The decisions that I made relating to the Young Farmers' Scheme were taken after I had considered carefully the responses to the CAP Pillar 1 consultation. Having considered the views expressed by Stakeholders, I decided to reduce the qualification requirement from the suggested Level 3 to a Level 2 qualification in agriculture, or a closely related subject containing at least a farm business management module.

CAFRE is offering the necessary courses for those who do not currently have the minimum required qualification. These courses are being delivered using CAFRE's model for industry training, on a part-time basis, using College campuses and local venues.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to ministerial appointments, what the respective success rates have been for (i) Protestant; and (ii) Catholic applicants, since June 2012.
(AQW 37844/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since June 2012 I have made 10 appointments to DARD sponsored public bodies. Of these, 6 appointees (60%) declared community background as Protestant and 4 as Catholic (40%).

There were 60 applicants for these appointments, of which 28 declared community background as Protestant, 29 as Catholic and 3 as 'Neither'.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 37210/11-15, to detail the source of the finance for the new database.
(AQW 37875/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: NIFAIS is one of a number of key Departmental change programmes going forward. It is anticipated that the NIFAIS Programme's resource and capital requirements will be addressed through the Department's normal public expenditure process.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of rural enterprises in the agri-food sector in East Londonderry that her Department has supported through funding for capital investment projects in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37890/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding for capital investment has been awarded under Axis 1 and Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 to 243 rural enterprises in the agri-food sector in East Londonderry in the past three years as detailed below:

2012

RDP Funding Scheme	Projects	Grant Awarded
Manure Efficiency (Axis 1)	5	£49,900
Business Development &	1	£38,754
Growth (Axis 3)		
Total	**6**	**£88,654**

2013

RDP Funding Scheme	Projects	Grant Awarded
Farm Modernisation (Axis 1)	224	£622,241
Total	**224**	**£622,241**

2014

RDP Funding Scheme	Projects	Grant Awarded
Manure Efficiency (Axis 1)	7	£70,000
Processing & Marketing (Axis 1) 5	£673,484	
Business Development &	1	£30,000
Growth (Axis 3)		
Total	**13**	**£773,484**

Total 2012 - 2014: 243 projects were awarded funding for capital investment totalling £1,484,379

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what fiscal support currently exists for farm businesses, specifically in the agri-food sector, which are seeking to expand.
(AQW 37892/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is currently no financial support available to new applicants seeking to expand their businesses.

The final tranches of financial assistance under the EU–funded Rural Development Programme 2007-13 Modernisation of Agricultural Holdings and the Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Scheme measures, have now closed.

On 14 October 2014 I announced the submission of the draft Rural Development Programme 2014-20 to the European Commission. Subject to EU approval, anticipated by April 2015, the proposed Farm Business Improvement and the Agri-food Processing Investment Schemes will provide extensive support for sustainable growth in the agri-food sector.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to flooding in the Glenone area of Portglenone, what progress has been made following the Rivers Agency's meetings with NI Water in early 2014 and in answering AQW 33374/11-15.
(AQW 37919/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency is continuing to work with NI Water in finding a long term solution to flooding in the Glenone area of Portglenone. It has not been possible for NI Water to take forward the preferred engineering solution and a revised solution is being developed. In the meantime, Rivers Agency is available to provide assistance during any future flooding emergency.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions her Department has taken in the last five years to address the problem of flooding faced by residents in the Hightown Crescent/ Hightown Drive area of Newtownabbey; and how her Department will address the ongoing problems.
(AQW 37920/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency has responded to requests from residents for assistance in dealing with blockages of an undesignated watercourse in the area. A culvert across Hightown Gardens is prone to blocking in times of high river flow and the Agency, subject to approval by the Drainage Council, is proposing to construct a new protective trash grille to the inlet in the 2015/16 financial year.

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the animation work for the new Local Action Groups.
(AQO 6910/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you will be aware I have said before that I want the new Local Action Groups formed, and ready to start by the time the new programme, which has now been submitted, has been signed off by the European Commission.

I am pleased to report that the animation process has started with a view to having fully engaged with all rural stakeholders and to have agreed the membership of the new wider LAG's by the end of December 2014, with the LAG's including their Boards being formally appointed by the end of January 2015. I officially launched the animation process last week at Loughry and I also officially announced that I had agreed the allocations to each of the new LAG areas. This is good progress and over the coming weeks there will be events held right across the rural north to energise the rural community into getting involved with the new LAG's.

It is through this involvement that local people can ensure that they have their say in how government funds are invested in their areas and what they think their priorities are. The LAG's will have to develop a Local Rural Development Strategy and it is essential that this is developed within the framework of the Council Community Plans. It is only through better co-ordination of funds that we can make best use of government and other funds and maximise the impact they have. But key to this is local people working in partnership with government, this is what LEADER is all about.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the plans in place to help mitigate any possible difficulties for the agriculture and fishing industries arising from adverse weather this winter.
(AQO 6915/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 7 and 8 together.

There are a number of steps farmers can take in preparation for extreme winter weather and to try and mitigate difficulties. Many of these steps are normal management practice for the vast majority of farmers but I would encourage all farmers to reassess the risks to their business now before the winter sets in.

Farmers should also keep a close check on weather forecasts and make appropriate adjustments and management decisions where severe weather is expected. Measures such as moving stock to less exposed fields and securing vulnerable buildings are basic steps that would help lessen the effects of severe weather. Farmers are also advised to check and consider the insurance cover they have for livestock and farm buildings.

DARD will reinforce this message and present practical information to farmers on preparing for winter in the coming weeks through press articles and the DARD website.

Fishing activity varies from season to season, with the weather affecting the availability of the targeted species and subsequently impacting on cash flow. Earlier this year I established the Fishing Industry Task Force to look at the challenges facing the fishing industry and this is one of the areas that will be examined. I expect the Task Force to make an initial report to me by the end of the year.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the measures she has taken to prepare for possible adverse weather conditions over the coming winter months.
(AQO 6916/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 7 and 8 together.

There are a number of steps farmers can take in preparation for extreme winter weather and to try and mitigate difficulties. Many of these steps are normal management practice for the vast majority of farmers but I would encourage all farmers to reassess the risks to their business now before the winter sets in.

Farmers should also keep a close check on weather forecasts and make appropriate adjustments and management decisions where severe weather is expected. Measures such as moving stock to less exposed fields and securing vulnerable buildings are basic steps that would help lessen the effects of severe weather. Farmers are also advised to check and consider the insurance cover they have for livestock and farm buildings.

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Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the integrated project to address flooding in the Sicily Park and Greystown areas of South Belfast.
(AQO 6918/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency is working in partnership with NI Water on the integrated project to address flooding issues in the Sicily Park and Greystown areas of South Belfast. The proposed scheme involves upgrading existing infrastructure and a business case is currently being prepared to establish the most cost effective options.

Rivers Agency is also proposing to take on responsibility for three privately maintained urban drains in the area, so that they can be upgraded and maintained at public expense. Subject to approval by the Drainage Council in October 2014, the upgrading works will follow over the next twelve months.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any discussions she has had with the Minster of the Environment regarding the impact the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill NIA 35/11-16 will have on rural areas.
(AQO 6919/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have held no discussions with the Minister of the Environment on issues relating to the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill. However, the Minister of the Environment wrote to me and other Executive Colleagues outlining the provisions of the Bill prior to its introduction.

All government Departments are signed up to rural proofing. Therefore, it is for each Department to undertake rural proofing to assess any potential impacts that its policies may have on rural areas and to make adjustments, where appropriate, so that the needs of rural areas are met.

That said, I believe there is more we can do to improve the effectiveness of rural proofing and I intend, subject to Executive agreement, to introduce rural proofing legislation during the lifetime of this current Assembly. This important Bill will provide my Department with a firm basis for promoting rural proofing across government and will help ensure that rural needs are fully considered in policy making.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact the proposed five-year Rural Development Programme will have on the local agriculture industry.
(AQO 6920/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Agri-food is our largest indigenous industry, largest manufacturing industry, largest single employer and most important exporter. It is one of the few industries to have recorded sustained growth during the recession and is a strategically important industry with the potential to help accelerate economic recovery. The Agri-Food Strategy Board's Going for Growth report highlights tremendous opportunities to grow our agri-food sector. It contains challenging targets and over 100 recommendations addressed to government and industry. The key headline recommendation to DARD in Going for Growth is the delivery of a Farm Business Improvement Scheme to improve competitiveness and productivity in primary production.

In response to this recommendation, DARD has included proposals for a Farm Business Improvement Scheme of up to £250 million as part of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. This Scheme will comprise a range of measures aimed

at knowledge transfer, innovation and capital investment. Subject to EU approval, there is potential for the Farm Business Improvement Scheme to have a significant positive impact on sustainable farm production, improved competitiveness through increased efficiency, integration of supply chains and flexibility in response to market requirements.

Additionally £157.8 million will be made available for a range of environmental actions which will support farmers and land managers to carry out environmentally beneficial farming practices.

The onus will be on the industry bringing forward as many eligible successful applications as possible so that I can draw down the full amount of funding available to ensure the industry gains the maximum possible benefit.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to reduce the departmental costs for tuberculosis.
(AQO 6921/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Our EU Commission approved TB eradication programme is vital in safeguarding our export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry, which is worth over £1,000 million annually.

As you may be aware, I have recently established a government/industry TB Strategic Partnership Group to develop a comprehensive and practical implementation plan to progressively reduce both the TB levels in cattle here and the cost burden of this disease. My ultimate aim is eradication of this scourge and by as early a date as possible. I recognise the enormity of the task facing this group, but concerted action must be taken. I have made it clear that I want the strategy to be all embracing and to address all the relevant issues.

The Department's current Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) is being replaced with a new system called the NI Food Animal Information System (NIFAIS). This also provides an opportunity to reduce TB programme costs through improving the efficiency of our disease control systems and processes. A number of projects are being initiated to inform the design of NIFAIS so it can support more efficient ways of delivery, such as involving mobile technology, increased digital engagement, improved work flow and better management information systems. While it is too early to estimate the quantum of these potential efficiency gains, I can assure you that this is an important aspect of the project.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the European Commission's position regarding elements of the Young Farmers' Scheme yet to be finalised.
(AQO 6922/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to report that I have just published an update outlining the clarification received from the EU Commission regarding the Young Farmers' Scheme and other outstanding aspects of CAP Reform, particularly greening.

In relation to the Young Farmers' Scheme, the update clarifies the position on partnerships involving young farmers, including 50:50 partnerships. It also clarifies that a young farmer who is a member of an existing business and who moves to take control over that business and is, therefore, head of holding of a business for the first time, may be eligible for the Young Farmers' Scheme, provided all the other requirements of the scheme are met.

My officials have written to all those who applied to the CAFRE Level II qualification and published a press article outlining possible sources of evidence the Department may require as proof of head of holding status. These sources included information about the applicant's VAT, income tax, banking, herd records, as well as buying, selling and investing activities in the business. If relevant, some form of partnership type agreement outlining, among other things, the roles and responsibilities of the members of the business and verified by an appropriately qualified professional may also be required.

The EU Commission still has to confirm formally their position on several remaining issues, including clarification on how the number of years a person has been head of holding should be calculated, and, hence, the number of years their business can receive the Young Farmers' payment. I will publish further details as they become available.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Rural Development Programme.
(AQO 6923/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials formally submitted the draft programme to the European Commission on 14 October. Formal approval by the European Commission will depend on the nature and extent of the comments on the draft programme. My officials are working to obtain a European Commission decision by April 2015.

In conjunction with seeking EU approval on the overall funding package, my officials are working to design the detail of the schemes. The date for the opening of any calls will depend on the programme being approved by the European Commission and on getting the necessary business case approval.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to explain the relationship between the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies.
(AQW 37340/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Ulster-Scots Agency supported the establishment of the Institute for Ulster-Scots Studies by the University of Ulster in 2001. Between 2001 and 2009 the Agency funded the University to support the core work of the Institute and a range of related projects.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the management arrangements, oversight and governance of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies; and what input there was from the Ulster-Scots Agency as the main external funder.
(AQW 37342/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies was managed at an operational level by a Director appointed by the University of Ulster. At a strategic level, it was managed by a Management Board which was appointed by the University of Ulster, with one representative from the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Management Board was supported by an Advisory Board which was appointed by both the Agency and the University. As part of the funding criteria the Institute was required to furnish the Agency with six monthly progress reports.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what effect the cuts to Libraries NI will have on each library in North Down.
(AQW 37565/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As a result of the need to make in-year budget reductions, Libraries NI is currently implementing a number of measures. These include releasing agency staff who covered staff vacancies, maternity leave, secondments, special projects, annual leave and sickness. In addition, libraries in the North of Ireland, including those in North Down, may be affected by a reduction in expenditure on new stock. Libraries NI is also reducing opening hours for the time being at Bangor Carnegie Library. Bangor Library's hours will reduce from 57 hours to 52 hours per week from early November.

Other libraries, especially smaller libraries, may be affected by temporary ad hoc closures.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the level of public use of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's Titanic site compares with the previous Balmoral Avenue site.
(AQW 37613/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There has been an increase in the level of public use at Titanic Quarter compared with the previous Balmoral Avenue site. During the last three full business years at Balmoral Avenue (2007/08 - 2009/10), the average number of visitors per year was 16,872. In the first three full business years at Titanic Quarter (2011/12 - 2013/14), the average number of visitors per year was 18,003. This represents a 6.3% increase in the level of public use. During this business year up to September (2014/15), PRONI has welcomed 9,952 visitors.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are any plans to provide parking facilities or concessions for users of the Public Record of Northern Ireland's Titanic facility.
(AQW 37614/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is on-street parking adjacent to the Public Record Office, and car parks within walking distance.

My Department has no plans to provide parking facilities or concessions for users of the Public Record Office.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department provides to the Ulster Orchestra.
(AQW 37634/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following table illustrates the amount of funding awarded to the Ulster Orchestra by the Arts Council and DCAL (via Creative Industries) over the last four financial years.

Year	ACNI Annual Funding £	Lottery £	Creative Industries £	Total £
2014/15	1,879,568			1,879,568
2013/14	2,031,966	8,130	48,206	2,088,302
2012/13	2,196,720	70,000		2,266,720
2011/12	2,205,315	77,580		2,282,895

The £48,206 awarded by DCAL Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) in 2013/14 is broken down as follows: £5,000 to contribute to costs associated with a launch event to announce formal collaboration with NI Screen; £12,792 capital grant to assist with the purchase of instruments; and £30,414 to develop and deliver a pilot community engagement initiative.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in her Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 37675/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Public Sector Reform Division has not completed any efficiency related work for this Department and no efficiencies have, therefore, been realised.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial support her Department provides to Coleraine Borough Mini Soccer.
(AQW 37725/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither my Department nor Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department is aware of any organisation named 'Coleraine Borough Mini Soccer'. However, I am aware that Coleraine Football Club operates a North West Mini Soccer Academy and this answer is provided on that basis.

The delivery of mini soccer throughout the Causeway Coast District Council area is supported through Sport NI's Active Communities programme. Sport NI invests in the new Causeway Coast District Council area to support the deployment of a network of eight coaches to increase sports participation; one of these posts is an association football (soccer)/multi-sports coach. The post holder is currently employed by Coleraine Borough Council. Sport NI's total investment in Active

Communities in the Causeway Coast District Council area in the period 2011/12 to 2014/15 is £829,633.

In addition, in 2014, my Department through Sport NI awarded Coleraine Borough Council a grant of £1.5 million towards the North Coast Sports Village. This investment funded the construction of two synthetic training facilities. These facilities can be used for a variety of sports, including soccer.

Coleraine FC has recently submitted an application to Active Awards for Sport (Round 2) which closed on 20 October 2014. Coleraine FC's application will be assessed against previously published criteria and the outcome of the assessment process will be notified to all applicants in December 2014.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by her Department.
(AQW 37752/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department does not hold any surplus land.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration has been given to the reallocation of departmental resources to provide greater assistance to the Ulster Orchestra.
(AQW 37772/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials, together with the Arts Council, are assisting the Ulster Orchestra and have been liaising with the Orchestra and its sponsors to discuss potential future operating models and alternative funding mechanisms.

The Orchestra need to develop a long-term, sustainable approach to address its current financial difficulties. If the Orchestra identifies a new sustainable operating model, I will give it serious consideration and, subject to receiving assurance it can be delivered, I will engage with Executive Colleagues to assess how the Executive might support it.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to ministerial appointments, what the respective success rates have been for (i) Protestant; and (ii) Catholic applicants, since June 2012.
(AQW 37845/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The success rate of (i) Protestant applicants for Ministerial appointments made since June 2012 is 22.2% while the success rate of (ii) Catholic applicants for the same period is 22.1%.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are still regular North South plenary and committee meetings of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and An Chomhairle Ealaíon; and to detail the dates of each meeting since 2008.
(AQW 37885/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There continue to be Plenary and Committee meetings and the requested details are provided below:

Plenary Meetings took place on	North South Working Group Meetings took place on
28/4/08	24/5/11
29/4/09	26/3/12
28/4/10	15/10/12
24/5/11	18/4/13

Plenary Meetings took place on	North South Working Group Meetings took place on
25/4/12	17/4/14
21/5/13	
20/5/14	

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 523/07, to detail whether the Arts Council of Northern Ireland raised the issue of the publication of the minutes of plenary meetings with An Chomhairle Ealaíon; and if so, to detail the decision, and if it was positive, whether the minutes have been published on the Arts Council for Northern Ireland's website.
(AQW 37886/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Previously An Chomhairle Ealaíon (ACE) did not publish minutes of its meetings. This position changed at the beginning of 2014 and ACE now plans to publish its minutes. Meetings of future joint plenary meetings will be published, albeit a year after the meeting takes place.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what definition of 'traditional music' is used by (i) the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; and (ii) her Department.
(AQW 37887/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council's Music Strategy 2013-18 confirms its commitment to a long-term programme of support and development for traditional music in the North of Ireland. The Strategy aims to gain a deeper understanding of the sectors strengths and weaknesses; the challenges it faces; and its development needs going forward. A component of this is to develop an agreed definition of the traditional music sector in the North and a consultant, Dermot McLaughlin, has been appointed to undertake this work. The definition will be agreed in conjunction with my Department.

Details of the Web sites for the Strategy and the Arts Council's artform policies are provided below:

Ambitions for the Arts' Five Year Arts Strategy, 2013-2018 - www.artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/strategy

Art Form and Specialist Area Policies, 2013-2018 - www.artscouncil-ni.org/the-arts

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the Traditional Music Forum which was recently created by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, to detail (i) the purpose and remit of the Forum; (ii) the membership of the Forum; and (iii) the structure of the Forum.
(AQW 37888/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council's Music Strategy 2013-18 confirms its commitment to a long-term programme of support and development for traditional music in the North of Ireland. One of the actions identified in the Strategy it is to draw traditional music organisations into a forum with the purpose of exploring the sector's own aspirations and proposals for development.

There is no specific membership for the Forum and the aim is to keep it deliberately broad to inform both the Arts Council's future planning and its advocacy for increased support and profile for the sector. Meetings are open to all and the inaugural meeting had been widely promoted on social media and by direct invitation to organisations, individual artists, instrument makers, Education and Library Boards, umbrella organisations, venues, festivals, local authorities, promoters and key stakeholders. Membership is expected to grow given the strong support for the inaugural meeting.

The structure will be led by the forum itself. It is a platform to explore the sector's own aspirations and proposals for development. There may be large group meetings accompanied by smaller working groups in areas of education, touring etc

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has held discussions with other Departments and Libraries NI with regard to developing Belfast Central Library.
(AQW 37931/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I discussed the development needs of Belfast Central Library and related financing options with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Simon Hamilton MLA, at a meeting with him in March 2014 on wider budgetary pressures facing the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). Following on from this, my officials have had a number of discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) about the preparation of an Outline Business Case that would objectively assess the costs and benefits of any potential investment. Similar discussions have been held with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). As part of these, advice has been sought and obtained from DFP and SIB on how the type of financing options I discussed with Minister Hamilton may be most appropriately modelled and assessed within the Outline Business Case.

My Department is engaged in detailed, on-going discussions with Libraries NI on its emerging proposals for the re-development of Belfast Central Library. DCAL is represented on Libraries NI's Project Board for Belfast Central Library which the authority set up in June 2014 to manage and direct the project. In addition, my officials have reviewed and provided written comments to Libraries NI on an initial draft Outline Business Case for re-developing the Library which the organisation submitted to DCAL in July 2014. Libraries NI is re-examining the Case in light of these comments and a revised version is

currently expected to be re-submitted to the Department in November 2014. It is also my intention to seek DFP's approval of the Case once it has been completed by Libraries NI and reviewed by my officials.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she is taking to prepare a bid to host the Commonwealth Games in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37933/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has not taken any steps to prepare a bid to host the Commonwealth Games in the north of Ireland.

Responsibility for events, including the Commonwealth Games, lies in the first instance with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what matters of co-operation and mutual interest have been identified as a result of the North South meetings between the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and An Chomhairle Ealaion during the last three years.
(AQW 38002/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Both Arts Councils have identified areas of mutual interest including the following:

Joint funding - a range of organisations with an all island remit such Irish Pages; Source Magazine; Camerata Ireland; Tyrone Guthrie Centre; Irish Traditional Music Archive; Poetry Ireland and Visual Arts Ireland have received funding.

All Island Working –

- In 2012 the Arts Council NI joined with An Chomhairle Ealaíon (ACE) to contribute to the all island Children's Laureate;
- Both arts councils have combined resources to create a simpler, joined-up approach to cross-border artistic touring;
- Opera NI has been successful in touring in the South under the Arts Council's Opera project funding scheme, an arrangement that that has been beneficial to the provision of quality opera throughout Ireland.

An area of mutual interest still under discussion is the commemoration of the life, work and legacy of Seamus Heaney.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the members of the North South committee of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and An Chomhairle Ealaion and from which of the two organisations they are nominated.
(AQW 38003/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is an annual plenary session meeting of the Arts Council NI (ACNI) and An Chomhairle Ealaíon (ACE) and this is open to senior management and boards of each organisation. In addition, a North South Working Group is held twice a year. The following staff and nominated board members attend:

ACNI representatives

- Roisin McDonough, CEO
- Nick Livingston, Director of Strategic Development
- Noirin McKinney, Director of Arts Development Dept
- Brian Sore, Board Member
- David Alderdice, Board Member
- Anna Carragher, Board Member

ACE representatives

- Orlaith McBride, Director
- John O'Kane, Director of Performing Arts
- Fionnuala Sweeney ,Head of Film and International Arts
- Dr Eimear O'Connor, ACE Council Member
- Shiela Pratschke, ACE Council Member
- Judith Woodward ACE Council Member

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money was allocated by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to Musical Instruments for Bands, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38004/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council has awarded a total of £512,661 to the Musical Instruments for Bands Programme in the last three years, broken down as follows;

Financial Year	Total Awarded
2014/15	104,415

Financial Year	Total Awarded
2013/14	205,555
2012/13	202,691

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and An Chomhairle Ealaion still employ an Arts Co-operation Officer.
(AQW 38005/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council employed a European Affairs Officer (jointly with An Chomhairle Ealaíon) from 1991/92. This post was not renewed at the end of the contract period.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how much lottery funding, that would have been allocated to arts and sports in Northern Ireland, was retained by the UK government to help fund the 2012 London Olympics; (ii) how much of this funding has since been returned to local sport and arts; and (iii) what action she has taken to ensure that all of this retained money is returned.
(AQW 38006/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The exact Arts Council NI (ACNI) and Sport NI (SNI) figures re-directed by the GB Government to the Olympic Lottery Distribution Fund were £4.514m and £4.192m respectively.

The Lottery Distribution Funds of both bodies were restored to pre Olympic levels after August 2012 and in July this year the unspent portion of the Olympic funding was refunded based on the percentage contributions to the overall re-direction. ACNI's share of this was £0.440m and SNI's share was £0.410m. Additionally, both bodies will shortly receive refunds in the same proportions (0.56% for ACNI, 0.52% for SNI) producing £0.380m for ACNI and £0.360m for SNI, following the sale of the Olympic Village.

My officials continue to liaise with DCMS in GB to secure any additional re-imbursements that may be due to the north of Ireland distributors, to be generated from further land sales at the Olympic Park.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the redevelopment of Windsor Park is due to be completed.
(AQO 6929/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Funding Agreement was issued to the IFA and the successful contractor (O'Hare and McGovern) was appointed in December 2013.

Design development by the contractor is complete and the release of the Construction Notice by the IFA was made on 2 May 2014. Construction works commenced on site on 6 May 2014 after the Irish Cup Final.

Construction work is on-going and progressing well, with the Phase 1 works (construction of the pitch) completed on time for the European Championship Qualifier on 11th October 2014.

Provided that significant delays around any legal issues are avoided, then the Windsor Park development can remain on programme with completion of the construction works planned for October 2015.

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department promotes its activities to students.
(AQO 6930/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The delivery of services to students is a key area of activity for my Department and its' Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) and there are a number of programmes and services aimed at students of all ages.

These are promoted by a variety of means. Websites and social media are used extensively and are key to publicising initiatives and activities of interest to students. There is also direct liaison with schools, colleges and universities to promote services and encourage registration on programmes. For example:

- Sport NI promotes its activities to students across the education sector through its website and registration facility. Programmes promoted directly to schools include a Activ8, Active Communities, Midnight Street Soccer and the Disability Sport NI 5 Star Challenge.
- The Arts Council's visual arts team hold information sessions twice a year in the University of Ulster's Art College to raise awareness of their Support for the Individual Artist Programme.
- Líofa Officers visit schools and attend University Fresher's days to promote the Irish Language and to encourage students to sign up to Líofa and become fluent in Irish.
- The Ulster-Scots Agency funds programmes and schemes for the target audience of students, including: after – school clubs; flagship programme for schools; school twinning programme; and school workshops.
- These examples are in addition to the ongoing engagement which Libraries, National Museums and other bodies have with places of study and individual students.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support and funding opportunites her Department can offer to existing grassroots level sports initiatives wishing to expand.
(AQO 6931/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The need to develop and prioritise sport at grassroots level is recognised within my Department's Strategy for Sport, Sport Matters. Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, works with a range of organisations that seek to provide and develop grassroots sports opportunities in sports clubs, schools and community/ voluntary organisations.

Sport NI provides a range of support services and resources to assist those groups wishing to expand, which includes the provision of funding through the Active Awards for Sport programme. This small grants programme is primarily aimed at providing grassroots support to community based sport and is due to re-open for applications at the end of March next year. The priorities are sports clubs, community groups and governing bodies of sport, especially those based in areas of greatest need.

Sport NI also assists in the development of grassroots sports clubs through the provision of coach development workshops; the implementation of the quality standard for clubs, Clubmark NI, the introduction of a new Equality Standard, and a Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport.

In addition, my Department has provided funding of four point five million which has been distributed equally between the Ulster Council GAA, the Ulster Branch Irish Rugby Football Union and the Irish Football Association over a three year period up until 31st March 2015. This funding was for a programme to promote equality, tackle poverty and social exclusion through sport. Grassroots level sports clubs and communities will benefit from part of this funding.

I have asked my officials and Sport NI to explore what other funding opportunities may be available for grassroots sports in the future.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's plans for the Library Service across Northern Ireland.
(AQO 6932/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to ensuring that Libraries NI continues to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for people living, working or studying in the north of Ireland. In addition, I am committed to realising the Department's Vision for the library service. This is set out in the libraries policy, Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries. This is to have:-

> *'A flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential.'*

In line with Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries we are looking for a library service which, within available resources, is: centred on people and relevant to their current needs; responsive to local communities particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion; sufficiently flexible within its core activities to reflect new demands; and provides space, stock and expertise to enable people to develop themselves, their families and their communities.

While the management of available resources for the library service is primarily the responsibility of Libraries NI, my officials and I stand ready to support its Board and Senior Management Team as they seek to identify how best to deliver tomorrow's libraries in the current budget environment.

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on how investment in arts and culture facilities will be made available in rural communities.
(AQO 6933/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My department invests in rural arts and culture facilities in a number of ways, for example.

- The Arts Council has provided capital funding which has delivered an arts venue within a 20 mile radius of every person in the North of Ireland.
- In the North West, to enhance the impact of City of Culture 2013, DCAL will support projects and interventions across the entire region including Derry, Strabane, Coleraine, Limavady and Dungiven. The programme is currently in development and will be announced in the coming months.
- Also, a DCAL North West Office has been established to work closely with local communities and organisations.
- NI Screen, through its Creative Learning Centres, has a specific remit to work with people from rural and hard to reach areas. The expansion of the Creative Learning Centres in 2013-15 is specifically targeted at reaching further into rural communities.
- NI Screen's Digital Film Archive (DFA) can be accessed at a range of locations including rural sites while customised outreach presentations are offered to reach further into these rural communities.
- Libraries NI has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive library service, including rural areas. This is currently discharged through the provision of 34 branches in small rural settlements, around 30 mobile libraries and an on-line library service on librariesni.org.uk.
- Libraries NI also has a commitment to ensure that 85% of households have access to a library service point within two miles.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department has given to the Glenavy District Angling Club following the major fish kill in June 2014.
(AQO 6934/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following the fish kill at the Glenavy River on 28 June 2014 my Department's Fisheries Protection Officers assisted officials in the Environment Agency in carrying out a detailed count and classification of the dead fish at the scene of the incident.

The Agency is undertaking an investigation which is on-going and you will therefore appreciate that I am unable to comment further at this stage.

My officials are available to work with fishery owners and angling clubs in providing technical advice to assist with the re-instatement of fish stocks following any fish kills. We have recently developed an improved methodology for the calculation of the costs of a fish kill and we were successful in recent prosecutions taken by the Environment Agency where the Courts awarded damages towards the reinstatement costs.

My Department has worked closely with Glenavy District Angling Club in the past, including authorising a major re-stocking programme in the Glenavy River in 2010 and supplying some ten thousand salmon fry and ten thousand brown trout fry for the programme.

While there have been no approaches from the club in relation to the June incident, I am happy for my officials to work with the club to offer advice and guidance on initial steps that may be taken to encourage the restoration of fish stocks in the Glenavy River.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent on the Líofa Initiative since its launch in 2011.
(AQO 6936/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has spent £526,405 on Líofa since its launch in 2011.

This figure includes £196,957 for the 2013/14 advertising campaign, which was approved by the Executive.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of the Brandywell stadium.
(AQO 6937/11-15)

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 Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the long term future of Libraries NI services in Newry & Armagh.
(AQO 6938/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to ensuring that Libraries NI continues to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for people living, working or studying in all areas of the North of Ireland including Newry and Armagh. There are currently pressures on the library service as, like all other DCAL Arms Length Bodies, Libraries NI is required to plan for budget reductions of 4.4% in 2014/15.

Whilst reductions of this nature may have an impact on front line service provision across the North, the Libraries NI Board and Senior Management Team is working hard to minimise this and to ensure that no locality, including Newry and Armagh, is disproportionately affected. My officials and I also stand ready to support Libraries NI as it explores the potential for savings to be identified.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the £2.8 million allocation in the last monitoring round to the City of Culture legacy projects.
(AQW 38176/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Building on DCAL's significant investment in the North West to date, I 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 my 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;
- Provide creative, cultural and sporting equipment for communities to increase skills and encourage social enterprise;

As business cases for the programme are still being finalised, I will be making further announcements in due course.

Department of Education

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when the Western Education and Library Board applied for funding for a new youth centre in Enniskillen; (ii) the level of local consultation on this project; and (iii) what consideration has been given to locating the youth centre on the proposed public services sector hub along with the South West College on the site of the former Erne Hospital in Enniskillen.
(AQW 37236/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): As The Lakeland Youth Centre is a controlled Youth Centre, the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) is responsible for capital works at the Centre.

I am advised by the WELB that:

(i) A revised Economic Appraisal was submitted by the WELB to the Department of Education on 18 April 2014.

(ii) The Lakeland Youth Centre has operated out of its existing premises in Enniskillen since 1993. Due to the deterioration in the condition of the building the WELB identified a need to upgrade the current provision. In addition to undertaking an Economic Appraisal the WELB consulted with young people who attend the Lakeland Youth Centre.

(iii) The Economic Appraisal explored options for the Lakeland Youth Centre. When assessing the options, consideration was given to the availability of both brown and green field sites and their availability within the timeframe, two years, for a new build centre. The Economic Appraisal recommended a new build on the existing site which provided best value for money. The existing site is within the ownership of the WELB and is in a prime location due to its proximity to the Lakeland Forum, Bus Station and other town centre amenities, to meet the needs of the Youth Service and the young people it serves.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education, following the amalgamation of Education and Library Boards, how his Department will work alongside the North Eastern Education and Library Board Youth Service to ensure they can continue to support local communities and the specific educational needs of young people.
(AQW 37508/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The single Education Authority, when established, will have a statutory duty to deliver and support youth work. Services will be delivered in line with the Department's priorities as set out in Priorities for Youth. The Regional Youth Development Framework will provide a clear framework for the delivery of youth services in response to assessed need. It will be a matter for the Education Authority to decide how services can be delivered most effectively within that context.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education how the amalgamation of Education and Library Boards will impact on support for Outdoor Education Centres which provide practical life skills training for young people in throughout Northern Ireland, and particularly Woodhall Outdoor Education Centre in Kilrea.
(AQW 37509/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not directly fund Outdoor Education Centres. These are currently funded by the Youth Service within each Education and Library Board area in accordance with their statutory obligations. This function will transfer to the single Education Authority, when established. It will be a matter for the Education Authority to decide how outdoor education provision is managed in line with the Department's priorities, as set out in Priorities for Youth.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserve funds held by his Department.
(AQW 37532/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The level of reserves in my Department as at 31 March 2014 is £(50,645,000).

This accounting balance represents the total assets less liabilities of the department, and does not represent spending power.

The Department has negative reserves due to the level of liabilities and the fact that my Department does not hold significant assets.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of schools in West Tyrone which have benefited from any programmes that provide pupils with the opportunity to learn a modern European language, including (a) Irish; (b) French; (c) Spanish; (d) German; (e) Polish (f) and Portuguese; and (ii) the educational benefits of such programmes.
(AQW 37589/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To support primary schools wishing to deliver language learning, the Primary Modern Languages Programme was introduced in 2007 to give pupils at Foundation Stage / Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language in school.

A breakdown of the number of schools in West Tyrone is not available however the number of primary schools currently benefitting from this programme in County Tyrone as a whole is set out in the table below:

Language	Number of Schools
Irish	27
Spanish	36
Polish	6
Total	**69**

At post-primary level, the European Studies Programme links schools in Ireland (North & South) with schools across the rest of Europe on collaborative curriculum-based projects. The emphasis whilst working together on these projects is on communication and pupils are encouraged to use the language of their partners where possible. Currently ten post-primary schools from County Tyrone are involved in this programme.

In addition, the Northern Irish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICILT) provides courses and activities for teachers and pupils. All schools receive notice of NICILT courses, film days, events and language debates. From 2012 to present, seven post-primary schools in County Tyrone visited NICILT for teacher training or film days for pupils.

I acknowledge the importance of language learning both socially and economically. Learning a second language can help our young people to become creative, confident and articulate individuals, able to play their full part in our increasingly diverse society and to achieve their full potential.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserve funds held by the South Eastern Education and Library Board.
(AQW 37606/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer you to AQW 37220/11-15, to ask the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserves in each of his Department's Arms Length Bodies as of 1 October 2014, tabled by Michael Copeland, MLA, and published in the official report on 17 October 2014.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to list the schools in West Tyrone which have benefited from minor works projects in the current financial year; and to detail the type of improvements in each case.
(AQW 37610/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following table lists schools in the West Tyrone constituency that have benefited from minor works projects in the current financial year and details the type of improvements in each case.

School Name	Details of Improvements
Barrack Street Boys PS	Fire Risk Assessment works
Castlederg HS	Refurbishment works, toilet, meeting room and IT classroom
Drumduff PS	Door Access Control
Gortnagarn PS	Door Access Control
Holy Family PS	Refurbishment works following amalgamation of Loreto Convent PS and St Colmcille's PS
Newtownstewart Model PS	Refurbishment Works, Ceilings, Staff Room, Administration Office
Recarson PS	Fencing
Sacred Heart College	Door Access Control
Sacred Heart College	Provision of CCTV
Sacred Heart College	Security Lighting
St Caireall's PS	Toilet Refurbishment

School Name	Details of Improvements
St Conor's PS	Refurbishment works school meals kitchen
St Columba's PS	Store Extension
St Mary's PS, Strabane	Amalgamation work – Outstanding works
St Mary's PS, Strabane	Door Access Control
St Mary's PS, Strabane	Fire Risk improvement works
St Oliver Plunkett's PS	Refurbishment work to provide quiet room
St Oliver Plunkett's PS	Toilet Refurbishment
St Patrick's PS, Eskra	Upgrade of telephone system
St Patrick's PS, Newtownstewart	Toilet Refurbishment
Tummery PS	Door Access Control

*the above table includes details of minor works projects approved up to 30 September 2014.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has a community asset transfer policy.
(AQW 37656/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not have its own Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy however it is contributing to the implementation of the Executive's policy on CAT, which was agreed in May 2014.

Eight pilot projects are currently underway to explore how this policy will work in practice. Two of these projects involve closed schools, Ballygolan Primary School (a controlled school) and St Gemma's High School (a catholic maintained school).

My Department is represented on the CAT Implementation Oversight Group. The steering group, through the progress being made on the pilot projects, is identifying amendments required to current procedures across all Departments, to ensure that the Executive's policy is considered when future decisions about disposal of surplus assets are taken.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the estimated cost of the required repair works at St. Columbanus' College in Bangor.
(AQW 37657/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards' estate management system indicates that the current maintenance backlog for St. Columbanus' College in Bangor is £496,795 with an additional £30,890 required to address issues with school meals accommodation. The total estimated 'make good' maintenance cost for the college is therefore £527,685.

I am committed to reducing the levels of maintenance backlog across the schools' estate and additional monies are allocated, when available, to assist the Boards in reducing the most critical elements of the maintenance backlog.

While St. Columbanus' College has a significant maintenance backlog, the college has benefited from substantial capital investment over the past two years totalling £1,265,736 through my Department's Capital Minor Works Programme.

In addition, extensive structural concrete repairs have been carried out at the school at an estimated cost of circa £120k.

Under the Schools' Energy Efficiency Programme which I approved earlier this year, the SEELB submitted a proposal to undertake boiler replacement works at St. Columbanus' College at an estimated cost of £80k. The Department has conveyed approval in principle for this scheme and a "Letter of Undertaking" was issued to the school for completion on 15 October 2014.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what minor capital works will be funded in North Down in 2015/16.
(AQW 37688/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has confirmed that it has not yet concluded the process of setting a minor works programme for the controlled sector in 2015/16.

In respect of the non-controlled sectors the Education and Library Boards take these works forward on behalf of the Department.

As 2014/15 is the last year of the current CSR period, the amount available for the capital budget for 2015/16 and beyond years has not yet been confirmed.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education, of the primary and post-primary schools that are currently awaiting approval for capital projects, whether any assessment has been made regarding the possible adverse health and safety implications for pupils attending the schools in the current academic year.
(AQW 37696/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring that all of the schools' estate is appropriately maintained to prevent unacceptable deterioration of the buildings and to mitigate any health and safety risks to pupils, teachers, staff and others who use the school buildings.

Condition surveys are carried out on all schools on a five-year cyclical basis to identify maintenance requirements, including those which create a health and safety issue. Additionally, health and safety risks can be identified through regular site visits by officers from the Education and Library Boards or by school staff. If the risk is deemed unacceptable, it is addressed as a matter of urgency.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) why the Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16) permits the education authority to borrow money when the Education Bill (NIA 14/11-15) explicitly prohibited the Education and Skills Authority from this; (ii) who the new education authority will be permitted to borrow money from; (ii) whether there are any limits to the amount the new education authority will be permitted to borrow; and (iv) the benefits that borrowing powers would afford the new education authority.
(AQW 37715/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16) permits the education authority to borrow money by means of an overdraft facility or similar to enable effective daily management of cash, which is within standard business operating practice.

(ii) Details of who the new education authority will be permitted to borrow, through an overdraft facility or similar, have not yet been confirmed as this will depend on the future provider of banking services.

(iii) Limits to the amounts the new education authority will be permitted to borrow have not yet been determined.

(iv) The ability to borrow through an overdraft facility or similar will enable the new education authority to manage cash effectively and enable the prompt payment of invoices to suppliers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools that have dyslexia.
(AQW 37726/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below. The information provided relates to the 2013/14 school census, the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will be available in December, finalised figures in February.

Primary and post-primary pupils with dyslexia, 2013/14

Primary	3,125
Post-primary	5,345

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1. Figure for primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
2. Figures include pupils at stages 1-5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.
3. Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how much his Department is planning to invest in cycling for pupils and school staff.
(AQW 37766/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As part of the Department for Regional Development's Active School Travel Programme, my Department is currently carrying out scoping for provision of school cycle parking facilities in 60 schools across the schools estate.

An investment decision will be made once this exercise is complete.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by his Department.
(AQW 37807/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not own any surplus land. Responsibility for land and property is dependent on the particular type of school. Within the controlled sector, decisions on the use of vacant buildings and land, including declaring them surplus, will rest with the relevant Education and Library Board taking account of guidance from Land and Property Services (LPS).

Decisions on the use or sale of vacant properties and land within the Voluntary Grammar, Maintained and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors are the responsibility of the Trustees of individual schools.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the dates of; and (ii) the individuals present at meetings to discuss the establishment of a cross border area learning community involving St. Mary's High School, Brollagh since his rejection of development proposal 256; and when he expects a pilot model to be brought forward.
(AQW 37810/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I announced my decision to turn down a development proposal to close St Mary's High School Brollagh in June 2004. At that time I advised that the option of cross–border collaboration needed to be examined. I called on the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) to bring forward a pilot scheme which would allow the school to work with schools on the other side of the border.

The following meetings have taken place:

Date	Those Present
3 July 2014	■ Gerry Lundy, Deputy Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Gerry Murphy, Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
30 July 2014	■ Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive, WELB ■ Jim Clarke, Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Paddy Mackey, Senior Education Officer, WELB ■ Rosemary Watterson, Chief Administrative Officer, WELB ■ Pat Hughes, Chief Finance Officer ■ Gerry Lundy, Deputy Chief Executive, CCMS
11 August 2014	■ Barry Jordan, Director of Equality and All- Ireland Jim Clarke, Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive, WELB
16 September 2014	■ Pat Ward, Head of Corporate Services, WELB ■ Paddy Mackey, Senior Education Officer, WELB ■ Gerry Lundy, Deputy Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Lewis Love, CCMS Associate
18 September 2014	■ John O'Dowd, Minister for Education ■ Jan O'Sullivan, Minister for Education and Skills
22 September 2014	■ Gerry Lundy, Deputy Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Simon Bradley, Principal of St Mary's Belleek
25 September 2014	■ Lewis Love, CCMS Associate met with a School Principal
1 October 2014	■ Lewis Love, CCMS Associate ■ Sean Rodgers, Assistant Finance Officer, WELB
3 October 2014	■ Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive, WELB ■ Shaun Purcell, Chief Executive, Donegal ETB (Education and Training Board)
21 October 2014	■ Gerry Lundy, Deputy Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Lewis Love, CCMS Associate ■ Pat Ward, Head of Corporate Services, WELB ■ Iris Barker, Head of Property Services
29 October 2014	■ Jim Clarke, Chief Executive, CCMS ■ Barry Mulholland , Chief Executive, WELB ■ Shaun Purcell , Chief Executive, Donegal ETB (Education and Training Board)

Discussions are continuing on a way forward.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, in relation to schools for children with special educational needs, to detail the current stipulated ratio of (i) teachers; and (ii) classroom assistants, to pupils.
(AQW 37819/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not stipulate teacher or classroom assistant ratios for special schools.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education what percentage of the remarking of AS level and A2 level modules in (i) 2012; (ii) 2013; and (iii) 2014 have resulted in increased marks.
(AQW 37839/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am able to provide relevant statistics for CCEA, which is the main Awarding Organisation in the north of Ireland, but not for all awards made here; enquiries about results (EAR) statistics are not presented by jurisdiction.

The statistics below provide a detailed breakdown of:

a. the percentage requests for remarks compared to the total number of AS and A2 unit entries;

b. the percentage mark increases overall compared to the total entries for AS and A2 examinations at unit level;

c. the percentage mark increases for AS and A2 compared to the total number of unit remarks requested by schools;

	2011-12		**2012-13**		**2013-14**	
	AS	**A2**	**AS**	**A2**	**AS**	**A2**
Percentage remark requests compared to the total number of entries	2.70%	2.53%	2.46%	2.63%	3.05%	2.82%
Percentage mark increase compared to the total unit entries	1.04%	0.83%	0.91%	0.84%	1.10%	0.97%
Percentage mark increase compared to the total number of remarks requested	38.59%	32.74%	37.18%	32.05%	35.93%	34.35%

Please note:

1. A and B above provide an overall context for the information requested and provided in C.

It is important to note that an increase in mark does not necessarily equate to a grade change.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, in relation to ministerial appointments, what the respective success rates have been for (i) Protestant; and (ii) Catholic applicants, since June 2012.
(AQW 37847/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The community backgrounds of those I have appointed to public bodies sponsored by my Department since 1 June 2012 are as follows:

Community Background	**Number**
Protestant	15
Roman Catholic	20
Neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic	2
Not Known	1
Total	**38**

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of Development Proposal 313 as submitted by Holy Trinity College, Cookstown; and to detail when his Department will be issuing a final decision on the proposal.
(AQW 37849/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development Proposal (DP) number 313 was published by the Southern Education and Library Board on behalf of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on 2 September 2014.

DP 313 proposes a phased increase to the approved enrolment of Holy Trinity College, from September 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter. Following the publication of the DP a statutory two month objection period begins which affords all interested and affected parties an opportunity to submit their comments on the proposal to DE; this ends on 3 November 2014.

It is likely to be a number of weeks after the end of the objection period before I am in a position to make a decision on this proposal. Once my decision is made, my Department's website will be updated accordingly.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Shared Educational Campus for Moy Regional Primary School and St. John's Primary School Moy, including identifying a site for the new build.
(AQW 37868/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Moy Project is one of three schemes I announced in July to be supported under the Shared Education Campuses Programme. The project is now in the early stages of planning.

A site search for the new campus is currently being undertaken by Land & Property Services. The Southern Education & Library Board (SELB) will then carry out the technical feasibility work for the sites identified. This information will inform the preparation of the economic appraisal which will be carried out by the SELB in conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

Once submitted to my Department, the economic appraisal will be considered within business case approval processes and in line with NI Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation guidelines, including value for money and affordability.

Only after approval of the economic appraisal, and subject to available capital funds, will the project proceed to tender and construction.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of counselling services to children of primary school age.
(AQW 37873/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have previously indicated that I would like to be in a position to offer provision of counselling support to pupils of primary age.

There are a number of issues around how such a service would operate when dealing with very young children that require to be teased out but I am committed to doing this and to bringing forward proposals for the introduction of such a service at the earliest opportunity.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education whether there is a minimum footprint or area of land required for a new build primary school; and if so, to detail the requirement.
(AQW 37884/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The recommended site area for a New Build Primary School is dependent on the enrolment of the proposed school and other factors including the topography of the site. Guidance is contained in Appendix 2, the Handbook Section 3a, Primary Schools Building Handbook, which is published on my Department's website at:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/bab_-_section_3a_-_ps_building_handbook_-_final_web_version_-_16611.pdf

Information pertaining to play and site areas for primary schools is detailed below:

Appendix 2

Table of Play and Site Areas

Enrolment Category	Class Bases	Hard Play	Informal Grass Play	Recommended Minimum Site Area (Hectares)
86-115	4	650	3,000	0.63
116-145	5	800	3,000	0.67
146-175	6	950	5,000	0.95
176-205	7	1,100	5,000	1.00
206-230	8	1,250	5,000	1.04
231-260	9	1,400	5,000	1.08
261-290	10	1,550	5,000	1.11
291-320	11	1,700	7,000	1.38
321-350	12	1,850	7,000	1.43
351-380	13	2,000	7,000	1.47
381-410	14	2,150	7,000	1.51
411-435	15	2,300	7,000	1.55
436-465	16	2,450	7,000	1.59
466-495	17	2,600	7,000	1.62
496-525	18	2,750	7,000	1.66
526-555	19	2,900	10,000	1.99
556-585	20	3,050	10,000	2.03
586-615	21	3,200	10,000	2.08

Enrolment Category	Class Bases	Hard Play	Informal Grass Play	Recommended Minimum Site Area (Hectares)
616-640	22	3,350	10,000	2.12
641-670	23	3,500	10,000	2.16
671-700	24	3,650	10,000	2.21
701-730	25	3,800	10,000	2.25
731-760	26	3,950	10,000	2.29
761-790	27	4,100	10,000	2.34
791-820	28	4,250	10,000	2.38

Notes:

1. For long-term enrolments (LTE) of less than 86 pupils, site and play areas shall be advised by the Department upon application.
2. For long-term enrolments (LTE) of more than 820 pupils, site and play areas shall be advised by the Department upon application.
3. In all cases, the recommended site area includes an allowance for School Meals Accommodation, staff and visitors parking, access and modest landscape works.
4. The site areas provided above are the preferred minimum. However, it is recognised that attaining the minimum is not always possible, particularly within the confines of an urban setting or when re-developing an existing site. In such circumstances, the Department will give due consideration to the minimum acceptable area on a case by case basis.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education how he is currently engaging with relevant stakeholders to ensure that parents of prospective pupils are aware of, and included in, all discussions regarding plans for the transition process, following the amalgamation of Coleraine High School and Coleraine Academical Institution.
(AQW 37889/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North-Eastern Education and Library Board advises that following my approval of a Development Proposal to establish a new Co-Educational Grammar School in Coleraine, an Interim Board of Governors for the school has been established, comprising equal representation from Coleraine Academical Institution and Coleraine High School. In accordance with TNC 2013/2 (School Reorganisation Agreement) the Interim Board of Governors will conduct all necessary business in respect of the establishment of the school.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education what support or funding is available to rural schools to open the school building in evenings to cater for community groups operating classes, such as ICT for farmers and rural dwellers.
(AQW 37896/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The local management and arrangements for the use of facilities by community groups is a matter for the school's Board of Governors. The Department's Guide for School Governors 'Every School a Good School – The Governors' Role' provides support and guidance to schools with regard to making their premises available for wider community use.

In January 2014 the Department published 'Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools' which provides detailed operational guidance to assist school leaders in considering the practical issues involved when making school premises available for wider community use, including links to a range of external funding opportunities which schools may find relevant.

In 2014/15, the Department has made £12m of funding available to almost 500 schools through the Extended Schools (ES) programme allowing for the provision of a range of activities outside of the normal school day. ES resources enable schools operating in areas of the highest social deprivation to work with its pupils, families and community in helping to raise the standard of pupils' achievement.

In response to identified needs ES can provide opportunities for lifelong learning and personal development and allow for the use of school premises and facilities outside of school hours for the benefit of learners and the wider community. There are currently 140 rural schools eligible to receive ES funding.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserve funds held by the Belfast Education and Library Board.
(AQW 37937/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer you to AQW 37220/11-15, to ask the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserves in each of his Department's Arms Length Bodies as of 1 October 2014, tabled by Michael Copeland, MLA, and published in the official report on 17 October 2014.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserve funds held by the Western Education and Library Board.
(AQW 37938/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer you to AQW 37220/11-15, to ask the Minister of Education to detail the level of reserves in each of his Department's Arms Length Bodies as of 1 October 2014, tabled by Michael Copeland, MLA, and published in the official report on 17 October 2014.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education how many (i) teaching; and (ii) non-teaching staff have received voluntary redundancies in (a) 2013/14; and (b) 2014/15 to date; and how much of the funds are still to be allocated to severances through this scheme.
(AQW 37957/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) Teaching Staff:

My Department did not offer a voluntary redundancy scheme for teachers, rather my Department provided a Cost Based Teaching Redundancy Programme in 2013/14 and 2014/15. The purpose of this programme was to assist schools to reduce their cost base through a reduction in their full-time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers.

The position of the 2013/14 and 2014/15 Strategic Cost Based Teaching Redundancy Programme is that the programme has now concluded and all payments have been made in respect of those approved teaching redundancy applications.

In response to the numbers of teaching staff who received redundancy payment in a) 2013/14 and (b) 2014/15, figures have been provided in the table below:

Year	Number	Cost (£)
2013/14	292	17.1m
2014/15	92	3.9m

(ii) Non-teaching Staff:

Likewise there was no voluntary redundancy scheme for non-teaching staff; rather schools could seek to make non-teaching posts redundant under the Department's Cost Based Redundancy Programme in order to invoke long-term savings to live within delegated budgets.

In addition, funding has been provided to cover the cost of inescapable redundancies that have arisen for various reasons such as school closures, mergers or relocations; pupil movement; changing pupil needs or the end of temporary contracts that have exceeded two years.

It is feasible that a further small number of inescapable non-teaching redundancies may occur before the end of the financial year. The situation is extremely fluid and proposals already approved may be subject to change as employers work to redeploy as many of the affected staff as possible which may reduce the anticipated costs to date.

The total number of approved non-teaching redundancies in 2013/14 and in 2014/15 (to date) is set out in the table below:

Year	Number of Posts	Cost (£)
2013/14	394	4.1m
2014/15 (to date)	261	1.96m

Note:

The number of non-teaching staff affected by redundancies will be smaller than the number of redundant posts due to double and triple jobbing.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 36979/11-15, how the Regional Training Unit (RTU) ensures that employers have agreed appropriate arrangements for release; and whether any concerns have been raised with the RTU in this regard.
(AQW 37972/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Arrangements for releasing teachers for training provided through the Regional Training Unit (RTU) are entirely a matter for schools working within guidelines set by the employing authorities. As such, and as outlined in my response to AQW 36979/11-15, it is for employers to agree appropriate arrangements for the release of individuals to attend courses.

While some concerns have been raised about the availability of sub-cover, in recent years support provided by RTU has been tailored to minimise the extent of day release through greater reliance on twilight and on on-line provision.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education how many schools have been nominated for the Derrytrasna Pastoral Care Award to date.
(AQW 37978/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: 14 nominations for the new Derrytrasna Pastoral Care Award have been received to date.

The closure date for the receipt of nominations is 14 November so there is still time for nominations to be made. Full details are available on the Department website or on the NI Direct website.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education what support is in place for pupils from year ten onwards when making choices in relation to further education.
(AQW 37979/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Young people must have access, at the right time, to high quality careers education, information, advice and guidance so that they can make informed choices leading to the most appropriate progression route for them as individuals.

Careers-related learning is a substantial component within the Learning for Life and Work part of the statutory curriculum. Through this young people are given the opportunity to learn about careers opportunities and to develop the skills to become effective decision makers.

Schools work in partnership with DEL's careers advisers who offer impartial advice and guidance to young people at key transition points on making appropriate and informed choices on pathways that lead to higher or further education, training or employment.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education what support his Department has in place to assist pupils with emotional health problems.
(AQW 37980/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education (DE) promotes positive mental health and well-being of pupils in schools through a range of developments.

The Revised Curriculum for primary and post-primary schools has elements designed to develop the young person as an individual and to enhance young people's own awareness of the stressors in their lives and their capacity to deal with them.

The "iMatter" Programme is intended to support the entire school community to be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils. Under the programme a suite of homework diary inserts and posters on topics of concern to young people such as self esteem and coping with stress, worry and anxiety, and outlining sources of help are prepared and distributed annually.

Pupils are also alerted to a topical "Message of the Month" each time they access the C2K system.

The Department issued a "Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools" in February this year. The Guide is aimed at ensuring a regional approach to dealing with critical incidents and is designed to help schools be prepared and to ensure effective management before, during and after the event. The Guide is available on the DE website.

DE is a member of and funds the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) which brings together local statutory and voluntary organisations to help schools and organisations working with young people to develop appropriate strategies to prevent and deal with bullying behaviours. In August 2013 the Forum published "Effective Responses to Bullying" to support schools in the management of alleged bullying incidents. Further information is available at www.niabf.org.uk.

The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) has been accessible to young people of post-primary age in mainstream schools since September 2007 and in special schools from January 2011.. On average 1432 pupils per month use the ICSS Service. As part of the current arrangements for support following a critical incident, pupils in primary schools have access to counselling support. Work will start later this year on how access to the counselling service might be extended to primary aged pupils.

In October 2012 the Delivering Social Change programme provided funding for a series of six Signature projects. One of these projects, the "Nurture Unit" Signature Project, which is being taken forward jointly by DE and DSD, involved the establishment of 20 new nurture units. Nurture Units offer a short term, focussed intervention strategy which addresses barriers to learning arising from social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, in an inclusive, supportive manner. The units aim to improve the child's ability to engage effectively with adults and their peers so that, following their time in the Nurture Unit (typically 2-4 terms) they are able to re-integrate and participate effectively within their mainstream class. In addition to the 20 new nurture units established under the Signature Project, DE is also funding existing nurture units in 10 schools where funding had ceased or would be due to cease during the life of the Signature Project (June 2015).

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown by constituency of the £5.4m of funding provided for school uniform grants.
(AQW 37981/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The £5.4m of funding relates to my Department's estimated budget for 2014/15 for the clothing allowance scheme. This is a demand determined service and funding will be provided to meet the number of awards. Funding is allocated to Education and Library Boards which are responsible for administration of the Clothing Allowance Scheme. The scheme was extended in September 2014 to include post-primary pupils in the Working Tax Credit criterion.

The Education and Library Boards have provided actual expenditure on the clothing allowance scheme in the 2014/15 financial year up to 24 October 2014 broken down by constituency as follows:

Constituency	**Expenditure 2014/15**
Belfast East	£164,641.00
Belfast North	£474,911.25
Belfast South	£248,564.50
Belfast West	£547,873.50
East Antrim	£170,623.75
East Derry	£263,145.50
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	£283,222.75
Foyle	£459,355.25
Lagan Valley	£151,756.50
Mid Ulster	£257,244.75
Newry And Armagh	£364,773.50
North Antrim	£244,445.50
North Down	£138,589.50
South Antrim	£141,243.75
South Down	£270,096.00
Strangford	£168,632.50
Upper Bann	£289,808.00
West Tyrone	£324,144.25
Total	**£4,963,071.75**

Note: Expenditure relates to awards to pupils attending schools in the constituencies listed.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 37060/11-15, whether senior management of the Southern Education and Library Board received annual salary increases, in addition to performance related pay, in the last five years.
(AQW 38001/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that no senior management staff in the Southern Education and Library Board received both performance related pay and annual salary increases in the last 5 years.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 32495/11-15, whether Education Welfare Officers are now able to access C2K attendance records from their offices.
(AQW 38046/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer you to the answer to AQW 34155/11-15 dated 26 June 2014 which informed Mr Kinahan MLA that C2k intended to conduct the pilot from September 2014 to December 2014 with a view to Education Welfare Officers (EWO) being able to access C2k attendance records from their offices.

An initial pilot involving one EWO from the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area and one school commenced during August/September 2014. Another EWO and another school within the BELB will follow the same process before the end of this year and if the process is robust and no security risks are present the pilot will be extended to each of the Education and Library Boards.

The Department will review the position with C2k early in the New Year.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the amount of funding initially allocated to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15; and (ii) whether this amount has been reduced due to budget pressures.
(AQW 38069/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Early Years – the Organisation for young children has awarded Gingerbread NI £14,410 from the DE Early Years Fund in 2014/15, which represents a slight increase on the allocation made to them in 2013/14.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many (i) controlled; and (ii) catholic maintained post-primary schools have transformed their management status to integrated since the option became available.
(AQW 38074/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the introduction of the statutory measures contained in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, which facilitate the transformation process, a total of 5 controlled post-primary schools have transformed to integrated status.

To date, no catholic maintained schools have transformed to integrated status.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AWQ 33588/11-15, for his assessment of the Drumragh Judgement, particularly of the conclusion that the inflexibility of its projections could inhibit his Department in the outworking of its Article 64 duty to integrated education in its day-to-day decisions.
(AQW 38077/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the Court's clarification in respect of Article 64 and the finding that I had not fettered my discretion on the Drumragh Integrated College Development Proposal. I also welcome the Court's acceptance that it is acceptable and necessary to use an analytical tool, i.e. the Needs Model, for area planning.

The Needs Model was designed to calculate estimates for growth in broad sectors based on population projections and current patterns of enrolment. However, it has been made clear to all parties that this is the starting point for planning purposes. It is not intended that the plans adhere rigidly to the distribution of the calculated need for places across the sectors.

It is important, therefore, that those representing the Integrated sector make a robust case in discussions with the Boards and CCMS to ensure that genuine need for local expansion in the sector is reflected in amended need figures and, subsequently, in the area plans.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Education how many children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders are in primary and post-primary education in South Antrim.
(AQO 6947/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2013/14 school census recorded 209 pupils as having Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in the South Antrim constituency. Of these, 138 are in the primary sector and 71 are in the post-primary sector.

The data is sourced from the school census rather than a diagnostic source. The school census data relates to those children who have been assessed as having ASD.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to promote greater community use of schools.
(AQO 6948/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Departmental Guidance Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools which seeks to encourage and assist schools in providing for community access to school facilities was published and issued to all schools in January 2014. The Guidance is also hosted on the DE webpage.

The Department's guide for School Governors also highlights the responsibility governors have in promoting the use of the school in the community and actively encourages them to consider making school premises available as a community facility where possible.

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education, in light of the June 2012 capital investment announcement, for an update on the progress of the school builds which are currently on site.
(AQO 6949/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details schools that were announced in 2012 that are currently on site or where construction work is about to commence. Of the 18 schools announced, one project has already been completed.

At a further 5 schools designs have been completed and procurement of the construction work is underway. It is anticipated that these schools will be on site before the end of this financial year.

The remaining schools are at an earlier stage of planning.

Name of School	Start date	Target Completion Date	Comments
Tannaghmore PS, Lurgan	June 2014	September 2016	On programme

Name of School	Start date	Target Completion Date	Comments
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain, Belfast	June 2014	August 2015	On programme
St Teresa's PS, Lurgan	May 2014	October 2015	On programme.
Victoria Park PS, Belfast	November 2013	June 2015	On programme.
St Josephs Convent PS, Newry	November 2013	June 2015	On programme
St Clares Convent and St Colmans Abbey PS, Newry	To be on site end October 2014	December 2015	Construction not yet commenced.
Eglinton PS	June 2014	July 2015	Slightly ahead of construction programme
Dromore Central PS, Dromore	March 2014	October 2015	Slightly delayed due to unexpected ground conditions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate's bi-annual report.
(AQO 6951/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Inspector's biennial report, covering the period from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2014, is due to have its official launch on 6 November 2014. I will meet with the Chief Inspector prior to that for a briefing on her findings.

The Chief Inspector's Report is the Education and Training Inspectorate's independent, professional, evaluation of the quality of education being provided across our local education and training system, including strengths and areas for improvement. The findings of the report are based on first-hand evidence gained from a broad range of programmed inspections and surveys and incidental visits to schools and other organisations undertaken by District Inspectors.

This will be the second Chief Inspector's Report presented to me as Minister for Education. I see it as an essential component in informing me about the state of education and training here and in promoting improvement and building capacity in the system.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education why the Education Bill does not give the Education Authority the right to appoint its own Chief Executive.
(AQO 6952/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Bill states that the Education Authority shall appoint all of its Chief Executives, with the exception of the first Chief Executive, who shall be appointed directly by the Department. This is normal when establishing a new Non-Departmental Public Body.

There are practical reasons for this. The Board of the Authority will not be established in time to undertake the selection and appointment of the first Chief Executive to be in post on or before 1 April 2015. This is critical for the Education Authority to ensure that the necessary minimum administrative arrangements are in place by 1 April 2015.

As I stated in the Assembly during second stage debate of the Education Bill, it would be my intention that the first Chief Executive would be appointed on an interim basis, for a period no longer than 2 years.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what actions his Department has taken to tackle pupil absenteeism.
(AQO 6953/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Regular school attendance and educational attainment are inextricably linked. Regular attendance ensures that pupils get the best possible outcomes from their period in compulsory education and improves their chances of employment and life chances in the longer term.

I have given close attention to the conclusions and recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee report on this issue, in particular that we need a Pupil Attendance Strategy. A Memorandum of Reply was published in August and it sets out a programme of work for my Department and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

Much has already been done. For example, to assist with the development of the Pupil Attendance Strategy, my officials have held workshops with schools and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). Direct engagement will also take place with pupils, parents, school governors, other government departments and the wider community.

My Department's guidance to schools on "Pupil Attendance and Absence Recording" has been revised and will issue in the coming weeks. It strongly recommends, among other things, that each school should have a clear pupil attendance policy. This has been supplemented by "School Attendance Matters – a Parent's Guide" which was issued in September for distribution to the parents/carers of all school-age children.

My Department and the ELBs continue to provide support to vulnerable groups, such as Looked after Children, Travellers, School-Age Mothers and Newcomers. This work is supported by the EWS, looked after children teams, the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) and the Inclusion and Diversity Service.

The levels of unauthorised pupil absences are unacceptable. Evidence shows that not all schools are following up on the reasons for absences. My Department will be writing to these schools in the coming weeks to highlight how many days of education have been missed by their pupils where the reason for the absence is unknown. If we are to develop a meaningful Pupil Attendance Strategy, we need to know the underlying causes of absenteeism which develop into educational underachievement for so many of our young people.

I remain committed to addressing the issue to ensure that our young people have every opportunity to reap the benefits of regular school attendance.

Department for Employment and Learning

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to assess and address the risk factors resulting in young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.
(AQW 37353/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department is responsible for the implementation of the Executive's "Pathways to Success" which seeks to address the needs of all young people who are presently Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This work is monitored and supported by a delivery infrastructure under the direction of the NEET Advisory Group, which is representative of key decision makers from Government Departments, the voluntary and community sector, education, health, social care and business sectors and local government.

A range of programmes has been developed to meet the needs of those young who are in the NEET category, all of which include the development of a personal action plan based on a detailed assessment of each young person's specific needs. The following programmes currently provide targeted support to young people in the NEET category. I have also referenced a number of new initiatives which will provide additional support to those young people furthest away from the labour market. These include:

Collaboration and Innovation Fund

This programme commences with an initial assessment by qualified staff to identify the barriers which are preventing the young people moving towards employment. This enables staff to develop a meaningful action plan designed to address the specific barriers and help the young people to improve their employability skills.

Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS)

This is a community-based employment initiative designed to help the "hardest to reach" in targeted geographical areas. LEMIS Mentors travel to meet clients with a common employability barrier in their local area, to conduct an assessment of the clients' specific needs and to arrange mentoring and other support measures to address the critical barriers.

The Community Family Support Programme (CFSP)

CFSP focuses on the needs of the most disadvantaged families, to enable young people to re- engage with Employment, Education, or Training. This programme has received additional financial support from OFMDFM and has been designated as a 'Signature Project under the Delivering Social Change initiative.

Careers Service

My Department's Careers Service currently provides dedicated advice and support to all 16-17 year olds in the NEET category. These clients are allocated a specific careers adviser who provides support and advocacy to assist them to secure an appropriate education, employment or training opportunity. Careers advisers also work with those young people who have unfortunately dropped out of education and training, to help them back into a positive labour market opportunity.

The United Youth Programme (UYP)

My Department is leading on the development of the Executive's United Youth Programme which has two specific outcomes: The personal development of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), to improve their confidence, skills and experience; and

i. The promotion of good relations between these young people and others across the community, including people (and particularly young people) from other religious backgrounds.

ii. In the early pilot phase I am particularly interested in finding new and creative ways of engaging those most disadvantaged or at risk of exclusion.

Apprenticeships

In June 2014, my Department published Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships which will be central in transforming our skills landscape and securing our economic success. The new model for apprenticeships will be in place for 2016 and includes a range of commitments to increase participation by a wide range of individuals. In particular, a

pilot project will be taken forward to develop a new youth training offer to widen access to apprenticeships to individuals with disabilities or other barriers that are impacting on their ability to engage in education and training.

Economic Inactivity

My Department is currently working in partnership with DETI, DSD, Invest NI and DHSSPS to develop a new strategy to tackle economic inactivity. A key aspect of this Strategy will be the delivery of initiatives designed to reduce the numbers of young people who are economically inactive.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what training programmes his Department offers to people over the age of 25 years who are trying to get back into employment.
(AQW 37598/11-15)

Dr Farry: Those seeking to return to work who are over 25 can avail of assistance in the first instance from my Department's Employment Service Advisers. This assistance can include training through the voluntary Employment Service Support (ESS) provision. This provision offers a number of different choices around work related activities which can be tailored to suit an individual's employability needs, for example, the opportunity to undertake a short accredited training course. It operates from June 2014 to March 2015. Anyone over 18 years old who is not working or working less than 16 hours each week may apply.

The Department's new main employment programme, Steps 2 Success (S2S) commenced on 20th October 2014. Its primary purpose is the delivery of a flexible personalised service tailored to meet individual needs, which will help people move into and remain in employment. Training within the programme is matched to individual job goals. S2S is available to all eligible jobseekers irrespective of their employability, need or age.

Clients who are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and aged between 18 and 24 will be mandated onto S2S after 9 months on benefit and those aged 25+ and on JSA for 12 months will be mandated onto the programme after 12 months on benefit. Early entry for all other JSA claimants, clients on Employment Support Allowance (Work Related Activity Group) (ESA (WRAG)) and existing ESA clients is available with the agreement of their Employment Service Adviser. The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS), an initiative designed to help unemployed people aged 16 plus in the community overcome those issues that may be preventing them from finding and keeping a job, is also available through by Department. The service is provided by local community employment organisations in the Belfast area, Derry, Strabane, Newry & Mourne, Moyle and Cookstown District Council areas. In addition to these areas LEMIS is also available on an outreach basis throughout Northern Ireland to individuals with a common employability barrier to employment, for example, young people (16-24 years) Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). In participating in the programme clients may available of Short Accredited Training Courses.

The Service is particularly focused on the homeless, ex-offenders/ex-prisoners, people with a history of drug/alcohol misuse and care leavers.

More job ready LEMIS clients may also participate in short pre-employment training courses to enable them to gain work experience relating to vacancies and prepare them for interviews.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the current income figures for (i) Queen's University; and (ii) the University of Ulster from (a) block grant for undergraduate teaching; and (b) fee income from NI-domiciled undergraduate students, for each of the last three years.
(AQW 37673/11-15)

Dr Farry: The income figures requested is detailed in the tables below.

Queen's University

	2011-12 £m	**2012-13 £m**	**2013-14 £m**
Block grant	57.0	52.6	52.3
Fee income	34.2	39.1	43.4

University of Ulster

	2011-12 £m	**2012-13 £m**	**2013-14 £m**
Block grant	55.8	52.7	52.3
Fee income	42.0	43.6	46.0

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown of the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of university students from each district council area that dropped out during the first year of their course, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37713/11-15)

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.

Annex A

NI Domiciled Full-time undergraduate entrants to NI HEIs failing to continue in HE following entry in the previous year

	2009/10 entrants		2010/11 entrants		2011/12 entrants	
Local Government District	**Not in HE in 2010/11**	**Percentage Not in HE in 2010/11**	**Not in HE in 2011/12**	**Percentage Not in HE in 2011/12**	**Not in HE in 2012/13**	**Percentage Not in HE in 2012/13**
Antrim	20	6.8%	20	7.1%	15	5.4%
Ards	15	5.7%	10	2.8%	15	5.7%
Armagh	35	9.0%	25	5.9%	20	4.7%
Ballymena	25	8.6%	15	4.6%	10	4.3%
Ballymoney	5	3.6%	5	3.7%	10	6.8%
Banbridge	20	8.5%	5	2.4%	5	4.1%
Belfast	100	8.6%	95	8.4%	80	7.1%
Carrickfergus	10	5.0%	10	5.3%	10	4.7%
Castlereagh	25	6.3%	10	3.0%	25	6.8%
Coleraine	30	9.3%	20	7.2%	20	7.5%
Cookstown	35	12.1%	20	9.5%	20	8.1%
Craigavon	45	8.4%	25	5.0%	40	8.5%
Derry	85	10.9%	50	7.4%	50	7.6%
Down	25	6.4%	25	6.6%	25	6.8%
Dungannon	45	13.1%	25	7.2%	30	7.9%
Fermanagh	20	5.6%	10	4.3%	10	4.5%
Larne	10	6.7%	5	4.3%	5	2.3%
Limavady	20	8.5%	15	6.3%	10	6.0%
Lisburn	55	9.5%	35	5.7%	35	5.4%
Magherafelt	30	8.0%	15	4.9%	20	5.8%
Moyle	5	7.4%	5	8.2%	5	5.9%
Newry & Mourne	50	7.9%	40	7.0%	30	5.1%
Newtownabbey	30	7.7%	20	4.9%	20	5.4%
North Down	30	8.2%	15	5.3%	15	4.6%
Omagh	35	9.5%	25	7.8%	35	10.1%
Strabane	35	13.8%	20	8.2%	15	7.7%
Total	**835**	**8.5%**	**555**	**6.2%**	**565**	**6.4%**

Source:HESA Performance Indicators

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of departmental funded PhD places available in each year since 2012.
(AQW 37798/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since 2012, my Department has made available funding for up to the following numbers of PhD studentships at the Queen's University Belfast and The University of Ulster:

Academic Year	PhD Studentships
2012/13	595
2013/14	631
2014/15	729

The universities can at their discretion commute some of these PhD studentships to students undertaking Masters Research degrees, although this is uncommon.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of Post-Graduate awards that his Department has provided in partnership with universities, in each year since 2011.
(AQW 37799/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department makes available funding for postgraduate awards in the form of PhD studentships at the Queen's University Belfast and The University of Ulster. At the discretion of the awarding university, these awards can be commuted to students undertaking a Masters Research degree (MRes). The awards since 2011 are as follows:

Academic Year	Funded PhD Studentships	Commuted to MRes
2011/12	695	20
2012/13	595	18
2013/14	631	NA
2014/15	729	NA

Information in respect of funded MRes degrees for academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 is not yet available.

In addition to the above, my Department also provides funding for the Aerospace MSc Bursary Programme. In academic year 2013/14 DEL supported 11 bursary holders and in academic year 2014/15 is supporting 10. There will be a further intake of bursary holders in academic year 2015/16.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the increase in the number of further education qualifications provided for by his Department in each year since the launch of his Department's Skills Strategy.
(AQW 37801/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have interpreted your question as being about the number of qualifications achieved by learners in further education colleges, which have been funded by the Department through the further education recurrent grant.

On this basis, the numbers of qualifications achieved by learners in further education colleges between 2010/11 and 2012/13 are provided in the table below.

Academic Year	Achievements
2010/11	51,443
2011/12	53,066
2012/13	61,932

Source: Funded Learning Unit (FLU) data.

The figures provided above exclude Essential Skills. The numbers of qualifications achieved by learners in further education colleges in the Essential Skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, over the same period, are provided in the table below.

Academic Year	Achievements
2010/11	14,907
2011/12	16,132
2012/13	15,643

Source: Funded Learning Unit (FLU) data.

2010/11 is the earliest academic year for which the Department holds validated and reliable data on learner achievements in further education colleges. The 2012/13 academic year is the most recent year for which validated data is available.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the Work and Families Bill, why he did not include a section on children and young people with special education needs or disabilities, as included in the Children and Families Act 2014.
(AQW 37871/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Work and Families Bill currently before the Assembly is an employment Bill with a tight focus on employment rights issues, and in particular the entitlements of working families following the birth or adoption of a child.

Whilst I am satisfied that it is appropriate for the Bill to have that specific focus, my Department has been alert to the need to consider the potential applicability here of provisions within Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 concerning the needs of young people with special educational needs or disabilities in England.

Although this is very much a cross-cutting issue, my Department's assessment regarding those provisions falling within its own remit is that there is no direct read-across to structures in Northern Ireland and that a birth to 25 education, health and care plan of the kind supported by the Act does not sufficiently recognise and respond to the changing needs of young people as they move into adulthood.

Officials in my Department will continue to monitor developments in Great Britain and elsewhere, and to liaise with those other Northern Ireland Departments having a relevant policy responsibility, to ensure that the potential applicability to our own systems of the latest thinking in this important area can be appropriately considered.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has agreed on a location for the proposed new facility for the Northern Regional College.
(AQW 37891/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Northern Regional College is currently preparing a business case for the provision of further education in the Ballymoney, Coleraine and Ballymena areas. Until the outcome of that business case is known and associated funding identified, it is not possible to provide details of any preferred option.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed new facility for the Northern Regional College.
(AQW 37893/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Northern Regional College is currently preparing a business case for the provision of further education in the Ballymoney, Coleraine and Ballymena areas. Until the outcome of that business case is known and associated funding identified, it is not possible to provide details of any preferred option.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the careers fairs held outside Northern Ireland which were attended by representatives from (a) Queen's University Belfast; and (b) the University of Ulster, in each of the last two years.
(AQW 37929/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides funding to the Higher Education Institutions for teaching and learning and research purposes. The Universities are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including staff attendance at events.

As my Department does not hold the information you have requested, departmental officials contacted both Queen's University and the University of Ulster for this information, as detailed below:

Queen's University Belfast

Attendance at Careers Fairs (Undergraduate and Postgraduate) in GB and Republic of Ireland - 2012-13 and 2013-14

Summary

YEAR	Republic of Ireland	Great Britain
2012-13	8*	42*
2013-14	11*	53*

*All events had one staff member in attendance

Event Breakdown

Year	ROI - 8	GB - 25	GB UCAS - 17
2012-13	Athlone IT	Weatherhead High School	London
	Sacred Heart Drogheda	Pate's Grammar	Exeter
	Dublin IT	Belvedere College	Surrey
	Trinity College	Medlink	Manchester

Year	ROI - 8	GB - 25	GB UCAS - 17
	UCC	St Mary's Catholic High School	East Midlands
	NUI Galway	Wycombe High School	Lancashire
	Grad Ireland	Leicester Grammar	Thames Valley
	Grad Ireland (summer)	Dame Allan's	Sussex
		Worcester 6th Form College	Staffordshire
		Weatherhead High School	Durham
		Wellington College Berkshire	Tyneside
		Loughborough High School	Bristol
		Ballakermeen Isle of Man	Kent and Medway
		Chelsea Academy	Merseyside
		Winstanley College	West and North Yorkshire
		Heathland School	Sheffield
		Norwich School	Birmingham
		Rochdale Sixth Form	
		Exeter School	
		Sefton Sixth Form	
		West Kirby Grammar	
		Lord Lawson	
		Brighouse High	
		Caludon Castle	
		Ashbourne Sixth Form	

	ROI – 11	GB - 37	GB UCAS - 16
2013-14	Blackrock College	Trinity School, Nottingham	Manchester
	Grad Ireland	Havant Sixth Form	Surrey
	Limerick IT	The Skinner School	Exeter
	Cork Options	Leicester Grammar	Thames Valley
	Letterkenny IT	Merchant Taylor Grammar	Bristol
	Loreto Secondary School	Bolton School	London
	University College Cork	University of Dundee	East Midlands
	University of Limerick	Francis Holland	Kent and Medway
	Grad Ireland	Pates Grammar	Sussex
	St Mary's Drogheda	City of London Freeman's School	Lancashire
	Grad Ireland	Belvedere College	Tyneside
		Russell Group tour, various locations over 5 days	Durham
		Shrewsbury Sixth Form College	Merseyside
		Medlink	Staffordshire
		Forest Higher London	W&N Yorkshire
		Belvedere Academy	Birmingham
		West Kirby Grammar School	
		Dame Allan's School	

	ROI – 11	GB - 37	GB UCAS - 16
		Wellington College	
		Bury Grammar	
		St Mary's Catholic High School	
		Bishop Wordsworth	
		William Perkins School	
		Wycombe High School	
		The Corsham School	
		Portsmouth Grammar	
		Adam's Grammar School	
		Hutchesons Grammar	
		Lady Eleanor Holles	
		Epsom College	
		Ballakermeen	
		Chelsea Academy	
		Oldham Sixth Form	
		Lord Lawson	
		The Sixth Form College, Farnborough	
		Weatherhead High	
		The Fallibroome Academy	

Queen's University Belfast

International Careers Fairs Attended Annually – 2012-13 and 2013-14

Attendance at International Careers Fairs are combined with partner visits, agent training and student counselling activities. These occur on an annual basis.

Month	Country	Activity	No. Events
August	Hong Kong	British Council clearing fair Agent clearing fairs	11
	India	Agent clearing fairs British Council school road show	15
	Brunei	Agent and BUBA clearing fairs	3
September	Hong Kong	School road shows	5
	USA	Study Abroad and recruitment fairs	15
October	China	Agent Exhibitions CIEET fair British Council events	10
	Malaysia	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	5
	USA	Study Abroad and recruitment fairs	10
	Myanmar	Agent recruitment fairs	4
	Vietnam	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	10

Month	Country	Activity	No. Events
November	China	Agent exhibitions	20
	India	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	6
	Middle East	British Council fair	7
	Brunei	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	4
	Thailand	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	6
December	China	Agent exhibitions	12
	Singapore	Agent recruitment fairs	4
January	Hong Kong	British Council fair Agent fairs	7
February	China	Agent training and exhibitions	15
	India	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	8
	Brunei	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	4
	USA	Study Abroad and recruitment fairs	15
March	China	Agent Exhibitions CIEET Fair British Council Events	25
	Malaysia	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	7
	Singapore	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	4
	Thailand	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	6
	Vietnam	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	3
	Myanmar	British Council and agent recruitment fairs	3
April	China	Agent Training and Exhibitions	10
May	China	Agent Training and Exhibitions	10
	India	Agent Training and Exhibitions	3
	Thailand	Agent recruitment fairs	3
	Indonesia	Agent recruitment fairs	4
June	China	Agent Training and Exhibitions	12
	Indonesia	Agent training and student counselling	10
	Singapore	Agent recruitment fairs	4
	Vietnam	Agent recruitment fairs	2
July	Hong Kong	Release of Hong Kong HKDSE	1
Total			**303**

University of Ulster

- May 2013: NAFSA – Association of International Educators (USA) – (2 staff members attended, also visited partner universities in the US).
- October 2013 – Education UK Exhibition, Brazil – (1 staff member attended as part of BIS/Universities UK delegation).
- March 2014 – Universities UK International Unit delegation to Chile and Argentina – (1 staff member attended at the invitation of Universities UK).
- March 2014 – British Council CIEET exhibition in China – (1 staff member attended, also visited partner universities in China).

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the importance of the provision of facilities such as the Apprenticeships NI programme in the plans for the new Northern Regional College.
(AQO 6963/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's new Strategy for Apprenticeships, published in June 2014, outlines a new apprenticeship model which will be operational here by 2016. This new approach to apprenticeships will be central to transforming our skills landscape and to securing our economic success.

Fundamentally, the Strategy establishes apprenticeships as a system of employment and learning that can be applied to a much wider range of occupations. It will put employers in the driving seat of developing apprenticeships and Further Education will have a central role to play - working with employers to develop and deliver curriculum and qualifications at level 3 and above that will offer seamless progression across further and higher education and mobility across the wider economy.

The Strategy will have a greater focus on quality and therefore it will be those providers who meet the highest quality standards that will be funded to deliver apprenticeship training in areas of importance to our economy.

The further education sector, including Northern Regional College, will be central to the delivery of the future apprenticeship model and this enhanced role should be fundamental to their plans going forward.

The Northern Regional College is currently liaising with my Department in the preparation of an outline business case to explore options for the provision of further education, including the new Apprenticeship model, in the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Coleraine areas.

This business case will identify the accommodation needed to deliver the planned curriculum and other further and higher education courses appropriate to the area.

My Department is working closely with the College to ensure that learners, employers and the community in the College's area will benefit from the state of the art accommodation and equipment that are now available in many other College areas.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the financial support his Department has provided to new jobs introduced and promoted by InvestNI, over the last three years.
(AQW 38054/11-15)

Dr Farry: In total, my Department has agreed to provide financial support totaling £5,704,519 to 14 projects in respect of 3,690 new jobs introduced and promoted by Invest Northern Ireland since the start of the 2011/2012 financial year.

You will wish to note that the financial support is that which is agreed in the Assured Skills Letters of Offer with the respective companies, and will only be fully spent when all the jobs are created. Furthermore, in most cases the financial support crosses several financial years.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given that Belfast Metropolitan College has informed staff that budget cuts will have a detrimental impact, for an update on the current position of the college.
(AQO 6955/11-15)

Dr Farry: You will be aware that for 2014/15 a cut of 4.4% has been confirmed for my Department. However, to date, there has been no detrimental impact to Belfast Metropolitan College in 2014-15, as my Department has managed this in-year budgetary reduction through cuts to the central Departmental budget, rather than to front line services.

Looking forward to 2015-16, until final decisions have been agreed regarding the extent of the budgetary reductions for further education, I am unable to advise what the impact will be at Belfast Metropolitan College or indeed any other college. However, due to the potential scale of the proposed cuts, it is likely that all services will be affected.

Given the likely severity of budget cuts facing the sector next year, all colleges, including Belfast Metropolitan College, have been asked to identify and assess possible savings options and report back. My officials are currently reviewing these.

I can assure you that my Department will continue to work directly with the further education sector to minimise the impact of any future budget cuts on student delivery. However should further budget cuts be implemented, it is my assessment that all front line services will be impacted.

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the action plan arising from the Disability Employment and Skills Strategy.
(AQO 6957/11-15)

Dr Farry: A new Disability Employment Strategy is currently being developed in conjunction with the main local disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland. It has been, and continues to be a very positive example of partnership working between my Department and the Community and Voluntary sector.

There has also been extensive engagement with various groups of people with a full range of disabilities, and their feedback and input will be reflected in the public consultation document that is currently being drafted.

In order to provide a more comprehensive contribution to the Transitions Action Plan, arising from the Bamford Ministerial Group on mental health and learning disability, it is proposed that the strategy is extended to formally include the other key services for which my Department has lead responsibility.

This would result in a more integrated and cohesive Disability Employment and Skills Strategy for people with significant disability related barriers to work. One of the key aims of this strategy therefore, is to provide a clear transitions pathway from

education through to economic employment; one that will offer a menu of tailored, quality services and support, to assist young disabled people in their pursuit of new skills, employment opportunities and career development.

My Department will carry out a public consultation exercise on the proposals contained within the strategy document in the early part of 2015 with a target date for the launch of the strategy thereafter.

The associated Action Plan to take forward the recommendations will be developed following the public consultation, and will be incorporated into the new Disability Employment and Skills Strategy.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total number of undergraduate students at Queen's University; and the percentage who are (i) members of the Protestant community; (ii) members of the Roman Catholic community; and (iii) of unknown background.
(AQW 38228/11-15)

Dr Farry: The attached table was produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and shows the latest figures available. The table also shows the non-NI Domiciled undergraduates.

All Undergraduate enrolments at Queen's University, Belfast by Religion - 2012/13

Religion	Enrolments at QUB in 2012/13	Percentage breakdown including not known/available and Non NI Domiciled
Protestant	5,265	29%
Catholic	7,395	41%
Other	1,270	7%
Not Known/available	2,395	13%
Non NI Domiciled	1,745	10%
Total Undergraduates	**18,075**	**18,075**

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Review of Careers Education, Information, Advice & Guidance.
(AQO 6960/11-15)

Dr Farry: Minister O'Dowd and I have just received the final report from the Independent Panel. We intend to consider the review findings carefully before making any decisions on the way forward.

I know that the panel's report has built on the detailed review undertaken by the Employment and Learning Committee and reports from the CBI.

Mr Milne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of his Department's report on Labour Mobility.
(AQO 6964/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Labour Mobility in Northern Ireland report was produced by Oxford Economics and published in mid September. The research reinforces the point that labour mobility is an important driver as we seek to realise our economic ambitions.

By matching demand and supply better, labour mobility helps individuals get the best return on the skills they develop. It helps businesses by creating a wider recruitment pool and it helps society by developing more cohesive, inclusive workplaces.

The work shows that improved transport and childcare can act to encourage labour mobility. It finds that chill factors or sectarian division continue to negatively influence job search activities for some. This is concerning.

On foot of the research, my Department is preparing a policy response to ensure labour mobility can be facilitated effectively. My officials will engage with others as that policy response is formulated.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he will introduce his proposed reforms to employment law.
(AQO 6965/11-15)

Dr Farry: I recently held a series of constructive high level discussions with stakeholders to assist in finalising policy decisions associated with my Department's employment law review.

With those meetings complete, I am currently in the process of seeking the agreement of Executive colleagues to the drafting of an Employment Bill, which I intend to introduce in the spring of next year. The purpose of the Bill will be to provide the legislative basis to implement key policy decisions.

My Department will publish the policy response to the employment law review in the near future, setting out in detail the decisions that I have taken and the reasons for those decisions.

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department contributed to the Higher Education Better Regulation Group in 2013-14.
(AQO 6966/11-15)

Dr Farry: During the 2013-14 year my Department made a contribution of £2,421 to the Higher Education Better Regulation Group.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what suppport mechanisms are in place to ensure that people with hidden disabilities are able to participate in further and higher education.
(AQO 6967/11-15)

Dr Farry: All students are encouraged to declare disabilities when enrolling in further education. Students declaring a disability or learning difficulty are assessed by college staff and, if required, by external professionals, so that support arrangements funded through the Additional Support Fund can be implemented.

There are a number of additional support mechanisms in place in colleges to identify students with disabilities. These include liaison between lecturing staff and colleges' learning support staff as well as liaison between colleges and external bodies, such as schools and the careers service.

Where students declare a disability or learning difficulty on enrolment, an individual supplementary learning agreement is completed to ensure the necessary support is put in place. Integral to the process are formal reviews of this agreement which also facilitates the identification of additional hidden disabilities.

A range of support mechanisms are also in place to facilitate the participation in higher education of students with a disability or learning difficulty. Access to this support is dependent on the student self-declaring their disability.

On self-declaring, students are encouraged to apply for Disabled Students Allowances. These allowances can help to cover the costs of an assessment of the student's support needs and any extra costs of the additional support they may require throughout their course as a direct result of the specific condition. This can include major items of specialist equipment, the assistance of non-medical support providers, travel and other costs.

A student can apply at any time before or during their course. The amount of assistance available is not means tested and does not have to be repaid.

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he will apply the lessons learned from his recent trip to the USA to ensure that people in Newry and Armagh have the necessary skill set to make the area more attractive to inward investment.
(AQO 6968/11-15)

Dr Farry: During my trip to the United States, I explained to companies that our doors are open for business and investing in Northern Ireland makes good business sense. I also examined the current and future skills needs of companies who are either establishing an operating base here or are looking to establish one.

My Department has no input as to where a foreign direct investment company who is considering investing in Northern Ireland should locate its office. This is a decision entirely for the company.

However, my Department leads a number of interventions to ensure that skills required by employers are available throughout Northern Ireland. For example, working with Invest NI, the Assured Skills programme is designed to help attract new foreign direct investment companies by assuring them that the skills they need to be successful are available here.

In partnership with Invest NI, I believe Assured Skills support continues to be instrumental in securing new jobs. To date, there have been fifteen company projects through Assured Skills and, when fully realised and all 3,736 jobs are created, this will benefit the local economy by £96m each year.

Furthermore, the Department's Skills Solutions service plays an active role in helping local businesses across Northern Ireland, and within the Newry and Armagh area, to address their skills needs. During the current year a total of thirteen companies in the Newry and Armagh area received training through Skills Solutions.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the (i) bureaucracy barriers with Invest NI in respect of encouraging inward investment in Northern Ireland; and (ii) information requested of companies wishing to locate in Northern Ireland, compared to information requested in the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 37703/11-15)

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

(i) Invest NI competes in a very competitive international market for inward investment. This involves a significant element of business development, which includes running tailored inward visits for potential international investors. This is a proactive process, which hopefully results in Northern Ireland being considered as a suitable investment location.

As the relationship with the potential investor develops, both parties will exchange information. The company will carry out detailed due diligence on Northern Ireland, including skills, operating costs, academic linkages and property. Invest NI will carry out detailed due diligence on the company and its business plan, ahead of securing funding and agreeing a Letter of Offer with the company. This process is not considered to be bureaucratic by the companies as the majority have been through a similar process to raise money from investors, Banks, Venture Capital and for some, the Stock Market.

Invest NI recognises that this engagement process is central to building a positive relationship with potential and existing investors. This process is independently reviewed, with results from Invest NI's 2014 Annual Customer satisfaction survey showing that for those who received funding from Invest NI, that 79% were satisfied with the application process and 73% were content with the time taken to approve their application.

Therefore, Invest NI is confident that there are no unnecessary barriers in respect of encouraging inward investment in Northern Ireland.

(ii) Invest NI has not carried out a detailed analysis of due diligence and approval processes across the UK and Ireland, however it has met with a number of the development agencies, including those in the Republic of Ireland, to share experiences and to discuss matters of mutual interest. It is clear from these discussions that the due diligence and approval processes are very similar. This should be expected as the funding schemes run by Invest NI and the Irish development agencies are governed by the EU. There should be consistency in approach, funding levels and the kinds of information requested.

Therefore, Invest NI is confident that the information requested of companies wishing to locate in Northern Ireland, would be comparable to information requested in the Republic of Ireland, and in other parts of the UK.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role her Department has in securing export accreditation for Northern Ireland food products into China; and what steps her Department has taken.
(AQW 37722/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The issue of export certification is a reserved matter and is therefore dealt with on a UK-wide basis by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). DARD has been working closely with DEFRA on this matter for a number of years now and we believe we are close to a final inspection of our pork plants, which should allow exports of pork products to commence in 2015.

I have written to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on this matter on a number of occasions and also to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, asking them to progress this matter during their respective visits to China. I have also raised the matter with the UK's Consul General in Shanghai.

I am aware of the potential that exists in China for our food companies and Invest NI will have a group stand at the Food Hotel China Exhibition from 19th - 21st November, when 10 companies will be exhibiting with a further 4 companies visiting the exhibition.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 36539/11-15, (i) how many days have been allocated for Barry McGuigan and Carl Frampton to act as Northern Ireland Ambassadors; (ii) what activities this will involve; and (iii) how the Tourist Board's social media and digital content will be shared through fan bases.
(AQW 37729/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB's Sponsorship Agreement contained:

(i) An allocated number of Barry McGuigan's time and Carl Frampton's time to be used for NITB's promotion and PR purposes – the allocated number is commercially sensitive information.

(ii) This time will be used for a variety of activities including:

- Attendances at NITB events for media or competition prize winners.
- Distributing NITB messages, footage, images.
- Production of photographs & editorial for NITB literature and collateral distribution.
- Photographs and footage on NITB website(s) and social media.
- Media interviews and quotes for press releases.
- Representation on behalf of NITB at key events where appropriate.

Cyclone Promotions, Barry McGuigan and Carl Frampton will share NITB social media posts relating to the fight itself, and other sporting events in Northern Ireland through an agreed framework.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role her Department is playing in the preparation of an development plan for mid and east Antrim from 2015.
(AQW 37754/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI and Invest NI continue to work in partnership with the new Council area of Mid & East Antrim District Council to provide input to the region's Community Plan on matters relating to economic development. Invest NI is leading as the Statutory Partner for Community Planning on economic development matters.

As part of Local Government Reform three broad economic development functions will transfer from Invest NI to Councils. These functions are entrepreneurial awareness, social enterprise and under-represented groups. Significant progress has been made between DETI, Invest NI and the CEO team at Mid & East Antrim District Council in preparation for this transfer.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department, and InvestNI, are developing the opportunities for social enterprises to expand, develop and become involved in entrepreneurial opportunities; and what funding has been allocated to assist these enterprises.
(AQW 37791/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department leads, on behalf of the Executive, on the development of social economy policy for Northern Ireland. This is taken forward through a cross departmental Social Economy Policy Group (SEPG) which includes representatives from several Executive departments which will be delivering their own social enterprise projects.

In October 2012 my Department appointed Social Enterprise Northern Ireland to design, manage and deliver a Social Economy Work Programme (SEWP), with funding from my Department of £150,000 per annum for up to a maximum of three years. The main objective of SEWP is to develop and implement a programme of initiatives to enable the continued growth of a sustainable social economy sector.

Invest Northern Ireland is developing opportunities for social enterprises to expand, develop and become involved in entrepreneurial opportunities through its following programmes:

- **Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP)**: In 2013-2014 SEP supported 55 new social enterprise start ups at both the business idea and business planning stage to develop skills to enable them to grow.
- **Jobs Fund**:
  1. Social Enterprise Employment Grant: In 2013-2014 109 new jobs were created through employment grant support of £182,000 from Invest NI.
  2. The Social Enterprise Franchise Programme: Provided support to 35 social enterprises interested in franchisor/franchisee business models. Total programme costs were £165,833.
- **Social Enterprise Hubs Project**: OFMDFM signature project under the Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework. The Project Board includes DSD, DETI and Invest NI. The hubs are located in Londonderry, North Belfast, South Belfast, East Belfast, West Belfast, Lisburn, Downpatrick, Lurgan, Ballymena, Strabane and Enniskillen providing space (admin or retail) for social enterprises to test trade. There is also advice, mentoring and training available.

In addition to the above during 2013/14 Invest NI assisted 14 social enterprises to access additional Invest NI support related to their business growth plans, including Innovation Vouchers, help with exports, design and ICT.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to carry out a review of the role and functioning of small business support, including the work of the enterprise agencies.
(AQW 37792/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and Invest NI are acutely aware of the importance of small business in our economy, where over 99% of businesses are classified as SMEs. Invest NI has a comprehensive range of support available to meet the needs of small enterprises, and in 2013/14 Invest NI offered £66million of support to SMEs. Indeed, in June, Thompson Aero Seating announced it plans to create 85 skilled manufacturing jobs, with Invest NI contributing £1.7 million to support the creation of the new jobs.

Invest NI is constantly reviewing its products and services to meet changing environments. Recent examples of these products and services include the Access To Finance funds launched specifically to enable small businesses and start ups to access equity and debt financing; the launch of a free-phone advice and signposting line; and Innovation Voucher which is designed to help small businesses take the step towards R&D.

This work is ongoing, and staying close to small business remains a key consideration for Invest NI in delivering its services.

With regard to the Local Enterprise Agency network, Invest NI, recognising the important contribution local enterprise agencies can make in their areas, helped this network undertake a review in 2010. The network, and its member organisation Enterprise NI, accepted and acted upon that review.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made with the Department of the Environment on levies on the disposal of end of life tyres.
(AQW 37802/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI has no role in this area.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department has advanced the provision of a recycling charge here and in Britain.
(AQW 37803/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI has no role in this area.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what opportunities exist for engagement between Mid and East Antrim Council and the social economy in Larne.
(AQW 37812/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department leads, on behalf of the Executive, on the development of social economy policy for Northern Ireland. This is taken forward through a cross departmental Social Economy Policy Group (SPEG).

In October 2012 my Department appointed Social Enterprise NI to design, manage and deliver a Social Economy Work Programme (SEWP), with funding from my Department of £150,000 per annum for up to a maximum of three years. The main objective of the SEWP is to develop and implement a programme of initiatives to enable the continued growth of a sustainable social economy sector.

Social Enterprise NI works closely with a number of social enterprises in the East Antrim area, as well as with Ballymena Business centre and Antrim Enterprise agency. Both of these organisations have a good understanding of the sector and the support they require. Social Enterprise NI has also delivered 'Introduction to Social Enterprise' workshops in North Antrim, and has met with both Larne Borough Council, and Carrickfergus Council to raise awareness of their work.

My Department and Invest NI continue to work in partnership with the new Council area of Mid & East Antrim District Council to provide input to the region's Community Plan on matters relating to economic development. Invest NI is leading as the Statutory Partner for Community Planning on economic development matters.

Significant progress has also been made regarding the transfer of the three broad economic development functions from April 2015, as part of Local Government Reform, which includes social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is currently the responsibility of Invest NI and the delivery is through the Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP). The programme is contracted across Northern Ireland to Enterprise NI and the Programme Manager works for Larne Enterprise Development Company (LEDCOM).

SEP focuses on supporting new social economy businesses with the potential to grow, helping them to build the skills and capabilities to make an impact on the local economy. The programme offers support at both the business idea and business planning stage. Since the current Invest NI SEP began two years ago there have been 14 participants from the Mid and East Antrim Council area (Ballymena 3, Carrick 4 and Larne 7). Four of these groups are now trading and collectively have created 26 new jobs in the area.

The Social Enterprise Hubs Project is one of the OFMDFM six signature projects under the Delivering Social Change framework. DSD, DETI and Invest Northern Ireland are managing the project through a Project Board. Invest NI is managing the contracts for delivery of the business services including, mentoring, signposting, training, best practice visits and space (admin or retail) where social enterprises can test trade. One of the hubs is located in Ballymena, with LEDCOM as the delivery agent.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how existing expertise and resources are being utilised for economic development in the Mid and East Antrim Council area.
(AQW 37814/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides a range of financial and advisory support to people with export focused business ideas. Support is wide ranging and can focus on trade development, skills development, research and development, process development, intellectual property and assistance toward the costs of employing new staff.

Over the 5 year period 2009/10-2013/14 Invest NI has made 1,251 offers of support totalling £36.40 million of assistance to businesses in the Mid & East Antrim District Council area. This contributes towards £207.14 million of investment in the area and has helped promote 1,798 new jobs promoted and safeguarded 1,325 jobs.

DETI and Invest NI continue to work in partnership with the new Council area of Mid & East Antrim District Council to provide input to the region's Community Plan on matters relating to economic development. Invest NI is leading as the Statutory Partner for Community Planning on economic development matters.

As part of Local Government Reform three broad economic development functions will transfer from Invest NI to Councils. These functions are entrepreneurial awareness, social enterprise and under-represented groups. Significant progress has been made between DETI, Invest NI and the CEO team at Mid & East Antrim District Council in preparation for this transfer.

Invest NI has also worked closely with all Councils in the region – including those in the Mid & East Antrim District Council area - to help identify gaps in the provision of support to the SME base and develop initiatives to complement existing economic development provision. These projects are primarily aimed at increasing SME capability and competitiveness and are funded through the Local Economic Development Measure of the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, Invest NI and local Councils.

Examples of businesses in the area that have been supported by Invest NI include Wrightbus, Garage Door Systems, Schrader, The Advantage Foundation, Terumo BCT and Old Mill Saddlery.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what lessons have been learned from the FG Wilson job losses in 2012; and what recovery assistance her Department offered Larne and East Antrim.
(AQW 37821/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI continues to maintain a good relationship with Caterpillar management, both in Northern Ireland and in the United States, in order to fully appreciate the key influences impacting on their global plans and on their local operations in particular. Through this engagement and the strong relationship with Caterpillar, Invest NI has been able to work with company management to identify a number of opportunities for specialist, high value manufacturing activities to be established here.

The securing of the 200 new jobs in 2013 in the company's Shared Services Centre in Springvale was the first of these opportunities to come to fruition and was clear evidence of management's continued commitment to Northern Ireland. Since then further investments have been made which now see the company assembling complex material handler machines at its Larne site (with significant associated fabrication work at Monkstown) and in producing a range of axles for articulated vehicles, again at Larne.

Other major investments in the area have been announced since 2012 including Terumo (460 jobs in Larne) and Shrader (241 in Carrickfergus) as well as major expansions in Wrightbus (130 jobs) and Moy Park (628 jobs) in bordering constituencies.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 36881/11-15, to detail the range of budgetary pressures faced by her Department which (i) she has identified as truly inescapable; and (ii) officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel have indicated as being truly inescapable.
(AQW 37863/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Refer to AQW 36881/11-15 which answered this question.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 36881/11-15, for an explanation of every inescapable pressure.
(AQW 37864/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The inescapable pressures arose because of the success of Invest NI in delivering jobs and investment projects, and the Tourist Board in delivering a step change in the events Northern Ireland is delivering as advised in the response to AQW 36881/11-15.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to introduce measures to set up the Warm Home Discount Scheme.
(AQW 37866/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Warm Homes Discount Scheme operates in Great Britain and does not apply in Northern Ireland. It was originally a four year scheme, which was due to close in March 2015, but it has recently been extended by the UK Government to 2016.

The Scheme is a form of social tariff funded by consumers. Suggestions that the scheme be introduced in Northern Ireland need to take account of the proportion of customers who would benefit against the proportion of customers who would pay more. In our small market,

we need to balance helping those in fuel poverty and ensuring that energy costs are kept as low as possible, for all consumers, so that more people do not fall into fuel poverty and businesses remain competitive. For these reasons I do not plan to promote implementation of the Scheme in Northern Ireland but, as this area is crosscutting, I remain open to considering any proposals from Executive colleagues.

I note the range of schemes that are available to support qualifying consumers with their energy usage. These include the NI Sustainable Energy Programme, the Warm Homes and Affordable Warmth Schemes and the Boiler Replacement Scheme. These are in addition to the availability of cold weather payments and the winter fuel payment.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the proposed timing of the Energy Bill.
(AQW 37897/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The timing for the Bill depends on resolution of a number of complex policy issues which are currently under consideration.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the estimated impact on employment as a result of not providing finance for the Events Fund in 2015/16.
(AQW 37923/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The nature of the National Events Sponsorship Fund is that organisers apply to the fund annually, therefore there is never any guarantee of receiving funding on a recurring basis. When applicants apply to the scheme, applications are assessed through a competitive process and therefore there can never be any guarantee of funding.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to encourage growth in science and technology industries.
(AQW 37934/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive recognises the need to target those areas which have the greatest potential to grow the Northern Ireland Economy and that this can be achieved by encouraging growth in science and technology industries.

The Programme for Government and the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy (NIES) both focus on the need to build on our existing strengths as well as exploit new opportunities in the global economy.

The NIES focuses on a number of technology based markets, identified by MATRIX, where we already have considerable science and technology strengths. These include Telecommunications & ICT; Life & Health Sciences; Agri Food; Advanced Materials, Advanced Engineering and Sustainable Energy.

Within the world class science and technology capabilities of our research base, we are rolling out the Northern Ireland Competence Centre programme. Concentrating on the key MATRIX market opportunities, and driven by industry needs, the Competence Centres will support companies to bring new products and services to markets that otherwise would not have been possible.

The recently published Innovation Strategy sets out a range of actions designed to increase the innovation performance of the Northern Ireland economy. This includes recognizing the role of the public sector should play as a driver of innovation in the economy through approaches such as the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI).

Building on the UK Life Sciences Strategy, and on the MATRIX Life & Health Sciences Foresight study, Northern Ireland is now prioritising its Life & Health Sciences sector through the development of its own regional strategy. As part of this strategy, DETI and DHSSPS will continue to develop their collaboration under a new and ambitious Memorandum of Understanding.

To ensure that the strategy's ambitions are realised Northern Ireland is also now developing a facility which will demonstrate a committed visible leadership & co-ordination capability for the sector. The Health Innovations & Life Sciences (HILS) Hub will be a focal point or 'nerve centre' for the life and health sciences sector to stimulate interaction, innovation, networking and collaboration across the academic, business and clinical communities, facilitating investment and promoting economic opportunities.

These policies, strategies and initiatives, combined with the support provided by Invest NI through its Proof of Concept, Techstart, Propel, Accelerator (currently being procured), Collaborative Network, Skills Growth and Grant for R&D programmes, as well as the provision of a full suite of risk capital funds, will seek to maximise the growth and impact of technology businesses on the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the recent report published by Barclays which estimated that local shoppers will buy £41m worth of goods online annually by 2018, what efforts her Department is making to ensure that local companies are maximising the opportunities that exist through using the Internet as a method of both selling and marketing goods and services.
(AQW 37961/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are a number of initiatives my Department provides to support Northern Ireland businesses wishing to sell and market products or services via the Internet.

Invest NI has a network of Information Communication Technology (ICT) advisors based across Northern Ireland helping businesses make best use of ICT to be more productive or access new online markets. This includes help for businesses with an export focus wishing to market or sell their services online. Invest NI ICT advisors can also offer one to one advice and support to businesses and regularly organise seminars, with over 20 delivered a year on a range of ICT topics including helping SMEs with online marketing and selling their products online. Indeed, over the last 3 years Invest NI has offered export focused SMEs a total of £7.5 million of funding towards ICT improvements within their business.

There is also a wealth of practical guidance available on the nibusinessinfo.co.uk website to help any business interested in selling online.

Invest NI has also been working closely with Councils to develop initiatives to support the needs of businesses in their local areas. These initiatives are funded through the Local Economic Development (LED) Measure of the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme with match funding from Invest NI and Councils. Within this Measure Invest NI has approved 17 LED projects totalling £2.9 million of assistance which target local businesses to encourage online sales and marketing.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any proposals for the provision of large scale tourist accommodation in East Londonderry that her Department has received in the last twelve months.
(AQW 37990/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has received no proposals in the last twelve months for the provision of large scale tourist accommodation in East Londonderry. Invest NI does, however, continue to offer its range of developmental advice and financial support to established tourism accommodation businesses in the area.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created in the hospitality sector in East Londonderry in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37991/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is unable to provide a breakdown of how many jobs have been created in each of the last three years as information relating to job creation is commercially sensitive at business level while a project is still 'live'. In order to ensure that individual companies are not identifiable, Invest NI therefore applies statistical disclosure controls.

As there are less than 5 companies in each individual year Invest NI is not able to release the information as an individual company could be identifiable.

Information relating to job creation by specific companies will become publically available once a project is complete and the control period has ended.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of hospitality sector business start-ups in East Londonderry that received financial assistance from her Department in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37992/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of potential hospitality sector start-up businesses that received Invest NI financial support in each of the last three full financial years is outlined in the table below:

Year	No of Hospitality Start-up Businesses Supported
2011/12	1
2012/13	1
2013/14	0
Total	2

Notes

1. Each start-up business is counted in the financial year when it received its first package of financial support from Invest NI.

It is worth noting that in line with European and National guidelines, particularly due to issues with displacement, Invest NI is, in the vast majority of cases, limited to the provision of advisory support to companies operating within the hospitality sector.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what impact the cancellation of the Tourism Events Fund will have on large events in East Londonderry, such as the International Air-show.
(AQW 37993/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The nature of the Tourism Events Fund is that organisers apply to the fund annually and therefore there is never any guarantee of receiving funding. When applicants apply to the scheme, applications are assessed through a competitive process and therefore there can never be any guarantee of funding.

In the financial year 2014/15 NITB funded 63 National events under the Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme and 13 International events under the International Tourism Events Fund with a total contribution from NITB of £2.8million.

However based on the information provided by the event organisers, the 76 events funded in 2014 are projected to:

- Generate a £12:£1 return for every £1 invested by NITB; and
- To attract 2.2m visitors.

I am very keen for events to go ahead with funding, but at present there is not budget available to open a Tourism Event Funding Programme for 2015/16. However, when the 2015/16 budget is known the position will be reviewed.

Department of the Environment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Information Service.
(AQW 37154/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): There is currently 27.5 staff supporting communications activities in the DOE. These posts cost £1,045,586 annually.

These communications staff work on a wide range of activities beyond traditional Information Office roles. In addition to 5 posts in the DOE Press Office, there are staff dealing with IT systems to support electronic communications, staff working on education and interpretation activities, print and design and supporting administration staff.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to the creation of an independent environmental protection agency.
(AQW 37712/11-15)

Mr Durkan: When I became Minister of the Environment I announced a vision of "A Better Environment - A Stronger Economy". In the 21st Century, it is reckless to remain wedded to the paradigm that economic prosperity is in conflict with a healthy environment. Environmental and economic success are dependent on each other as is becoming increasingly recognised throughout the world.

My Department, including NIEA, has a vital role to play in delivering my vision. After listening to customers and stakeholders in my first few months in office and having received the Mills Report into waste management, I concluded that NIEA needed to be much more outcome and customer-focused.

That is why I instructed the Chief Executive to undertake a root and branch review of NIEA. This review has resulted in significant changes to NIEA's structures, systems and programmes, including four new Operating Principles:

1. to make it easy for people to do good business and difficult for people to do bad business;
2. to help create a resource efficient Northern Ireland;
3. to help people see our environment and heritage as an opportunity, not a barrier; and
4. to be a customer-focused and people-centred organisation.

These changes apply to all the environment functions carried out by the Department. Indeed, one of the key findings of the independent Mills Report emphasised the need for closer working between NIEA and other parts of my Department with responsibilities for resource efficiency and waste management. The changes which have been made are ensuring that these closer working relationships are starting to deliver concrete results as evidenced by the integrated Waste Operation Plan I published last week.

I will continue to closely monitor the performance of the Department's environment functions to ensure continued performance improvements are being delivered. If this shows that any further adjustments of these arrangements are needed to drive stronger improvements, I will make them.

While an independent environmental protection agency could have merits, it is not necessary to create a new statutory body outside of government to secure the improvements necessary. As the above actions show, it is possible for me as Environment Minster to promote and direct actions within government to secure better environmental outcomes for businesses and communities in the North.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to increase knowledge and research into the risks associated with nanoparticles on health, climate, air quality, particularly those released from waste incinerators.
(AQW 37716/11-15)

Mr Durkan: While the Department itself does not carry out any research into the risks of nanoparticles, officials monitor developments ongoing elsewhere, both at EU and UK level.

There is a wide range of research activity surrounding the risks of nanomaterials to human health and the environment. At EU level the NANoREG project brings together governments, industry and an interdisciplinary network of internationally recognised researchers to develop risk assessment and decision making tools for regulating consumer products which contain manufactured nanomaterials.

In the wider UK, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, along with several universities, are researching the effects of nanoparticles on the environment. The Institute of Occupational Medicine is carrying out research on the risks of nanomaterials to human health. The 'From Airborne exposure to Biological Effects' (FABLE) research programme is currently investigating pathways for health impacts of nanoparticles.

There are presently no UK or EU regulations which specifically deal with nanoparticles that might be produced from waste incinerators. However, all such installations must meet the requirements of the European Directive on Industrial Emissions which specifies stringent operating conditions and emission limits including total dust. In Northern Ireland waste incineration installations are regulated by the Industrial Pollution and Radiochemical Inspectorate (IPRI) under the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013.

Our links to the EU and Defra ensure that, in Northern Ireland, we maintain policy measures and control to be consistent with current understanding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what additional actions will be taken to improve the quality of beaches following the latest Good Beach Summit.
(AQW 37727/11-15)

Mr Durkan: All the stakeholders who attended the last Summit on 19 September listened to a list of achievements to date; these included improved water quality at a number of beaches throughout Northern Ireland, improved beach cleanliness through targeted campaigns in association with partner agencies and the development of uniform signage across all the designated beaches in Northern Ireland.

They then discussed the actions required to ensure that these achievements could be maintained and improved on going forward. Consequently, my officials are now working on a draft Action Plan for 2015 – 2017 which will be presented, discussed and hopefully agreed at the next Summit in early 2015. It is important that all stakeholders are fully engaged in this process to ensure that the best ideas come forward and can be implemented across all of our designated beaches.

I will ensure that when agreed, you receive a copy of the 2015 - 2017 Action Plan.

I can say however that we will continue to work closely with all stakeholders including those within Central and Local Government and we will continue to communicate fully with the public in terms of bathing water quality and other relevant matters concerning our beaches.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department is monitoring new councils to ensure they have their community plan in place for 2015.
(AQW 37738/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The new duty of Community Planning will become the responsibility of councils from 1 April 2015. The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 sets out the process by which councils, working with their community planning partners, will identify long term objectives for improving the social, economic and environmental well being of the district. The legislation does not require councils to have a community plan in place by 2015, rather it requires the community plan to be produced as soon as is reasonably practicable after the council is of the opinion that an appropriate degree of consensus has been reached amongst the community planning partners.

To help ensure that councils are as well prepared as possible to implement their community planning duties from 2015, they have been taking forward (on a voluntary basis) the community planning foundation programme which is facilitated by Community Places on behalf of the Department. My officials have also been working with councils, potential community planning partners and other central government departments to provide appropriate help and guidance and will continue and intensify this work over the coming months.

I am therefore confident that all councils will be well prepared to take forward their community planning duties from 1 April 2015 and know that they will be aiming to reach the level of consensus required to produce their community plan as soon as possible after that date.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the rationale for a farmer requiring an expensive permit to bring tyres onto their farm for agricultural use,
(AQW 37748/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Farmers may keep waste tyres, already in place on the farm, to re-use in agricultural activity. An example of this would be for use in a silage clamp. However, it is important that the quantity of tyres should not exceed the number required for the silage clamp(s). If a farmer wishes to bring additional waste tyres onto the farm, the farmer must hold an appropriate waste authorisation, the transport must be undertaken by a registered waste carrier, and he must complete waste transfer notes and these must be retained by the farmer for two years.

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. In this instance a farmer may apply to NIEA to register a Paragraph 16 waste exemption for the beneficial use of tyres. This exemption permits a person to use the tyres provided:

(a) they are put to that use without further treatment; and

(b) that use of the tyres does not involve their disposal.

The fee to register a Paragraph 16 exemption is currently £842 for 3 years.

Guidance on the use of tyres on farms has been produced in conjunction with DARD and NIEA are more than happy to assist farmers on this issue.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37305/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the taxi offences for the last three years.
(AQW 37753/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have included the table below, with figures derived from published statistics, which provides a breakdown of the fixed penalty offences relating to taxis for the last three years.

Details of taxi offences prosecuted at court is not captured on the Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement database and it is therefore not possible to provide a breakdown of this information.

FPNs issued to taxis in NI

Descriptions	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Using motor vehicle while uninsured or unsecured against 3rd party risks	0	6	1
Operating an unlicensed taxi or driving a taxi whilst unlicensed	0	0	10
Operating a taxi service without a taxi operator's licence	0	0	10
Using a public service vehicle without an operator's licence	0	0	1
Defective braking system	1	3	0
Defective steering	0	4	0
Defective tyre – general	60	51	58
Failure to maintain a vehicle in a roadworthy condition or to carry passengers so as not to be a danger	0	0	1
No Vehicle Test Certificate	11	5	7
Driving a taxi when it is standing or plying for hire or carrying passengers for hire with no taxi driver's licence	0	8	8
Defective exhaust and silencer system	0	2	1
Defective light	7	3	8
Failure to wear taxi drivers' badge	36	31	19
Failure to have a fire extinguishing apparatus in a public service vehicle	0	23	7
Failure to have a spare wheel or puncture repair kit in a public service vehicle	0	2	0
No PSV licence (vehicle)	130	122	182
No taxi roof sign	9	4	3
Overcrowding on PSV	3	13	6
Touting, calling out or otherwise importuning any person to be carried for hire in the vehicle	0	0	1
Total	**257**	**277**	**323**

FPNs issued to taxis in Belfast only

Descriptions	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Using motor vehicle while uninsured or unsecured against 3rd party risks	5	2	0
Operating an unlicensed taxi or driving a taxi whilst unlicensed	0	0	6
Operating a taxi service without a taxi operators licence	0	0	6
Defective braking system	0	2	0
Defective steering	1	1	1
Defective tyre – General	27	20	28
No Vehicle Test Certificate	0	0	3
Driving a taxi when it is standing or plying for hire or carrying passengers for hire with no taxi driver's licence	0	1	3
Defective exhaust and silencer system	0	1	1
Defective light	2	3	4
Failure to wear taxi drivers' badge	12	10	8
Failure to have a fire extinguishing apparatus in a public service vehicle	0	7	4

Descriptions	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Failure to have a spare wheel or puncture repair kit in a public service vehicle	0	1	0
No PSV licence (vehicle)	43	31	131
No taxi roof sign	5	0	1
Overcrowding on PSV	1	1	0
Touting, calling out or otherwise importuning any person to be carried for hire in the vehicle	0	0	1
Total	**96**	**80**	**197**

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the length of time that the Waterfall Walk at Crawfordsburn Country Park has been inaccessible; and (ii) the timescale for repair.
(AQW 37756/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have been advised by officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, which manages Crawfordsburn Country Park, that a 60 metre section of pathway leading to the waterfall has been closed to ensure public safety since 12 November 2010, following a landslide.

A timescale for completion of repair works cannot be provided at this time. Civil engineers were unable to assure NIEA that the path could be made safe for public use by a short term fix. A long-term solution to address the slope stability issues is required. Options for this are under consideration. However they are limited because a section of the unstable slope is not owned by my Department and any such works are likely to be costly and will be dependent on budget availability.

Visitors to the Country Park can still access the waterfall via the path on the opposite bank of Crawford's Burn and enjoy 11 kilometres of paths within the Park.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the approximate change in numbers of public hire taxis between January 2009 and January 2014.
(AQW 37781/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As taxis require an enhanced vehicle inspection every year, the Driver & Vehicle Agency is able to provide a breakdown of the number of PSV tests conducted for public hire taxis in each financial year from 2009/10 until 2012/13. These help to provide an approximate indication of the change in public hire taxis in recent years.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast public hire	558	548	498	437
Public hire Outside Belfast	8,189	7,834	7,680	6,957
Total	**8,747**	**8,382**	**8,178**	**7,394**

1 As Taxi licensing is a real time system it is not possible to determine retrospectively the number of public hire taxis licensed at a particular time or between different times. As taxis require a vehicle test certificate psv tests conducted annually provide an approximate indication for change in the numbers of licensed public hire taxis, as detailed in the table above.

As of June 2014, there are 444 Belfast public hire vehicles and 6,986 Public hire outside Belfast vehicles currently licensed (7,430 in total).

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the result of his Department's investigation into the discrepancies between the levies charges by retailers under the Duty of Care system and those in Britain in respect of end-of-life tyres.
(AQW 37796/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Levies charged by tyre retailers or used tyre collectors are not made under the Duty of Care system. The Duty of care is required by Article 5 of the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 (the 1997 Order) and it places an onus on those who handle waste (including tyres) to ensure that:-

- the waste is handled properly, in a way that does not pose any threat to the environment or human health;
- it is only passed to someone who is authorised to accept it; and
- records are kept to ensure that the waste is being managed legally and to provide an audit trail.

Article 5 of the 1997 Order does not contain powers to introduce a recycling levy.

The tyre levy scheme that is operated both here and in the rest of the UK is a voluntary agreement between the tyre retailer and the customer. DOE believes it is not appropriate to interfere in the operation and/or utilisation of the voluntary levy scheme, as imposed by the industry itself.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the levies charged by retailers for the disposal of end-of-life tyres, what efforts have been made to obtain the power to regulate the collection and utilisation of the levy.
(AQW 37797/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The collection of such a levy is a reserved matter and would be for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to consider and take forward for all regions of the UK.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by his Department.
(AQW 37805/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Land holdings are periodically reviewed to identify land which may become surplus to requirements. Currently my Department has not identified any surplus land that could be sold.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37092/11-15, how much his Department, and its agencies, has paid to the contracted taxi company in each of the last four financial years.
(AQW 37817/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below provides details of payments made by my Department to the contracted taxi company over the past four financial years.

Year	Total Cost (£)
2010-11	471
2011-12	585
2012-13	1,350
2013-14	2,109

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37257/11-15, whether this email constituted producing a report and the information passed to the departmental solicitor; and if so, why there has been a denial of the existence of any report on this specific matter.
(AQW 37818/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would refer the Member to my response to AQW 27856/11-15 where I made it clear that the observations of enforcement officers formed part of the overall consideration of taxi arrangements at Ravenhill rugby ground and no separate formal report was produced. I do 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.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of farm buildings that are required to satisfy CTY10 (C) of Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21.
(AQW 37836/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I can advise the Member that PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside – Policy CTY 10: Dwellings on Farms – Criterion (c) requires that a new dwelling on a farm is visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm.

Policy CTY 10 does not specify how many buildings constitute an established group of buildings on a farm. This is a matter of planning judgement with each application being assessed on a case by case basis on its own planning merits, taking into account the relevant planning policy and all other material considerations.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36988/11-15, how many vehicles with (i) public hire plates in (a) Belfast and (b) outside Belfast; and (ii) advanced booking only plates currently operate from private hire companies within Belfast city limits.
(AQW 37855/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The following table provides a breakdown of the latest official figures showing the current number of vehicles with (i) public hire plates in (a) Belfast and (b) outside Belfast.

As at June 2014:

Belfast public hire	444
Public restricted (outside Belfast)	6,986
Total	**7,430**

Note: Figures sourced from DOE Official Statistics published as of the end of June 2014.

Information is not stored on the Taxi Licensing IT system in a way that would facilitate your request for the number of advanced booking only plates currently operating from private hire companies within Belfast city limits.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37097/11-15, whether (i) fonaCAB signed a declaration on their operator's licence at Kingspan Stadium; and if so, whether this declaration was appropriate in all respects, including for the relevant planning permission; and (ii) the Passenger Transport Licensing Division within Driver and Vehicle Agency incorrectly issued the licence.
(AQW 37877/11-15)

Mr Durkan: An application was made by Fonacab to have an operating centre at Ravenhill Rugby ground included in their taxi operator licence. The application included all the required declarations including the Planning Declaration which stated:

> *'I declare, that the operating centre(s) on my application does not require planning approval and is outside the scope of any planning enforcement action.'*

Procedures do not require the inspection of operating centres upon application. The application was granted correctly in line with procedures.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37257/11-15, whether he has seen the email; and if so, when; and whether he is satisfied that the contents therein do not undermine or constitute any challenge or raise any concerns to taxi provision at Ravenhill Stadium and the proposed Single Tier Taxi system legislation in its current format.
(AQW 37878/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have not seen the internal email summarising the observations of enforcement officers at Ravenhill Stadium on 23 August 2013 and cannot therefore comment on its content.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36783/11-15, why this legislation features in the legal position regarding taxi provision at Ravenhill Stadium provided by core department on 18 October 2013, if it has never been endorsed or enforced.
(AQW 37881/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am of the view that the advice issued by my Department on this matter remains pertinent.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37026/11-15, whether he can confirm that the importation of materials and filling of land at Camcosy Road in close proximity to the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation, does not form part of planning approval K/2013/0072/F.
(AQW 38000/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Allegations of the importation of materials and filling of land in connection to planning approval K/2013/0072/F are subject to live enforcement investigations.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Health and Social Care Board will make investment proposals for the £1m, which he has confirmed is still is in place, to support and improve the current service provided at the Paedratic Cardiac Department in The Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.
(AQW 37516/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): As mentioned in my Oral Statement to the Assembly on 14 October 2014, I shall be requesting that the HSCB bring forward, in conjunction with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's management and clinical teams, detailed investment proposals to further develop a cardiology centre of excellence at the Belfast Trust and to strengthen the Northern Ireland cardiology network. My Department is working with the Board and Trust in this regard and I expect to be in receipt of their initial proposals by the end of this year.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) when; and (ii) on what directive a decision was taken that, with limited exceptions, diabetic clinicians will no longer provide reports on a Disability Living Allowance applicant, particularly young people transferring from paediatric to adult services; and whether this applies across all Health and Social Care Trusts or does each Trust have its own policy.
(AQW 37648/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am advised that there has been no such decision or directive in relation to the completion of reports by diabetes clinicians for applicants for Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Information provided by HSC Trusts regarding the completion of DLA reports is set out in the table below.

HSC Trust	Trust Response
Belfast	Belfast Trust has not made a decision nor issued a directive advising diabeticians not to provide reports in respect of Disability Living Allowance. In relation to children's service, due to increased demand on the service, paediatricians providing the endocrine and diabetes service have identified the completion of Disability Living Allowance reports as a task that is better performed by a patient's own GP, who should have thorough knowledge of the child's full medical history, including care that is delivered by other care professionals. In such instances the individual specialty will write to the patient's GP with a request to do so.
Northern	The Northern HSC Trust is not aware of any such directive either at Trust or at wider HSC level.
South Eastern	The South Eastern Trust continues to complete Disability Living Allowance applications for children, young people and adults who have diabetes.
Southern	The Southern Trust is not aware of a formal directive concerning this. Disability Living Allowance forms in respect of patients are completed when requested to do so by the Department for Social Development.
Western	The Western Trust has not made a decision to no longer provide reports on a Disability Living Allowance applicant. Requests for clinicians caring for adult patients with diabetes to complete DLA reports are considered by individual clinicians on a case by case basis.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following his statement on the future of paediatric congenital cardiac services, to outline the process whereby family representatives will be included in the governance and delivery groups.
(AQW 37661/11-15)

Mr Wells: Subject to my final decision on the way forward, my Department will consult with the proposed groups, including family representatives, on their nominated representatives on both the Governance Committee and Family Advisory Group, as proposed in Recommendations 1 and 2 respectively of the International Working Group's report. We will ask for their views on how they would wish to see those groups established and how they would want the families they represent to be involved in them.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to implement a voluntary early retirement scheme across Health Trust Care Trusts.
(AQW 37662/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have no plans at this time to introduce a voluntary early retirement scheme across Health and Social Care Trusts.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to reduce the cost of locums, agency and bank staff across Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 37665/11-15)

Mr Wells: While I recognise the importance of securing cover to maintain delivery of service, it is an important policy aim for the health service, to reduce expenditure on locum and bank staff.

I recognise the ongoing work by the Health and Social Care Trusts in continually seeking to drive down these costs through a range of initiatives. One such initiative which seeks to more effectively manage the use of and expenditure associated with locum doctors, is the new e-locum system currently being piloted within HSC Trusts. This should help with the difficultly in securing cover for gaps in rotas by offering greater opportunity to systemise and organise staffing cover.

In addition, and as I indicated in my Written Statement of 30 October, in order to help address the financial deficit, elective care treatments will be focussed on urgent procedures, assessed by clinicians in priority order, and potentially provided on different sites in order to reduce locum and agency spend.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Health and Social Care (HSC) Regional Medical Locum Service, otherwise known as HSC e-locums, launched; and how many locum doctors have registered with the service.
(AQW 37682/11-15)

Mr Wells: HSC e-Locums (formerly Regional Medical Locum Service) was launched on 20 August 2012 and to date 364 Locum Doctors are registered and live on the system. A further 593 doctors have commenced the registration process but have not yet submitted their applications.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how the ranking system of framework agencies operates, including the financial benefit of using a higher ranked agency and the difference in cost of ranked agencies.
(AQW 37687/11-15)

Mr Wells: Operation of the ranking system for framework agencies is based on a vacancy fill protocol contained within the Medical and Dental Agency Workers Framework.

Under this protocol, when a vacancy becomes available a request is issued to all appropriate contractors simultaneously, with a specified deadline. Once the allotted response period has passed the responses are considered according to the framework ranking; i.e. the first ranked supplier's response will be considered first, (provided they have offered a candidate). If the candidate offered is considered unsuitable then the Authority proceeds to the response from the second ranked supplier and so on until a suitable candidate is found.

Development of the ranking system was based on the most economically advantageous tenders in terms of 60% Quality & 40% Price; therefore, low priced suppliers may not be highest on the rankings as they may not have attained a good quality score.

The difference in cost of using a higher as compared to a lower ranked agency will vary depending on the posts for which locum cover has been provided. The information as requested could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 36921/11-15, whether he recognises a link between recreational courses provided at Regional Colleges and public health.
(AQW 37691/11-15)

Mr Wells: Recreational courses can encourage and engage people at any age in social, cultural, sport and leisure activities. Participation in such activities can impact positively on both physical and mental health and wellbeing in many ways - for example by providing new skills, enhancing self esteem and confidence which have been shown to be associated with healthier behaviours. In addition recreational courses provide opportunities for social interaction which is in turn associated with better health.

The links between life- long learning, participation and improved health and wellbeing are recognised in the new cross-cutting strategic framework for public health "Making Life Better". One of the aims of the framework is to equip and enable individuals, families and communities to take greater control over issues affecting their health and wellbeing.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether agencies who supply locum doctors that are not employed through the agency's payroll are permitted to charge his Department or Health and Social Care Trusts for (i) Working Time Directive allowances; and (ii) National Insurance contributions.
(AQW 37762/11-15)

Mr Wells: Recruitment agencies who would bid for the contracts are advised that, when a Limited Company contractor is used, no charges for Employer's National Insurance Contribution (ENIC) or Working Time Directive Allowance (regulatory term for Holiday Pay) shall be passed to the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts.

The majority of contractors fall within the category of Limited Company, and hence no charges apply. For the small number that are not limited companies, the associated costs could only be identified at disproportionate cost.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been paid to locum framework agencies in respect of (i) Working Time Directive allowances; and (ii) National Insurance contributions, since December 2013.
(AQW 37763/11-15)

Mr Wells: All employment agencies are advised when bidding, that when a Limited Company contractor is used, no charges for Employer's National Insurance Contribution (ENIC) or Working Time Directive Allowance (regulatory term for Holiday Pay) shall be passed to the HSC Trusts. The majority of contractors used are Limited Companies.

The payment information in respect of those contractors who are not limited companies is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to support the increase of 7 per cent in GP activity in the last twelve months.
(AQW 37773/11-15)

Mr Wells: As part of the GMS Contract negotiations my Department gave a commitment to deliver equitable core funding across GP Practices in Northern Ireland.

A working group has been established with representation from the Department, the Health and Social Care Board and the Northern Ireland general practitioners Committee (NIGPC) to review the elements of and allocation methodology of core funding to GP Practices under the General Medical Services arrangements in Northern Ireland.

The findings of this group will be considered and taken forward as part of any future contract negotiations with NIGPC.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his proposals in relation to the minimum unit pricing of alcohol.
(AQW 37774/11-15)

Mr Wells: The price at which some supermarkets sell alcohol, sometimes cheaper than bottled water, is damaging to individuals, communities, and families. Therefore I am determined to take action to address alcohol's affordability, and I believe this is vital given that alcohol is 67% more affordable now than it was in 1980.

236 people died last year and 12,255 people were admitted to hospital from alcohol related disease. It is estimated that the full social cost to the Northern Ireland economy is up to £900m per year. I believe Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) potentially offers a targeted and proportionate response to the growing concerns about the effects of alcohol harm on our society.

We are working with colleagues in DSD and DOJ in this matter, and we also continue to watch developments in Scotland, England and Europe very closely.

However, MUP is only one potential part of our approach to this issue, and it is important we take a range of actions, including education and early intervention and providing services for those to need additional support, to address alcohol misuse across the population.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the arrangements in place by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to deal with the demand for access to a consultant neurologist for clinics in the South West Acute Hospital.
(AQW 37782/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social (HSC) Trust has advised me that patient referrals to a Consultant Neurologist in the South West Acute Hospital are triaged by a Consultant and prioritised for their clinic appointment. The waiting list is managed depending on triage category. There are two visiting Consultant Neurologists who attend clinics in the South West Acute Hospital.

Regionally the Neurologists are working closely with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to review Neurology services across all Trusts.

There is a high demand of new referrals for Neurology appointments across the Western Trust, as with patients requiring reviews. The Western HSC Trust has recruited one new Consultant Neurologist with the support of the local Commissioner to address the demand capacity gap that exists.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of his Department's compliance with the MS Society's Treat Me Right campaign; and what steps he intends to take to meet the needs of MS patients.
(AQW 37811/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland is addressing all four of the goals of the 'Treat Me Right' campaign as set out below.

1. Availability of licensed MS treatments

The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board commission's medicines which are recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). For medicines that NICE does not appraise, the HSC Board will look to other UK health technology appraisal bodies, such as the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) and others, to inform a decision as to whether a drug is accepted for use in Northern Ireland. For medicines not recommended by NICE or other UK health technology appraisal bodies, and therefore not currently commissioned, the HSC Board has a clear process (Individual Funding Request – IFR) by which individual patient requests can be considered.

Of the 10 currently licensed drugs, 7 are currently commissioned, 1 is being implemented and is available now on a cost per case basis and the remaining 2 are available under the IFR process.

2. Treatment and review of MS Patients

With regard to regular reviews of treatment and care by MS specialists, it should be noted that not everyone with MS attends a neurologist. Some patients have chosen not to, some attend a general neurologist and others attend a neurologist with specialist interest in MS.

All Health and Social Care Trusts invite MS patients for regular reviews however the interval between appointments can vary as scheduling is based on the progress of the patient's clinical condition and each patient's individual need as well as available capacity.

3. Information regarding the availability of new disease modifying drugs

At review, it is routinely the case that clinicians will determine whether MS patients are on the right treatment for their stage of disease and discuss all treatment options with patients.

4. Patient role in decision making process

Commencement of disease modifying therapy and other treatment for MS patients is a shared process between clinicians and patients across all Trusts. Discussion of treatment options is an integral part of the review process between patients and their MS specialists.

The services detailed above are key elements of the services being provided to meet MS patients' needs. In order to further improve services, the HSC Board and Public Health Agency are developing a service specification for MS services which aims to offer clinically consistent, appropriate and equitable care across the Trusts.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the services offered by the South West Acute Hospital that were not available in the Erne Hospital.
(AQW 37815/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised that the services provided in the South West Acute Hospital which were not available in the Erne Hospital are: Endobronchial Ultrasound (EBUS); Full Pulmonary Function Tests and Multi channel sleep studies; eye laser procedure within the outpatient department; and VNUS procedures as an alternative to varicose vein surgery.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of eliminating mixed-sex hospital wards.
(AQW 37823/11-15)

Mr Wells: In Northern Ireland, all of our hospitals aim to accommodate patients in single gender accommodation insofar as possible.

It has been the Department's policy since 2008 that all new adult acute inpatient hospital accommodation should be planned to provide 100 percent single rooms to promote this aim. The number of single rooms in existing hospitals is also maximised whenever possible when carrying out major refurbishments. However, it remains that there are circumstances where, for clinical reasons, placing patients in mixed gender accommodation may be necessary to access specialist treatment or services such as that provided in specialised intensive care units.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) reported on mixed gender accommodation in 2012. The RQIA found that:

- The Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts had developed local policies for the admission of patients to mixed gender bays;
- In the majority of circumstances where mixed gender accommodation was being provided, it was being managed appropriately;
- Patients were being consulted regarding their placement in advance of admission to mixed gender bays;
- Privacy and Dignity was maintained at all times;
- Patients were transferred to single gender accommodation within 24 hrs of admission where ever this was possible;
- Patients were consulted in advance of their admission that they would be admitted to a mixed gender area;
- Complaints procedures were in place and patients were made aware of the process.

RQIA made the following recommendations:

1. The DHSSPS, in conjunction with the HSC Board and The PHA should - issue a definitive policy statement on care in mixed gender accommodation;
2. That there should be regular monitoring and reporting;
3. The HSCB should ensure that any performance targets should be considered for impact on the patient experience;
4. All Trusts should ensure that ward based staff have training in respect of vulnerable adults.

Progress in implementation of these recommendations is being monitored by the Department in conjunction with the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the decision taken by the Health and Social Care Board to cease elective care in private clinics in relation to (i) current; and (ii) future budgets.
(AQW 37859/11-15)

Mr Wells: I indicated in my written statement of 30 October 2014 that I am allocating £14 million for elective care; however this is much less than the full extent of the pressure and thus the current restrictions on the use of the independent sector will have to continue.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has recently considered instigating a campaign highlighting the importance of folic acid during pregnancy to reduce the incidence of neural tube defects in children.
(AQW 37882/11-15)

Mr Wells: The mandatory fortification of flour is supported by all four UK Chief Medical Officers, the UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, the Food Standards Agency and all three devolved Health Ministers, as an effective measure to reduce the incidence of foetal neural tube defects such as spina bifida, hydrocephalus and anencephaly.

In April 2014 the English Health Minister decided to postpone until 2015 a decision on whether to legislate for mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid. This effectively rules out the possibility of Westminster legislation on this issue before the next Parliament. In the meantime Department of Health officials will discuss with the relevant food industry companies their willingness, in principle, to stop voluntary fortification of food products with folic acid, if mandatory fortification were to be introduced.

While the Food Standards Agency in NI has confirmed that the Northern Ireland Assembly has the legislative competence to introduce mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid, a decision to introduce mandatory fortification would be most effective at a UK level given the production and distribution of food stuffs across the UK. I discussed this issue at a meeting with my Scottish and Welsh counterparts in Belfast on 30 October and we agreed to write to Minister Ellison to highlight the need to progress this matter as a matter of urgency.

My Department is in discussions with the charity Shine to explore what more can be done to raise awareness of the importance of taking extra folic acid before conception.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has considered the fortification of grain based food products, such as flour, with folic acid, in an attempt to limit instances of children born with neural tube defects.
(AQW 37883/11-15)

Mr Wells: The mandatory fortification of flour is supported by all four UK Chief Medical Officers, the UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, the Food Standards Agency and all three devolved Health Ministers, as an effective measure to reduce the incidence of foetal neural tube defects such as spina bifida, hydrocephalus and anencephaly.

In April 2014 the English Health Minister decided to postpone until 2015 a decision on whether to legislate for mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid. This effectively rules out the possibility of Westminster legislation on this issue before the next Parliament. In the meantime Department of Health officials will discuss with the relevant food industry companies their willingness, in principle, to stop voluntary fortification of food products with folic acid, if mandatory fortification were to be introduced.

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My Department is in discussions with the charity Shine to explore what more can be done to raise awareness of the importance of taking extra folic acid before conception.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the clinical contracts; (ii) the value of the contracts; and (iii) the groups awarded contracts, by local health commissioning groups, broken down by group, in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 37898/11-15)

Mr Wells: Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs) are sub-committees of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and do not contract separately outside HSCB processes. They have therefore awarded no contracts directly for clinical services in the last three financial years.

The HSCB has awarded the following contracts for clinical services and/or clinical goods and services during the period 2011/12 – 2013/14:

Provider	Nature of Contract	Annual Value £m	Duration
Marie Curie	Palliative Care	1.4	Awarded annually
NI Hospice (Adults)	Palliative Care	2.1	Awarded annually
NI Hospice (Children)	Palliative Care	0.6	Awarded annually
Southern Area Hospice	Palliative Care	1.1	Awarded annually

Provider	Nature of Contract	Annual Value £m	Duration
Air Liquid (Homecare) Ltd	Supply of Domiciliary Oxygen Concentrator Service	1.4	1/4/12 – 31/12/12
OCS Group UK Ltd T/A: Cannon	Collection, Transportation, Treatment & Disposal of Clinical Waste from Chemists	0.3	1/1/12 – 31/12/16
Woodgate Aviation (NI) Ltd	Air Ambulance/Air Transfer Service	1.0	1/1/14 – 31/12/16
BOC Healthcare	Supply of Home Oxygen Services	2.3	1/1/13 – 31/12/17

Note: Excluding Family Health Services (GPs, General Dental Services etc) and Social Care

The HSCB commissions the majority of the clinical services required for the Northern Ireland population from the six Health and Social Care Trusts. This commissioning process is not done by way of legal contracts or open tenders, but rather through an annual process of engagement and negotiation which culminates in the setting of Service and Budget Agreements with the trusts. The HSCB may also contract directly through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with NHS Trusts in other parts of the UK.

The wider legal framework favours in-house services: most public sector bodies are generally free to transact between one another without going through a formal public competition process.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether preferential treatment is given to Health Service providers in competitive tenders for clinical services by local health commissioning groups; and if so, to explain the rationale behind this and the steps he intends to take to ensure that clinical services contracts are awarded to Health Service providers.
(AQW 37899/11-15)

Mr Wells: Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs) are sub-committees of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and do not contract separately outside HSCB processes. They have therefore awarded no contracts directly for clinical services in the last three financial years.

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The wider legal framework favours in-house services: most public sector bodies are generally free to transact between one another without going through a formal public competition process.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37237/11-15, and given that his Department, the Health and Social Care Board and Health and Social Care Trusts have consistently failed to meet the stated targets, whether he would consider reintroducing the previous bands of (a) ‘>26 - 30 weeks’; (b) ‘>30-36 weeks’; and (c) ‘>36 weeks’ for inpatient waiting times.
(AQW 37900/11-15)

Mr Wells: As previously stated in AQW 37237/11-15, the inpatient waiting times publication provides a breakdown of patients waiting for inpatient treatment using the following time bands: 0-6, >6-13, >13-21, >21-26 and >26 weeks.

These time bands are selected to align with the current target, which for 2014/15 states that, from April 2014, at least 80% of inpatients and daycases should be treated within 13 weeks; and no patient waiting longer than 26 weeks for treatment.

My Department currently have no plans to provide a more detailed breakdown of the '>26 weeks' time band, however, such issues are reviewed on an ongoing basis. As inpatient waiting times are collected on a patient level basis, more detailed breakdowns are available on request and a requested breakdown has been provided in response to AQW 37901/11-15.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown by (i) speciality; and (ii) Health and Social Care Trust of inpatient waiting times (a) 0-6; (b) >6-13; (c) >13-21; (d) >21-26; (e) >26-31; (f) >31-36; (g) >36-41; (h) >41-52; (i) >52 weeks from 1 April to 30 June 2014.
(AQW 37901/11-15)

Mr Wells: A breakdown of the inpatient waiting times by (i) specialty and (ii) Health and Social Care Trust for each of the requested time bands, at 30th June 2014, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, are detailed in the tables overleaf.

(i) Number of patients waiting for inpatient admission at 30th June 2014, by specialty

	Patients Waiting for Inpatient Admission, by Weeks Waiting									Total Number of Patients Waiting
Specialty	**0-6**	**>6-13**	**>13-21**	**>21-26**	**>26-31**	**>31-36**	**>36-41**	**>41-52**	**>52**	
General Surgery	4,513	2,461	1,689	663	379	242	173	164	275	10,559
Urology	1,893	1,013	744	327	255	239	253	350	366	5,440
T & O Surgery	1,941	3,205	2,839	1,162	415	263	160	169	67	10,221
ENT	1,383	1,012	734	238	237	209	99	87	34	4,033
Ophthalmology	1,534	1,180	845	153	93	35	31	6	7	3,884
Oral Surgery	270	146	58	16	10	1	0	1	0	502
Restorative Dentistry	39	18	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	65
Paediatric Dentistry	65	16	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	83
Neurosurgery	70	52	27	9	5	15	3	5	0	186
Plastic Surgery	338	225	159	87	42	31	42	31	19	974
Cardiac Surgery	122	103	122	46	15	5	0	2	2	417
Paediatric Surgery	81	132	137	73	38	11	3	2	1	478
Thoracic Surgery	42	11	7	4	1	1	0	0	0	66
Pain Management	448	555	348	168	85	73	44	29	1	1,751
General Medicine	1,214	331	47	2	0	0	0	0	0	1,594
Gastroenterology	1,727	761	85	4	0	0	0	0	0	2,577
Endocrinology	12	12	9	2	0	0	0	0	0	35
Haematology (Clinical)	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Cardiology	865	461	102	38	14	24	15	11	0	1,530
Dermatology	290	128	15	2	0	8	2	0	1	446
Thoracic Medicine	36	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	51
Nephrology	39	13	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	53
Medical Oncology	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Neurology	85	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	89
Rheumatology	131	120	66	4	1	1	0	1	0	324
Paediatrics	44	70	31	0	0	0	0	4	0	149

Specialty	Patients Waiting for Inpatient Admission, by Weeks Waiting									Total Number of Patients Waiting
	0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-31	>31-36	>36-41	>41-52	>52	
Geriatric Medicine	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Gynaecology	1,508	1,074	775	251	111	100	36	28	1	3,884
GP Other	347	180	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	549
Mental Illness	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Clinical Oncology	30	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
Radiology	22	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	29
Other	149	107	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	269
Total	**19,295**	**13,411**	**8,889**	**3,250**	**1,701**	**1,259**	**861**	**890**	**774**	**50,330**

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

(ii) Number of patients waiting for inpatient admission at 30th June 2014, by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for Inpatient Admission, by Weeks Waiting									Total Number of Patients Waiting
	0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-31	>31-36	>36-41	>41-52	>52	
Belfast	6,394	6,212	5,192	2,084	1,178	888	622	623	602	23,795
Northern	3,241	1,618	661	204	85	61	29	23	3	5,925
South Eastern	2,733	1,358	623	165	73	59	49	33	13	5,106
Southern	3,508	2,247	1,167	380	158	79	49	87	90	7,765
Western	3,419	1,976	1,246	417	207	172	112	124	66	7,739
Total	**19,295**	**13,411**	**8,889**	**3,250**	**1,701**	**1,259**	**861**	**890**	**774**	**50,330**

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Datase

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding that has been, or will be, provided by each Health and Social Care Trust to each branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16.
(AQW 37912/11-15)

Mr Wells: The amount of funding provided by each Health and Social Care Trust to each Citizens Advice Bureau in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15 is set out in the table below. Funding for 2015/16 has not yet been determined.

	2013/14 £	2014/15 £
Belfast HSCT		
Belfast CAB	117,950	116,266
Belfast HSCT Total	117,950	116,266
Southern HSCT		
Dungannon CAB	19,292	19,292
Armagh CAB	19,292	19,292
Craigavon CAB	19,292	19,292
Banbridge CAB	19,292	19,292

	2013/14 £	2014/15 £
N&M CAB	19,292	19,292
Southern HSCT Total	96,460	96,460
South East HSCT		
North Down	64,787	29,475
Down	29,700	29,700
Ards	29,475	29,475
Lisburn	8,582	8,582
South East HSCT Total	132,544	97,232
Total	**346,954**	**309,958**

Note: The Western, Northern and NI Ambulance Service HSC Trusts did not provide funding to a Citizen's Advice Bureau over this period

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of fires that were started maliciously and attended by the Northern Ireland Fire Service in each of the last three years; and what costs were incurred.
(AQW 37967/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below details the number of mobilisations by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) to deliberate fires in 2011/12, 2012/13, and 2013/14.

Year	No of Deliberate Fires
2013/14	6,689
2012/13	6,281
2011/12	9,504

NIFRS do not routinely calculate the costs of attending individual call types.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) fire engines; and (ii) ambulances vandalised in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37968/11-15)

Mr Wells: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)

NIFRS does not record details of vandalism to fire appliances. NIFRS does record incidents where appliances are damaged as a result of attacks on Firefighters.

The table below details the number of incidents where damage to appliances has occurred as a result of attacks on Firefighters in each of the last three years.

Year	No of Incidents where damage to Appliances occurred as a result of Attacks on Firefighters
2013/14	17
2012/13	31
2011/12	23

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)

The table below details the number of ambulances damaged as a result of vandalism in each of the last three years

Year	No of ambulances vandalised
2013/14	8
2012/13	9
2011/12	12

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to minimise waiting times at the Emergency Department of Antrim Area Hospital, given that waiting times are normally exceeded as a result of winter pressures; and whether he will increase provision at Whiteabbey Hospital Minor Injuries Unit.
(AQW 37998/11-15)

Mr Wells: I look to the Health and Social Care Board to work with the Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that effective plans are in place to respond to anticipated winter pressures on emergency departments.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust is taking steps to address emergency care pressures and prepare for winter. Over the last 18 months the Trust has put additional measures in place to improve the flow of patients through Antrim Area Hospital including opening up alternative access routes for patients such as the Acute Assessment Unit and rapid access to diagnostics pathways. Significant development has also taken place within community services to reduce unnecessary admissions to hospital and to ensure safe and efficient discharge pathways. A programme of work is currently under way involving senior clinicians and managers to systematically improve the unscheduled care service and improve care delivery across primary, secondary and community care settings.

As part of the Northern Trust's contingency plan, Whiteabbey Minor Injuries Unit will close temporarily. The Trust will put in place alternative arrangements to maintain safety and ensure patient flow.

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the imminent closure of the children's cardiac surgery unit at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, whether he can provide an assurance that children who are currently on the local waiting list who have to travel to specialised hospitals in England for surgery are not placed at the bottom of the waiting list, and that their existing waiting time and health conditions will be taken into account.
(AQW 38060/11-15)

Mr Wells: The timing and location of all children's cardiac surgery are matters of clinical judgement to be taken by the appropriate healthcare professionals. Currently a small number of lower complexity, non-urgent paediatric cardiac operations are carried out each month in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (equating to approximately 35 cases per year). All other elective surgery is carried out in heart centres in England or Dublin and is planned in advance through case conferences between both sets of clinicians, which will take account of a range of factors to determine the appropriate timing for treatment. When surgery ends in Belfast in December 2014, the small cohort of children to be added to the number requiring surgery in England, while capacity is being increased in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, will be managed in the same way. I can therefore provide assurance that they will not simply be placed at the bottom of a waiting list. The heart centres in Birmingham and Evelina Children's Hospitals have sufficient capacity to treat these children when deemed appropriate in agreement with their clinicians.

The Clark Clinic will continue to provide all non-surgical care for children with congenital cardiac conditions.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to explain his understanding of the word "temporary", when used by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on 30 October 2014, in relation to Multiple Sclerosis respite care and intermediate beds in Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 38061/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has said that: "for the remaining part of 2014/2015 to achieve reduced spend in-year of £6.9m; in the Moyle area this involves the temporary closure of Intermediate Care beds in Dalriada Hospital (20 beds) from the 30 November 2014. The length of stay in our intermediate care beds has been reduced, making the remaining Trust beds more efficient so the Trust is confident that patients' needs can be met with reduced bed numbers. This will enable staff to be redeployed to support unscheduled care and acute services at Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals. The Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre will also temporarily close from 30 November 2014 with services being provided in independent nursing homes or via home based respite or direct payments which allow service users to make their own respite arrangements".

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the recent announcement that nine beds will close at Downe Hospital, whether he will carry out an Equality Impact Assessment to ascertain if any Section 75 groups will be unduly effected.
(AQW 38065/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is designated as a public authority for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Public authorities are responsible for equality screening any proposed substantive change to or withdrawal of services they provide.

The Trust has carried out an equality screening on this proposal in order to identify potential impact on any of the Section 75 groups. The outcome of this was a recommendation for on-going screening which means that the Trust will continue to monitor the impact of the proposed changes during the implementation phase.

This is a temporary closure, in line with other changes taking place across Northern Ireland due to the ongoing financial pressures. If the Trust were to propose to close these beds on a permanent basis a full consultation process, including equality screening, would have to be undertaken.

Department of Justice

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has any plans to introduce legislation aimed at combatting internet trolling.
(AQW 37693/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am aware of the Justice Secretary's proposed legislative changes for England and Wales in relation to malicious communications or "internet trolling". My officials are already in touch with their Westminster equivalents as to the detail. As a devolved issue any proposal to change the law in Northern Ireland would be subject to public consultation and consideration by the Assembly. I will be keeping developments in Westminster under review.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the cost of the research and report he commissioned into prostitution in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37724/11-15)

Mr Ford: A budget of £60,000 was allocated for the research into prostitution in Northern Ireland.

I have been advised by Central Procurement Directorate that to provide a breakdown of the costs reduces the ability of a tenderer, for any contract, to compete successfully for such services in the future in both the public and private sectors. Disclosing commercially sensitive material in this way could diminish confidence in the integrity of the public tendering process, and disincline companies from competing in such contests. This would weaken the ability of public authorities to obtain value for money in procurement.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice what legal action can be taken against an individual who collects payment for rates from a tenant for a premises they do not own, and then fails to make that payment to the rightful landlord or authority.
(AQW 37730/11-15)

Mr Ford: In terms of the civil law, in appropriate circumstances a landlord or authority may be able to take a civil action, in respect of money owed, against a person who collects money and then fails to make payment.

In terms of the criminal law, and again subject to the circumstances involved, amongst other offences, offences of fraud by false representation and theft may have been committed. Decisions on charging and prosecutions are a matter for the independent prosecuting authorities based on the nature of the specific crimes involved.

Subject to the charges brought, offences of fraud by false representation or theft by dishonest appropriation of another's property with intent to deprive permanently can both, for example, attract penalties of up to ten years imprisonment on indictment.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether a person was transferred to Burren House as part of his pre-release; and if so, on what date was he transferred from Maghaberry.
(AQW 37755/11-15)

Mr Ford: To release the information requested would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice what penalties are in place for people who collect rent or rates for premises without the permission of the owner.
(AQW 37757/11-15)

Mr Ford: In terms of the civil law, in appropriate circumstances a landlord or authority may be able to take a civil action, in respect of money owed, against a person who collects money and then fails to make payment.

In terms of the criminal law, and again subject to the circumstances involved, amongst other offences, offences of fraud by false representation and theft may have been committed. Decisions on charging and prosecutions are a matter for the independent prosecuting authorities based on the nature of the specific crimes involved.

Subject to the charges brought, offences of fraud by false representation or theft by dishonest appropriation of another's property with intent to deprive permanently can both, for example, attract penalties of up to ten years imprisonment on indictment.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by his Department.
(AQW 37806/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice, including its Agencies but not its arm's length bodies, does not currently possess any surplus land.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many deputy district judges are registered; and how many are practicing (i) solicitors; and (ii) barristers.
(AQW 37822/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are 24 deputy District Judges (Magistrates' Courts) and nine deputy District Judges (Civil).

Judge Type	Practicing Solicitor	Practicing Barrister	Other
Deputy District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)	8	13	3
Deputy District Judge (Civil)	4	1	4

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice to detail the goods and services that the Police Ombudsman has procured from outside Northern Ireland in each of the last three years, including (i) when the goods and services were procured; (ii) the value of each procurement; and (iii) from whom the services were procured.
(AQW 37858/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Office of the Police Ombudsman is operationally independent of my Department. The level of detailed information sought is not retained by my Department. I have, however, been assured by the Office that its procurement policy complies with the requirements of Managing Public Money NI and incorporates relevant procurement guidance from both DFP and DOJ.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what action has been taken by G4S to deal with the issue of faulty palm scanners, particularly at Dungannon Courthouse, and to detail (i) the actions that have been taken, including the date and results; (ii) whether any other courthouses are affected; and (iii) whether the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service are being kept fully appraised.
(AQW 37879/11-15)

Mr Ford: G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd commenced discussions in early September 2014 with its own Information Technology Department in order to remedy the connectivity issues. G4S is considering installing static Internet Protocol (IP) addresses at all sites across the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service estate. Additionally, G4S has revised and will circulate an updated Hand Punch Operations and Usage Policy to all G4S staff on the NICTS security contract in November. All courthouses have experienced connectivity issues and the proposed actions should resolve any connectivity issues going forward. The NICTS is being kept fully apprised of this situation.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the person was ever an inmate of the Prisoner Assessment Unit; and if so, to detail the dates.
(AQW 37880/11-15)

Mr Ford: To release the information requested would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why Prison Service staff were provided with information on the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme via a notice on February 2014 based on figures to be paid in April rather than March.
(AQW 37908/11-15)

Mr Ford: Two Notices to Staff were issued in February 2012 (NS 17/12 and NS 20/12). Neither of these notices referred to staff leaving in March being paid in April.

The Staff Exit Unit carried out a number of checks on the figures provided to staff. The incorrect calculations arose in a minority of cases for a range of reasons which the Prison Service had no control over. Late notification from staff (including marital status) impacted upon their pension illustrations. Payroll information for the final month is interfaced after the award has been calculated and can impact upon the benefits payable. Revisions to the benefits payable meant that in some cases the maximum lump sum exceeded the 25% limit.

The Prison Service put measures in place, when this situation arose in 2012, to prevent these staff from being adversely affected, ensuring they received their correct calculations and were able to leave under the terms of the VER Scheme as close to the appropriate date as possible for their tranche.

In 2012, the Prison Service secured an agreement from HM Revenue and Customs that the Additional Payment made under the terms of the VER Scheme would fall under Section 401, in addition to the Compensation Lump Sum payment. This ensured that, when these payments were aggregated, staff were able to benefit from a tax free element up to £30,000 and did not have to pay national insurance contributions on these two payments.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why 51 Prison Service staff were provided with incorrect calculations on their entitlement under the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme when it was meant to be checked by the Staff Exit Unit.
(AQW 37909/11-15)

Mr Ford: Two Notices to Staff were issued in February 2012 (NS 17/12 and NS 20/12). Neither of these notices referred to staff leaving in March being paid in April.

The Staff Exit Unit carried out a number of checks on the figures provided to staff. The incorrect calculations arose in a minority of cases for a range of reasons which the Prison Service had no control over. Late notification from staff (including marital status) impacted upon their pension illustrations. Payroll information for the final month is interfaced after the award has been calculated and can impact upon the benefits payable. Revisions to the benefits payable meant that in some cases the maximum lump sum exceeded the 25% limit.

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Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why Prison Service representatives indicated that an agreement had been secured from HM Revenue and Customs on 9 March 2012 that additional payments would be taxed under Section 401.
(AQW 37910/11-15)

Mr Ford: Two Notices to Staff were issued in February 2012 (NS 17/12 and NS 20/12). Neither of these notices referred to staff leaving in March being paid in April.

The Staff Exit Unit carried out a number of checks on the figures provided to staff. The incorrect calculations arose in a minority of cases for a range of reasons which the Prison Service had no control over. Late notification from staff (including marital status) impacted upon their pension illustrations. Payroll information for the final month is interfaced after the award has been calculated and can impact upon the benefits payable. Revisions to the benefits payable meant that in some cases the maximum lump sum exceeded the 25% limit.

The Prison Service put measures in place, when this situation arose in 2012, to prevent these staff from being adversely affected, ensuring they received their correct calculations and were able to leave under the terms of the VER Scheme as close to the appropriate date as possible for their tranche.

In 2012, the Prison Service secured an agreement from HM Revenue and Customs that the Additional Payment made under the terms of the VER Scheme would fall under Section 401, in addition to the Compensation Lump Sum payment. This ensured that, when these payments were aggregated, staff were able to benefit from a tax free element up to £30,000 and did not have to pay national insurance contributions on these two payments.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many victims of human trafficking were interviewed as part of his Department's Report on Prostitution.
(AQW 37911/11-15)

Mr Ford: Chapter 8 of the report of the independent research into prostitution in Northern Ireland details that two victims of human trafficking, confirmed as such by the National Referral Mechanism, were interviewed by researchers from Queen's University. The same chapter describes how, out of a further 19 interviews held with sex workers, one interviewee said that she had been trafficked into the sex industry at an earlier stage.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many illegal republican parades have taken place in each of the last three years; and how many (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions have resulted.
(AQW 37930/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information available indicates that there were two illegal Republican parades in 2012, three in 2013 and one in 2014 (at 28 October).

Information on prosecutions and convictions is not readily available for these years and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number and type of weapons discovered in each prison, in each of the last three years; and the date each weapon was discovered.
(AQW 37951/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is set out below:

Maghaberry	23/10/2011	Wooden Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	26/10/2011	Plastic Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	14/11/2011	Razor Blade

Maghaberry	28/11/2011	Metal Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	07/01/2012	Razor Blade
Maghaberry	08/01/2012	Metal Pipe & Tourniquet
Maghaberry	13/06/2012	Garrotte
Maghaberry	21/08/2012	Catapult
Maghaberry	11/09/2012	Blade
Maghaberry	11/09/2012	Blade
Maghaberry	13/09/2012	Blade
Maghaberry	09/11/2012	Razor Blade
Maghaberry	15/11/2012	Blade
Maghaberry	21/11/2012	Not Recorded
Maghaberry	18/02/2013	Not Recorded
Maghaberry	19/03/2013	Belt Buckle
Maghaberry	29/03/2013	4 Blades
Maghaberry	03/04/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	04/04/2013	Razor Blade
Maghaberry	21/04/2013	Razor Blade
Maghaberry	28/04/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	05/05/2013	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	27/05/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	27/05/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	27/05/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	21/06/2013	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	03/07/2013	Knife
Maghaberry	03/07/2013	Knife
Maghaberry	05/07/2013	Wooden Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	27/07/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	27/07/2013	Lock Knife
Maghaberry	10/08/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	11/09/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	14/09/2013	Razor Blade
Maghaberry	22/09/2013	Wooden Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	01/10/2013	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	01/10/2013	Plastic Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	12/10/2013	Knife
Maghaberry	21/10/2013	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	05/11/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	06/11/2013	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	13/11/2013	Not Recorded
Maghaberry	14/11/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	14/11/2013	Not Recorded
Maghaberry	14/11/2013	Blade

Maghaberry	26/11/2013	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	21/12/2013	Razor Blade
Maghaberry	23/12/2013	Blade
Maghaberry	28/12/2013	Hoffman Knife & Scissors
Maghaberry	09/01/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	29/01/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	31/01/2014	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	04/02/2014	Table Leg
Maghaberry	12/03/2014	Copper Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	17/03/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	17/03/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	18/03/2014	Knife
Maghaberry	19/03/2014	Sharpened Cutlery
Maghaberry	19/03/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	30/03/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	02/06/2014	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	20/06/2014	Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	25/06/2014	Blade
Maghaberry	27/06/2014	Wooden Weapon
Maghaberry	20/07/2014	Sharpened Cutlery
Maghaberry	28/07/2014	Wooden Weapon
Maghaberry	26/08/2014	Plastic Pointed Weapon
Maghaberry	10/09/2014	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	09/10/2011	Blade
Magilligan	04/11/2011	Plastic Pointed Weapon & Screwdriver
Magilligan	06/02/2012	Metal Hammer
Magilligan	26/02/2012	Knife
Magilligan	05/03/2012	Not Recorded
Magilligan	09/03/2012	Craft Knife
Magilligan	30/03/2012	Not Recorded
Magilligan	16/06/2012	Not Recorded
Magilligan	16/08/2012	Not Recorded
Magilligan	23/08/2012	Tin Can In A Sock& Brush Shaft
Magilligan	04/10/2012	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	11/10/2012	Knife
Magilligan	04/12/2012	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	08/03/2013	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	23/03/2013	Blades
Magilligan	24/05/2013	Blades
Magilligan	04/06/2013	Wooden Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	11/06/2013	Craft Knife
Magilligan	27/06/2013	Metal Pointed Weapon

Magilligan	03/07/2013	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	22/07/2013	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	03/09/2013	Not Recorded
Magilligan	22/09/2013	Pointed Weapon & Blades
Magilligan	13/11/2013	Blade
Magilligan	23/12/2013	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	23/12/2013	Screwdriver
Magilligan	14/02/2014	Wooden Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	25/03/2014	Pointed Weapon
Magilligan	04/08/2014	Not Recorded
Hydebank	13/09/2012	Blade
Hydebank	06/11/2012	Sock With Soap Inside
Hydebank	02/07/2013	Pointed Weapon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to place a copy of the Police Association Regulations 1991 in the Assembly Library, or specifically the section on emoluments for full time Police Federation NI officials showing the required agreements amongst Central Committee, the NI Policing Board and the Chief Constable; and whether these agreements have been, and remain, in practice.
(AQW 37962/11-15)

Mr Ford: A copy of the Police Association for Northern Ireland Regulations 1991 has been placed in the Assembly Library and I would refer to regulation 18 regarding emoluments of the office bearers of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland (PFNI) officials. Regulation 18 has not been amended or revoked.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why tranche one applicants to the Prison Service Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme were treated differently to applicants in tranches two and three.
(AQW 37984/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to my response to his question AQW/35324/11-15.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why applicants for tranches two and three of the Prison Service Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme were given an option to withdraw from the scheme whilst those in tranches one were not afforded this opportunity.
(AQW 37985/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to my response to his question AQW/35324/11-15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what cash reserves are held by the Public Prosecution Service.
(AQW 38010/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am committed to respecting the independence of the Public Prosecution Service. Questions regarding their finances and cash reserve should be forwarded to them for further information and answer.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the progress of developing the joint public services college at Desertcreat.
(AQW 38212/11-15)

Mr Ford: Development of a joint training college for the police, Prison Service and Fire and Rescue Service is a Programme for Government commitment. Decisions on this will be taken by the Executive.

At a recent meeting of the Programme Steering Group, the three Services reiterated their commitment to some form of integration but expressed concern at the impact of budget reductions on their long term training requirements and their ability to meet future running costs.

As a result, the Steering Group has commissioned a two stage review. The first stage will involve the Programme Board urgently establishing what the present position means for the current procurement process. This will be completed within a short, two-week timescale. During this period, the Programme Board will also firm up the scope of the second stage review which will, inter alia, re-affirm the training requirements of the three Services and the scope for integration; review underlying assumptions; and establish what is appropriate, affordable and deliverable in the current budgetary climate.

Department for Regional Development

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will commission research, similar to that published by the Australian government, measuring the benefit to the economy each time a person cycles or walks for at least twenty minutes to and from work.
(AQW 26314/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The economic benefits of cycling have been well established in a number of key studies. These were considered in depth by the Active Travel Forum in developing the Active Travel Strategy "Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland". This Strategy was agreed by the Executive and published in January of this year. Both the Strategy and supporting papers produced by the Active Travel Forum, including its research on economic drivers, are available on my Department's internet site.

I have no plans to commission further research into the economic benefits of Active Travel. Rather my priority is to drive delivery of the vision set out in the Active Travel Strategy and associated Action Plan to put walking and cycling at the heart of local transport, public health and well-being and wider government strategies for the benefit of society, the environment and the economy as a whole.

To this end I have established a new cycling unit to ensure cycling issues and initiatives are progressed in a more coherent and coordinated manner across my Department, in partnership with local government, voluntary bodies, public transport operators and the health and education sectors.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to upgrade and enhance the railway station at Scarva.
(AQW 36678/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Substantial works were carried out to the platforms at Scarva station in 2007/08 to improve passing clearances and facilitate increased line speed. Further works were completed to the station as part of Translink's New Railway Vision programme and to make it compliant with Disability Discrimination legislation. Standard on-going minor maintenance works are routinely undertaken, e.g. repairing lights and refurbishing posters that have been vandalised.

TransportNI within my Department has provided pedestrian warning signs on both approaches to this location. It has also had initial discussions with the Police Service of Northern Ireland regarding the extension of the 30mph speed limit beyond the train station on Station Road. My officials will undertake speed surveys to ascertain if it is appropriate to extend this limit beyond the station and to review the position of the warning signs on both approaches to the station.

In addition, I can confirm this road is fully lit at the station/restaurant entrances to a standard commensurate with the road classification and type.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the £19 million funding for the signalling relay on the Coleraine to Londonderry line is ring-fenced and available for the project.
(AQW 36726/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I made a statement to the Assembly on 3 November in which I indicated that the estimated cost of Phase 2 is likely to increase but a final figure is subject to a procurement. My statement confirms a commitment on my part to fund the project subject to an updated economic appraisal.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on Phase 2 of the Derry to Coleraine rail link renewal project.
(AQW 36905/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The civil works design for Bellarena Station is complete and approvals are being finalised to allow the start of construction.

The signalling principles design is nearing completion and Translink are preparing to go out to the market for its detail design and build package.

I have made a statement to the Assembly on 3 November.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much NI Railways has spent on hospitality in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 36907/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following are the relevant statistics in relation to hospitality extended by Northern Ireland Railways:

Year	£
2011/12	11,658

Year	£
2012/13	8,173
2013/14	18,537

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has spent on business trips in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 36908/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following are the relevant statistics from Translink's business travel account, in relation to business travel conducted by Translink personnel:

	£k
2011/12	333
2012/13	314
2013/14	278

Of these figures more than two thirds were made up of mileage claims, most of which relates to operational business travel as part of Translink's ongoing business.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much NI Railways has spent on business trips in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 36909/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following are the relevant statistics from Translink's business travel account, in relation to business travel conducted by NI Railways personnel:

	£k
2011/12	218
2012/13	232
2013/14	165

Of these figures more than two thirds were made up of mileage claims, most of which relates to operational business travel as part of Translink's ongoing business.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the volume of leakage from mains water pipes over the last three years.
(AQW 37132/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the leakage levels from mains water pipes over the last 3 years are as follows:

Year	Losses (mega litres per day)
2011/12	168.32
2012/13	161.75
2013/14	167.21*

* New leakage management software to estimate leakage levels was introduced in 2013/2014. The Regulator in its Annual Information Return has recognised this change by acknowledging that the 2012/13 figure should be adjusted to 170.73 Ml/d under the revised method of calculation. It therefore set NI Water a target of 169 Ml/d for 2013/14 which the company has exceeded.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the current extent of compliance with the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and the EU Water Framework Directive; (ii) the current extent of the risk of infraction proceedings commencing; (iii) the level of fines possible as a result of this infraction; and (iv) the level of investment needed to avoid such proceedings.
(AQW 37193/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive protects the environment from the adverse effects of sewage discharges. It sets treatment levels on the basis of sizes of sewage discharges and the sensitivity of waters receiving the discharges. There are 79 wastewater treatment works (WWTW) in Northern Ireland assessed for compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD). All sites, except Ballycastle WWTW and Benone WWTW complied with UWWTD requirements resulting in a compliance rate in 2013 of 98%.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires member states to implement measures to prevent deterioration of the status of all bodies of surface water and groundwater and to protect, enhance and restore all water bodies with the aim of achieving "good" status by 2015. This is achieved through the production and implementation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for each River Basin District (RBD) which set out the measures through which improvements in the water environment can be achieved across a six-year cycle. The first set of RBMPs was submitted to the European Commission in 2009 with the second set of RBMPs due in 2015. The first formal classification of water bodies under WFD will not take place until 2015 and thus no assessments have been performed yet in terms of the extent of compliance. The implementation and reporting of compliance with the WFD is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment (DOE).

(ii) The European Commission has commenced infraction proceedings against the UK Government in respect of Ballycastle WWTW as the works does not have secondary treatment in place. NI Water has begun a capital works project to deliver an upgrade at Ballycastle to meet the UWWTD requirements. Progress on this upgrade is being monitored by the European Commission. The Benone WWTW failed to meet the required standards in 2013 and has been decommissioned. A new works at Magilligan, which serves the Benone area as well, was opened in 2014.

With regard to compliance with the WFD, DOE is due to report to the European Commission in 2015 on progress of the delivery of the Programme of Measures for the first River Basin Planning Cycle of the WFD. An infraction risk is likely to arise in respect of Belfast Harbour water quality, where monitoring to date suggests that the required standard will not be met. In response to this risk, a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure plan is being developed for Northern Ireland and the first phase will focus on South and East Belfast. One of the key aims of this phase is to deliver improvements in the water quality in Belfast Harbour. It is likely that this initiative would be taken into account by the European Commission when it determines whether or not to commence infraction proceedings, and subsequently if it were to consider the imposition of fines by way of enforcement.

Article 9 of the WFD requires Member States to take account of the principle of recovery of the costs of water services and requires Member States by 2010 to have water-pricing policies that provide adequate incentives for users to use water resources efficiently. Although Northern Ireland has charges for non-domestic water users the absence of charges for domestic users could represent an infraction risk.

(iii) The Commission has powers to apply financial sanctions to the UK where, following infraction proceedings for a breach of EU law, the Court of Justice has found the UK to be in breach of its obligations. The level of infraction fine in an individual case is difficult to assess as it will be determined by the seriousness and duration of the breach. Although infraction proceedings may commence, in most cases in the UK to date it has been possible to avoid financial penalties through committing to a prioritised programme of work to address the breach. It is hoped that the interdepartmental work now begun to develop a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan may help to reduce the risk of infraction fines and further action by the Commission.

(iv) The funding allocated to complete the building of the new Ballycastle WWTW is £10.8 million at the initial design stage. It is estimated that additional funding (of at least £750m) will be needed to progress an integrated drainage infrastructure solution for the greater Belfast area as part of the Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) when Roads Service decided to resurface the Coa Road in Enniskillen; (ii) when NI Water decided new water mains were needed in the area surrounding the Coa Road in Enniskillen; (iii) when the resurfacing work on Coa Road, Enniskillen was completed; (iv) when the water mains project on the Coa Road commenced; and (v) what action he will take to ensure that any similar utility works take place prior to or during resurfacing. **(AQW 37235/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy:

(i) TransportNI decided to resurface the Coa Road in Enniskillen on 18 May 2011.

(ii) Water quality issues were identified in the local area around Coa Road and Chanterhill Road during the summer of 2013. Northern Ireland Water defined the scope for this scheme on 6 September 2013 and included the water main scheme into an existing South Phase 1 work package at the time. Following initial site investigation works, Northern Ireland Water held a meeting with TransportNI on 21 November 2013 to discuss the South Phase 1 package and at this meeting it was highlighted that the Coa Road had been resurfaced in recent years. TransportNI confirmed that as 2 years had passed since the resurfacing was carried out, the 12 month prohibition period had lapsed and Northern Ireland Water was permitted to submit a proposal for a new water main. Northern Ireland Water had made a commitment to use trenchless techniques for this scheme with the aim of reducing the number of open excavations. A further meeting with TransportNI was held on 21 May 2014, after Northern Ireland Water completed the final design and budget approval had been received in advance of scheme commencement.

(iii) The resurfacing work on Coa Road, Enniskillen was completed on 8 August 2012.

(iv) The Coa Road and Chanterhill Road scheme commenced on 7 July 2014 and is scheduled for completion on 30 October 2014. There are additional schemes linked to the Coa Road scheme, at Aughawart Road and Irvines Crescent, and these will be completed during the period November 2014 to February 2015. Northern Ireland Water's contractor has attempted to maximise the use of trenchless technologies during the installation of the new water main. However, a number of open excavations were required due to the congestion of other services and inaccuracies in existing record drawings.

(v) In accordance with current procedures, Northern Ireland Water (like all other utilities) is given advance notice of all plans for resurfacing works and, wherever possible, all works are co-ordinated. After resurfacing works are complete, there is a 12 month statutory prohibition period which restricts the completion of non-emergency works to the newly applied surface. Northern Ireland Water will continue to post notification of proposed schemes, as early as possible, onto the Northern Ireland Street works Registration and Notification Service.

In the case of Coa Road, Enniskillen, the Northern Ireland Water works were carried out over two years after completion of the TransportNI scheme, and as this was outside the 12 month prohibition period no restriction was imposed on its proposals.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to list the organisations that have received, or will receive, a refund for water and sewerage services through standard usage or trade effluent as a result of being overcharged since the introduction of the legislation that came into effect in 2008; (ii) to detail the amount in question for each organisation; (iii) what efforts are being made to identify other organisations that may have been affected; (iv) what resources NI Water or his Department are allocating to help identify other organisations that may be affected.
(AQW 37402/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) It would be inappropriate to list individual customers or organisations and their respective account adjustments. A detailed disclosure of that nature would be an infringement of the duty of confidentiality owed to customers.

(ii) 6,705 accounts have received a credit relating to overcharges to water and sewerage bills from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2014 with a total amount of £2,186,300. The breakdown of these figures is as follows:

Date Range	Number of Customer Accounts	Total Credit Amount
Apr 08 – May 11	5,007	£906,550
May 11 – May 14	1,698	£1,279,750

(iii) There is an ongoing programme to improve data quality and thereby ensure that customers are billed accurately and fairly. This programme 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.

(iv) A customer data quality project team of 15 staff, covering office and fieldwork, has been established to supplement the existing account management teams. Further account corrections are to be expected as the project team continues its work.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (a) number; and (b) location of street lights which are not working in Omagh; and when he will authorise Transport NI officials to carry out repairs, given that this current situation presents health and safety risks to local residents, including older and vulnerable people.
(AQW 37591/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: AQW 37591/11-15

The most recent information I have is that on 23 October 2014, 169 street lights were not working in the Omagh District Council area.

The schedule below details the location of the lights that are not working.

No. Lights out	Road/ Street	Area	No. Lights out	Road/ Street	Area
1	Altnamona	Altamuskin	1	Innisclan Road	Mountfield
1	Cooley Road	Beragh	1	Killins Wood Avenue	Mountfield
1	Carnoney Road	Carnoney	2	Castletown Road	Mountjoy
1	Creggan Road	Carrickmore	1	Mountjoy Avenue	Mountjoy
2	Hazelhill Road	Carrickmore	1	Ballinamullan Road	Omagh

No. Lights out	Road/ Street	Area	No. Lights out	Road/ Street	Area
1	Crawfords Lane	Dromore	1	Ballynahatty Road	Omagh
2	Fairview Gardens	Dromore	1	Beech Grove	Omagh
3	Fairview Heights	Dromore	2	Beltany Grove	Omagh
2	Gardrum Heights	Dromore	1	Belvoir Park	Omagh
1	Main Street	Dromore	1	Birchwood	Omagh
3	Meadowcroft	Dromore	2	Brookmount Road	Omagh
1	Mullinacross Fold	Dromore	2	Brookvalley	Omagh
3	Old Creamery Road	Dromore	2	Cannondale	Omagh
2	The Croft	Dromore	1	Castle Grove	Omagh
1	Omagh Road	Drumquin	1	Castle Oaks	Omagh
1	Drumlegagh Road	Dunteige	1	Castle Street	Omagh
1	Ashfield Gardens	Fintona	1	Centenary Park	Omagh
1	Lisdergan Road	Fintona	1	Coolnagard Grove	Omagh
1	Garvaghey Orlits	Garvaghey	1	Coolnagard Meadow	Omagh
1	Main Street	Gortin	1	Coolnagard Rise	Omagh
1	Crockanboy Road	Greencastle	1	Coolnagard Way	Omagh
2	Greencastle Road	Greencastle	1	Crannyfields	Omagh
1	Knockmoyle Road	Knockmoyle	3	Crevenagh Road	Omagh
2	Loughmacrory Road	Loughmacrory	1	Culmore Park	Omagh
1	Barony Road	Mountfield	1	Dergmoney Heights	Omagh
2	Derry Road	Omagh	2	Mc Ivor Villas	Omagh
2	Dromore Road	Omagh	1	Meelmore Drive	Omagh
2	Dromore Road Industrial Estate	Omagh	5	Mullaghmore Drive	Omagh
1	Dublin Road	Omagh	2	O Kane Park	Omagh
1	Edinburgh Villas	Omagh	3	Old Dromore Road	Omagh
1	Farmhill Road	Omagh	8	Old Market Place	Omagh
1	Ferone Drive	Omagh	1	Orchard Terrace	Omagh
1	Gillygooley Road	Omagh	1	Pinefield Court	Omagh
1	Gleannan Park	Omagh	1	Pinefield Drive	Omagh
1	Glenard Gardens	Omagh	2	Pinefield Wood	Omagh
1	Glendore Wood	Omagh	1	Queens Parade	Omagh
1	Gortin Road	Omagh	1	Saint Marys Road	Omagh
1	Gortmore Gardens	Omagh	2	Shandon Park	Omagh
2	Gortrush Industrial Estate	Omagh	1	Slieveard Grove	Omagh
9	Gortview Close(L'nelly Hts)	Omagh	1	Slieveard Mews	Omagh
1	Holmview Avenue	Omagh	2	Slieveard Rise	Omagh
1	Holmview Mews	Omagh	1	St Julians Road	Omagh
1	Hospital Road	Omagh	1	St Julians Way	Omagh

No. Lights out	Road/ Street	Area	No. Lights out	Road/ Street	Area
1	Hunters Crescent	Omagh	1	Starrs Crescent	Omagh
1	Irishtown Road	Omagh	1	Summerfield Court	Omagh
1	Johnston Park	Omagh	1	Tamlaght Road	Omagh
1	Kevlin Avenue	Omagh	1	Townview Avenue	Omagh
2	Kevlin Road	Omagh	1	Townview Avenue South	Omagh
2	Killybrack Close(L'nelly Hts)	Omagh	1	Winters Gardens	Omagh
1	Killybrack Glen	Omagh	1	Winters Lane	Omagh
3	Killybrack Road	Omagh	2	Letfern Road	Seskinore
1	Kylemore Gardens	Omagh	1	Cooley Road	Sixmilecross
1	Lisanelly Avenue	Omagh	1	Woodview Crescent	Trillick
1	Lissan Drive	Omagh	1	Drumlegagh Road	Tully
1	Lissan View	Omagh	1	Gormley Park	Tursallagh
1	Mc Clay Park	Omagh			

The Northern Ireland Executive's June and October monitoring process has been completed and despite my Department starting the year with a significant funding shortfall and submitting bids for additional funding as part of the monitoring round process, the Resource budget has been cut significantly. The Resource budget is used to fund the day to day maintenance of the street lighting system.

As a direct result and with regret, I have had to suspend the issuing of new works to external contractors for a range of activities, including street lighting maintenance operations. If additional funding becomes available following January monitoring, the situation will be reviewed urgently.

Until further notice, my Operations and Maintenance staff will be endeavouring to deal with as many street lighting defects as possible in the Omagh area and across the province. However, they will not be able to provide the level of service the public would expect in normal circumstances.

They will give priority to larger group outages followed by smaller group outages and our lowest priority will be given to individual street lighting outages.

Unfortunately, the number of outages is increasing and at this time I am unable to predict when I will be in a position to repair all of the outages in your area.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development when his Department will be in a position to repair street lights in East Londonderry.
(AQW 37597/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department started repairs to the street lights in East Londonderry on 29 September 2014 initially within the Coleraine Borough Council area and my Department's Operations and Maintenance staff are currently completing work in Garvagh and Kilrea. This team is then likely to move into the Limavady Borough Council area to carry out further repairs.

Regrettably, due to the current budgetary constraints my Department is no longer able to provide the service the public would expect under normal circumstances.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the current street light repairs required in (i) Coleraine; and (ii) Limavady Borough Council areas.
(AQW 37599/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Due to the numbers involved and as defects are being reported and repaired on an ongoing basis as available resources permit, it would not be practicable to individually list the 517 street lights currently awaiting repair in both the Coleraine and Limavady Borough Council Areas. However, I can confirm that as at 21 October 2014, 179 reported street light repairs were outstanding in the Coleraine Area and 338 in the Limavady Area.

The Northern Ireland Executive's June and October monitoring process has been completed and despite my Department starting the year with a significant funding shortfall and submitting bids for additional funding as part of the monitoring round

process, the Resource budget has been cut significantly. The Resource budget is used to fund the day to day maintenance of the street lighting system.

As a direct result and with regret, I have had to suspend the issuing of new works to external contractors for a range of activities, including street lighting maintenance operations. If additional funding becomes available following January monitoring, the situation will be reviewed urgently.

Until further notice, my Operations and Maintenance staff will be endeavouring to deal with as many street lighting defects as possible in Coleraine and Limavady and across the province. However, they will not be able to provide the level of service the public would expect in normal circumstances. They will give priority to larger group outages followed by smaller group outages and our lowest priority will be given to individual street lighting outages.

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any delays are anticipated for the Glenmachan Strategy Project; and what assurances he can give that he will allocate sufficient resources to the project in an effort to fasttrack delivery.
(AQW 37611/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water has advised me that Phase 1a (Upgrade of Sicily Park & Marguerite Park) and Phase 1b (Greystown & Upper Malone Road) of the Glenmachan Strategic Project are planned to commence in May 2015 with a construction period of two years. The estimated combined cost of both projects is £11 million with Phase 1b being part funded by the Rivers Agency. This part of the overall Glenmachan Strategic Project was advanced following the flooding of June 2012 and required extensive investigation, design and stakeholder engagement due to the complexity of the solution. There are still some third party land issues to conclude and statutory approvals required for this phase of the project but progress is being made on these.

The remainder of the work to complete the Glenmachan Strategic Project is a longer term commitment currently estimated to cost in the region of £110 million. I can confirm that NI Water has included sufficient development funding in its PC15 Business Plan to progress the feasibility, planning and design work, which will take up to three years to complete. It is important that sufficient time is taken at the development stage to ensure that the best solution is taken forward for this significant capital investment.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development who is responsible for the removal of manure from public roads. and whether there are any plans in place to alter this policy.
(AQW 37622/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Any person who allows manure to be deposited on the road is responsible for restoring the road to its original condition. Under Article 94(1) of the Roads (NI) Order 1993, anyone who deposits or allows anything to be deposited on a road, which is likely to cause an obstruction or danger, shall be guilty of an offence and held liable, on summary conviction. Responsibility for taking any prosecution under this Article lies with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and I understand that deposits on the road must be such that they are deemed to constitute a danger to persons using the road before proceedings are instituted.

The objective of enforcement is, however, not so much to secure convictions and to impose penalties, as to restore the condition of the road, and/or to discourage other potential offenders. Where my Department's interests can be protected by constructive dialogue, rather than prosecution, so much the better.

To this end my Department monitors roads on a regular basis and, when they can be clearly identified, any offenders are instructed to clean a road when officials become aware that it is unduly dirty. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is also informed and if the offenders do not co-operate, taking action under the above 1993 Roads Order is considered.

In certain circumstances, particularly in the interests of road safety, my Department may carry out whatever operations are necessary to restore the road condition and may subsequently seek to recover costs from the offender, where it is practicable to do so.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development how much the A5 project was originally forecast to cost; (ii) how much was budgeted for the project; (iii) for a breakdown of the spend on the project to date; (iv) how much the A5 project is now estimated to cost due to the modifications to the original proposal; (v) how much allocated to the A5 project has been reallocated to other projects, or surrendered during the monitoring rounds; (vi) for a breakdown of the reallocations; and (vii) how much is required to complete the A5 project, broken down by financial year from 2014/15.
(AQW 37636/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) In 2011 the estimated total cost to complete the A5 Western Transport Corridor project was £800 million.

(ii) In February 2012 the Irish Government reduced its short term contribution to the A5 West Transport Corridor project from £400 million to £50 million. The Executive then agreed to commit funding of £330 million to the project, with a view to constructing the sections from Newbuildings to north of Strabane and south of Omagh to Ballygawley.

(iii) A breakdown of the spend to date on the project is outlined below:

Year	(£)
2007/08	875,000
2008/09	8,350,000
2009/10	14,600,000
2010/11	11,395,000
2011/12	10,753,310
2012/13	13,121,911
2013/14	9,432, 421
2014/15 spend to end of August	2,180,000
Overall Total	**£70,707,642**

Note: the above figures exclude capitalisation

(iv) The scheme now being proposed is broadly similar to the original proposals with the minor changes included in the revised design having an insignificant effect on the likely overall costs. The 2011 estimate of £800 million therefore remains relevant as a baseline figure. A more significant factor will be the timing of delivery of the various phases and the associated inflationary implications. This will be subject to successful completion of statutory procedures, other public consultations and the availability of funding.

(v) The reduced requirements, returned to the Department of Finance and Personnel in relation to the A5 Western Transport Corridor totalled some £277.5million broken down as follows:

- £50 million in 2012/13;
- £108 million in 2013/14; and
- £119.5 million in 2014/15.

(vi) Reallocation of the A5WTC budget was a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(vii) The level of funding required to complete the A5 project will be significantly influenced by the evolving delivery strategy and the inflationary impacts of a phased implementation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development given the pressures on departmental budgets, the significant cost of the A5 project and the lack of progress on this project, for his assessment of the necessity and value of the continuation of this project; and what consideration he has given to abandoning the project and reallocating this funding into sustainable transport infrastructure, and other departmental priorities, such as flood alleviation.
(AQW 37637/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The A5WTC project remains an Executive project and work to address the one area of concern identified in the Court ruling is advanced. This relates to undertaking Appropriate Assessments under the Habitats Directive of the impact of the A5 proposals on the Special Areas of Conservation.

With regard to capital money allocated to Strategic Roads projects, such as the A5, my Department's budget settlement from DFP is ring-fenced. Any monies that are not required to meet the spend profile of a project within a particular year must be returned to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what method his Department is using, including details of the tendering process, to dispose of vehicles and plant held by Transport NI and NI Water.
(AQW 37645/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: TransportNI disposes of end of life vehicles and plant through a Service Level Agreement with the Ministry of Defence Disposals Services Authority. The Disposals Services Authority has enabling agreements with private sector contractors across the UK, secured through an open tendering process, which accords with all European and UK procurement procedures.

The disposal of vehicle and plant items within Northern Ireland Water is carried out periodically by a nominated contractor / auctioneer who has tendered for such services.

Northern Ireland Water is currently evaluating tender submissions recently received in order to appoint the next successful contractor / auctioneer. The tendering process is managed by NIW's Operational Procurement Team through a publically advertised competition which complies with all Departmental policies and procedures.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of repairing vandalised bus shelters in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 37664/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The provision and maintenance of bus shelters is funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to my Department. The contract covers the vast majority of Northern Ireland's bus shelters and my Department does not retain information on costs incurred by Adshel in carrying out its contractual commitments.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what impact the current budget restrictions will have on the ongoing plans to dual the A26 road between Glarryford and Coleraine.
(AQW 37697/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The current budget restrictions will have no impact on the A26 Dualling project.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development why it is necessary to have Royal Assent granted on Off Street Parking by 1 April 2015 as per clause 112 of Local Government Act (NI) 2014.
(AQW 37720/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Royal Assent is required in respect of any Executive Bill before it may become an Act of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The present timetable for the Bill envisages the Final Stage debate taking place on 3 February 2015 following which Royal Assent will be sought. The process of achieving Royal Assent takes a number of weeks to complete.

For the purposes of clarification, The Off-Street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill relies on Section 122 (not clause 112) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to make the transfer schemes necessary to transfer my Department's off-street car parks to the new councils. However, those provisions will only apply if the Off-Street Parking Bill comes into operation on 1st April 2015.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 36808/11-15, and in relation to the work carried out by Enterprise Managed Services on behalf of NI Water during the 2008/2009 contract period, (i) to detail the property types that were surveyed during this period; (ii) to detail the type of meter being installed; and (iii) whether they were (a) internal fits; (b) meters screwed into existing boundary boxes; or (c) boundary box and meter installs.
(AQW 37728/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In relation to the work carried out by Enterprise Managed Services on behalf of NI Water during the 2008/2009 contract period, which was during my predecessor, Conor Murphy's time, Northern Ireland Water has advised as follows:

(i) all of the 32,977 properties surveyed during 2008/09 were non-domestic covering all industry sectors;

(ii) there were two types of meter installed, a concentric rotary piston type meter where the supply pipe was up to 32 millimetres in diameter and helix meters with flanged outlets where the supply pipe was greater than 32mm in diameter;

(iii) of the meters installed at non-domestic properties (a) 1,071 were internal fits, (b) 2,294 were screwed into existing boundary boxes: and (c) 3,241 involved installation of a new boundary box and meter.

For completeness, there were 5,832 meters installed at new build domestic dwellings during this period, in accordance with the legislation, these were screwed into the boundary box provided at the time of connection.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to make Galgorm Road, Ballymena safer for cyclists.
(AQW 37743/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Galgorm Road, which carries in excess of 15,000 vehicles per day, is one of the main routes into Ballymena from a westerly direction. Whilst a shared use cycle lane has already been provided on the North side of the Galgorm Road from the Sourhill Road Roundabout to the Galgorm Roundabout, there are limited opportunities to provide dedicated cycle facilities due to road width constraints along significant sections of the Galgorm Road.

I can confirm, however, that legislation is currently being progressed to extend the 30mph speed limit from the junction with the Old Galgorm Road to just beyond Cambridge Avenue, which will reduce vehicle speed and create a safer environment for cyclists using that stretch of the road.

In addition, my Department's Cycling Unit has recently engaged with Ballymena Academy as part of the Active Travel for Schools Programme, and this work will include consideration of what additional measures can be implemented to assist pupils cycling to and from the school.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what improvements he is considering for cyclists that wish to transport their bicycles on Translink buses.
(AQW 37744/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In launching my draft Bicycle Strategy I set out my commitment to address barriers to modal interchange, including the opportunities to enable cyclists to transport their bicycles on public transport. Consultation on the Strategy is ongoing, however, responses to date make it clear that this is an issue for many cyclists. My officials will, therefore, engage with Translink to ensure that the Delivery Plan for my Bicycle Strategy directly addresses this issue.

In the interim folding bicycles are permitted on all Translink Bus Services. I can also confirm that Translink are currently exploring opportunities to facilitate the carrying of conventional bicycles on specific routes such as the Mourne Rambler Service. It is hoped to commence this service in the next summer and I will keep the member advised of progress.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what funding does his Department provide to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.
(AQW 37745/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently provides no funding to Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what funding does his Department provide to the Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.
(AQW 37747/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Generally, my Department does not fund Trust Ports. In exceptional circumstances my Department can provide grants for certain capital works. I can confirm that funding of that nature was provided to Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.

In 2006 Warrenpoint Harbour Authority successfully submitted a business case for a budget allocation of approximately £16.5 million to provide funding for a Roll on-Roll off (RoRo) facility and deep water developments.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much could be raised by selling surplus land owned by his Department.
(AQW 37749/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is working towards achieving some £1.3 million of disposal income from the sales of surplus departmental land this financial year. This amount has already been adjusted for in the Department's Budget by the Department of Finance and Personnel as part of the Executive's budget process.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount of cash reserves held by each of his Department's arm's-length bodies.
(AQW 37776/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water holds no reserves. In terms of Translink I refer you to my response to AQW 36507/11-15 to Mr Easton.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the decision to amalgamate Coleraine Inst and Coleraine High School, what discussions will be held with the education authorities on the traffic implications of the newly enlarged school.
(AQW 37785/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware the Education Minister, John O'Dowd MLA, announced his decision to approve the amalgamation of Coleraine Academical Institution and Coleraine High School, and the increase in enrolment at Coleraine College on 24 September 2014.

The North Eastern Education & Library Board will be taking forward the outworkings of this decision, however, I understand the entire process is at a very early stage of development and is set against a background of falling pupil numbers in the wider area.

Initial indications are that it is proposed to utilise the existing sites at Coleraine Academical Institution and Coleraine College. Should the proposals require a planning application, then my Department will be engaged as a consultee to the planning process and consider any transportation issues which may arise.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has in place to address the sewage odour at the Rossorry Church Road, Enniskillen.
(AQW 37787/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water is fully aware of the longstanding issues with odours from the sewerage system in the west of Enniskillen in the vicinity of Rossorry Church Road. The cause of the odours is septicity in sewage pumped from the Rossorry Wastewater Pumping Station, that flows through the main sewer running through Blackvede Park, Dannys Mill Road, Rossorry Church Road and Galliagh Park. Sewage odours have been escaping through manhole covers and sewer connections in these areas.

In order to address the issues, NI Water has developed a four phase programme of work involving short, medium and long-term measures. These have been ongoing since 2012.

Phase 1 was completed in January 2013 and involved the diversion of private house connections away from the section of trunk sewer that used to run through the Dannys Mill Road area.

Phase 2 was completed in July 2014 and involved cleaning and repairing the trunk sewer that runs through the Blackvede Park, Rossorry Church Road and Galliagh Park areas.

Phase 3 involves replacement and extension of the Rossory Wastewater Pumping Station's existing pumped sewer in order to improve its hydraulic performance and divert odorous sewage flows away from the problematic trunk sewer to a new discharge location. Site investigation and detailed design work began in September 2014. Subject to gaining all necessary statutory approvals and the satisfactory completion of all necessary lands and procurement procedures, construction work is expected to commence in April 2015 with completion that summer.

Phase 4 involves an overarching review of the wider sewerage system, including addressing septicity issues. A draft business case for this is currently being refined.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the submission of a business case to address sewage and odour problems in the West End of Enniskillen.
(AQW 37788/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In order to address sewage and odour issues caused by septicity of sewage, in the west of Enniskillen in the vicinity of Rossorry Church Road, NI Water has developed a four phase programme of work. Phases 1 and 2 were completed in 2013 and 2014, with construction work on Phase 3 anticipated for completion in summer 2015, subject to gaining all necessary statutory approvals and the satisfactory completion of all necessary lands and procurement procedures.

Phase 4 involves an overarching review of the wider sewerage system to address the sewerage problems, including addressing septicity issues. A draft business case, which considers the long-term requirements, has been prepared and is being refined to ensure the risk of future odour problems is minimised.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department has given to cycleways and footways that glow in the dark, such as those seen in Cambridge.
(AQW 37825/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials in my Department are aware of luminous road markings being trialled in areas such as parks in Cambridge and on roads in the Netherlands, and have made contact with the manufacturers. A local road markings manufacturer has also tried to develop an experimental mix but has had limited success so far.

The draft Bicycle Strategy currently out to consultation outlines my commitment to creating a network of high quality, direct, joined up routes throughout Northern Ireland.

The development of quality routes will consider the use of innovative engineering measures which emerge on the market.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to promote cycle to work schemes and its benefits for large private employers.
(AQW 37827/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Cycling Unit through its Travelwise initiative promotes cycling as a sustainable mode of travel to and from education, training and employment. Travelwise regularly promotes the Cycle to Work Scheme in its campaigns: including reference to the scheme in press and media releases highlighting cycling matters; in Workplace Travel Plans prepared by Travelwise for employers in all sectors; and at promotional events held in workplaces. More generally the Department provide advice on the Cycle to Work Scheme to a range of employers in all sectors who contact the Department.

The Cycle to Work Scheme is a HMRC scheme for employing organisations.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to make the Changing Gear cycling conference an annual event.
(AQW 37830/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Changing Gear seminar was an exciting event with an excellent array of speakers designed to harness Northern Ireland's interest in cycling and explore possibilities to transform Northern Ireland into a modern, vibrant, healthy cycling society.

The event was attended by over 180 people and will unquestionably have raised awareness of and encouraged participation in the consultation process for the draft Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland.

I am buoyed by the level of interest in and enthusiasm about the Northern Ireland Changing Gear event and will consider what further events my Department might undertake on foot of it.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department is considering any changes to the Albert Bridge in Belfast to make it safer for cyclists.
(AQW 37832/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's draft Bicycle Strategy, currently out to consultation, outlines my commitment to creating a network of high quality, direct, joined up routes throughout Northern Ireland.

My vision is to create 'arterial routes' in our urban areas beginning with Belfast, which will largely mirror our arterial road network to enable safe cycling into town and city centre.

I am also keen to develop 'Quiet routes' and 'Greenways' which will offer convenient yet quieter, less trafficked options for cyclists in our urban areas and off road routes into or between our urban areas.

It will not be possible to develop ideal cycle facilities at all locations due to local constraints, such as the restricted road width available on the Albert Bridge. However, it must be remembered that my vision is for the development of a cycling network over a 25 year period and such constraints may in certain places be able to be overcome in the future.

Instead my Department is looking at alternative routes which will provide safe corridors from the east of the city from the Comber Greenway and routes leading to the proposed Ormeau Park Bridge from the south-east.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, since May 2011, what has been the change in the number of staff at his departmental headquarters in Clarence Court who cycle to work.
(AQW 37837/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Cycling Unit promotes cycling as a sustainable mode of travel to school and work through the Travelwise NI initiative. Marketing information and material, highlighting the benefits of cycling, is also made available to staff within DRD.

Records indicate that the number of NICS staff using cycling facilities at my departmental headquarters in Clarence Court, Belfast has increased from approximately 15-20 in May 2011 to around 30-35 at present.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there will be a cycle lane on the new A2 road from Silverstream Banks to Seapark.
(AQW 37841/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland scheme will include a continuous combined footway/cycleway on the shore side of the road between Jordanstown Road and Station Road, Greenisland.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department plans to address health and safety concerns, raised by public representatives and members of the public, with regard to the necessary maintenance work to overgrown trees, which are not currently being addressed due to budget constraints.
(AQW 37913/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Most roadside trees and hedges are on lands adjacent to public roads and property owners or occupiers of those lands are responsible for ensuring that such trees and hedges do not endanger or obstruct road users. From time to time TransportNI places notices in the local press and in farming journals reminding owners and occupiers of their responsibilities.

Generally, overgrown trees and hedges that endanger or obstruct road users are identified by TransportNI staff during routine maintenance inspections. In addition, members of the general public also report trees and hedges causing concern to local section offices.

As a first step, owners or occupiers are identified and are requested to co-operate in removing or cutting the trees or hedges. If that fails, TransportNI has powers under Article 50 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to serve a notice on the owner or occupier requiring them to remove or cut back the tree or hedge so as to remove the danger or obstruction. Where an owner or occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, TransportNI may carry out the necessary works and seek to recover the costs.

With regard to the relatively small number of trees which are the responsibility of my Department, specialist external contractors are generally employed to undertake this type of work as my Department's Operations and Maintenance staff do not have the necessary specialist skills or equipment.

However, as a result of budget cuts, external contractors are only being employed to undertake emergency work at this time, for example, where there are road safety implications.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development how many requests have been received by Transport NI in the last six months for maintenance work to be carried out to overgrown trees; and of these, how many have been acted upon.
(AQW 37914/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has received 551 requests in the last six months relating to overgrown trees, which were either our responsibility or belonged to private landowners, all of which have been or are being acted upon.

For example, maintenance work was undertaken in a number of instances by either Operations and Maintenance staff or external contractors working on behalf of the Department. In other instances officials wrote to landowners requesting that action be taken and maintenance action may have already taken place or still to be completed. If necessary, the Department may serve a statutory notice compelling the landowner to take action. Failure to do so may result in the Department undertaking the necessary work for which it may seek to recover the costs. In certain instances, following site inspections, officials may consider that no action is required and therefore do not take the matter further.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how many outstanding requests for streetlight maintenance have been received by Transport NI; and (ii) what action does he intend to take to address the serious health and safety concerns arising should these streetlights be not repaired.
(AQW 37915/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Street lighting maintenance defects are being reported on an ongoing basis, and repairs are being carried out as available resources permit. As of 29 October 2014, records show that the number of lighting defects listed for repairs stood at just under 13,500.

In order to deal with the health and safety implications, I have set priorities for dealing with street lighting faults. Priority will be given to those faults that present an electrical hazard to members of the public and contractors will still be employed to deal with these faults. My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff, who can provide around twenty five percent of the overall resource required to fix street lighting faults, will endeavour to repair as many lights as possible, prioritising large groups of lights which are out, and then individual lights that have failed.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 36182/11-15, to detail the total number of (i) surveys completed; and (ii) meters installed by Enterprise Managed Services Ltd on behalf of NI Water during the (a) 2007-2008 and (b) 2009-2010 contract periods.
(AQW 37917/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The total number of surveys completed, and the total number of meters installed, by Enterprise Managed Services Ltd during 2007/2008 and 2009/2010 were as set out in the table below.

Number	2007/2008	2009/2010
Surveys completed	15,451	4,501
Meters installed	5,341	4,620

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cycling parking spaces or loops were available for public use in (i) 2012; (ii) 2013; and (iii) 2014.
(AQW 37939/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The information requested by the Member is not available in the form requested.

Whilst my Department has been developing the infrastructure and providing improved facilities for cyclists, Councils and, for example, the Department for Social Development as part of public realm works, may have also installed cycle stands and other cycling facilities, details of which are not maintained by my Department.

My draft Bicycle Strategy highlights the need for a comprehensive cycle network with end to end routes. This will include the provision of secure cycle parking where it is required. As part of our development plans, we will be making an assessment of current parking provision.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the annual cost of the free bus pass for people over 60 years old; and what percentage of users are aged between 60 and 65.
(AQW 37954/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: For 2013/14 the cost of free bus travel for the over 60s was £27.9m out of a total for free travel of £40.2m

In terms of users, passenger journeys 2013/14 show that 27% of smart pass users were in the 60-65 age category across both bus and rail.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on repairing vandalism to bus shelters in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37956/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The provision and maintenance of bus shelters is funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to my Department. The contract covers the vast majority of Northern Ireland's bus shelters and my Department does not retain information on costs incurred by Adshel in carrying out its contractual commitments.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development whether traffic attendants can display flexibility on parking infringements during the Public Realm works in North Down.
(AQW 37988/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Traffic Attendants do not have the authority to grant parking concessions, other than those already provided within existing parking legislation. However, as a result of ongoing road works it may not be possible to enforce some restrictions, for example, where signs or markings have been removed.

Waiting restrictions are beneficial in both maintaining a turnover in parking and increasing availability for delivery vehicles serving local shops and businesses. They discourage long stay parking and maximise the use of short stay spaces. There are a number of public realm schemes currently ongoing in the North Down and Ards area, namely Bangor Town Centre, Donaghadee, Comber, Newtownards and Holywood.

My Department's officials are working with North Down Borough Council and Ards Borough Council officials on the five public realm schemes in the area to ensure the works are carried out in a manner to minimise the impact of the works on the parking spaces available for use.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what road improvement works are planned for the Seahill area of North Down.
(AQW 37997/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not have any road improvement proposals for the Seahill area of North Down within its current work programme.

Budgets and associated work programmes for 2015/16 and beyond have yet to be agreed.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what action he has taken on the alleged incident of Translink staff bullying a colleague with a learning disability, (ii) to provide a report into the outcome of any departmental investigation; and (iii) for an update on any planned action.
(AQW 38031/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has operational responsibility for these issues. This matter is currently the subject of an internal inquiry being undertaken by Translink as part of its established disciplinary procedures. As such it would be inappropriate to comment further until the investigation is complete. I am aware that Translink has been in contact with the individual and family in respect of this very distressing incident.

Department for Social Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether the resolution by the Assembly on 11 November 2013 to carry out a review of the range of insulation materials used in Housing Executive homes has been acted upon; and if so, whether any report has been produced following this review and if it will be published.
(AQW 36661/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive commissioned a small scale exploratory survey to determine the condition of its previously installed cavity wall insulation. As a result of the findings from that, a much larger piece of work is now being commissioned as part of the Stock Condition Survey of Housing Executive dwellings which will inform the future strategy and programmes required to address the issues.

Additionally, further research is being carried out in collaboration with Building Research Establishment (BRE) and other key partners called S-IMPLER to determine the best means of insulating the Housing Executive's "No Fines" stock. This research includes heat retention, sustainability and value for money analysis for the insulating materials being considered.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the current number; and (ii) the number in each of the last three years of social housing properties in each Northern Ireland Housing Executive district area.
(AQW 36963/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has provided Table 1 below which details: (i) the current number and (ii) the number in each of the last three financial years of their stock in each district office area.

The information is not available in the same format for Housing Association stock because my Department does not collect this data by Housing Executive district area. However, the information on stock is collected by Council area from Housing Associations through the Annual Regulatory Return for each year as at 31 March, which is published in November. Therefore, the information as at 31 March 2014 is not yet available nor are the current figures.

The Table 2 below provides details of Housing Association stock for 2011/12 and 2012/13 by Council area.

Table 1 – NIHE Stock

District	Stock 30/09/2014	Stock 31/03/2014	Stock 31/03/2013	Stock 31/03/2012
Belfast 1	2002	2004	2019	2024
Belfast 2	3443	3452	3461	3446
Belfast 3	3029	3037	3049	3049

District	Stock 30/09/2014	Stock 31/03/2014	Stock 31/03/2013	Stock 31/03/2012
Belfast 4	3350	3356	3275	3376
Belfast 5	3491	3497	3550	3561
Belfast 6	2897	2902	2910	2948
Belfast 7	3847	3877	4167	4284
Area Total	**22059**	**22125**	**22431**	**22688**
Bangor	2554	2649	2673	2668
Newtownards	3841	3849	3861	3872
Castlereagh	3725	3729	3743	3741
Lisburn (Antrim Street)	4297	4309	4339	4306
Lisburn (Dairy Farm)	1836	1838	1848	1846
Downpatrick	2365	2368	2379	2379
Area Total	**18618**	**18742**	**18843**	**18812**
Banbridge	1768	1772	1785	1789
Newry	3019	3035	3059	3068
Armagh	1903	1909	1924	1935
Lurgan	2498	2511	2581	2618
Portadown	1588	1593	1601	1605
Dungannon	1746	1753	1765	1764
Fermanagh	1974	1979	1998	2005
Area Total	**14496**	**14552**	**14713**	**14784**
Ballymena	2707	2714	2727	2754
Antrim	2348	2356	2377	2377
Newtownabbey 1	2150	2151	2168	2170
Newtownabbey 2	2118	2122	2138	2139
Carrick	1881	1891	1901	1903
Larne	1291	1293	1298	1356
Ballycastle	815	818	820	814
Ballymoney	1442	1444	1457	1461
Coleraine	3034	3041	3052	3043
Area Total	**17786**	**17830**	**17938**	**18017**
Waterloo	2163	2172	2182	2175
Waterside	2373	2385	2406	2416
Collon	2338	2343	2367	2365
Limavady	1436	1446	1457	1451
Magherafelt	1276	1281	1293	1294
Strabane	2146	2155	2176	2192
Omagh	1773	1778	1799	1801
Cookstown	1019	1021	1033	1039
Area Total	**14524**	**14581**	**14713**	**14733**

District	Stock 30/09/2014	Stock 31/03/2014	Stock 31/03/2013	Stock 31/03/2012
N.I. Total	**87483**	**87830**	**88638**	**89034**

Table 2 – Housing Association Stock

Council Area	2011/12		2012/13	
	Self Contained Units	Shared/Hostel Bedspaces	Self Contained Units	Shared/Hostel Bedspaces
Derry City Council	3583	555	3755	550
Limavady Borough Council	312	34	312	34
Coleraine Borough Council	614	245	629	241
Ballymoney Borough Council	169	62	144	62
Moyle District Council	118	24	138	24
Larne Borough Council	344	28	344	29
Ballymena Borough Council	558	79	565	79
Magherafelt District Council	178	21	207	21
Cookstown District Council	136	65	134	66
Strabane District Council	502	26	502	26
Omagh District Council	291	198	303	201
Fermanagh District Council	587	128	628	106
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	553	25	595	25
Craigavon Borough Council	1249	161	1268	174
Armagh City and District Council	399	72	424	81
Newry and Mourne District Council	997	245	1049	234
Banbridge District Council	382	38	382	37
Down District Council	639	79	747	90
Lisburn City Council	2302	132	2484	137
Antrim Borough Council	299	74	426	71
Newtownabbey Borough Council	743	122	795	122
Carrickfergus Borough Council	484	96	510	97
North Down Borough Council	884	470	901	476
Ards Borough Council	849	40	1003	43
Castlereagh Borough Council	684	61	716	61
Belfast City Council	12168	1344	12773	1351
Totals	**30024**	**4424**	**31734**	**4438**

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 Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many Housing Executive applicants (i) are currently living in a hostel; (ii) have been living in a hostel for longer than twelve months; and (iii) have been living in a hostel for longer than two years. **(AQW 37366/11-15)**

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has provided the following information in relation to:

(i) Hostel accommodation placements at 14 October 2014:

	Total
Housing Executive hostels	69
Voluntary Sector hostels	435
Total	504

(ii) Hostel placements longer than twelve months but less than two years:

	Total
Housing Executive hostels	23
Voluntary Sector hostels	130
Total	**153**

(iii) Hostel placements longer than two years:

	Total
Housing Executive hostels	8
Voluntary Sector hostels	42
Total	50

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Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what information is given to homeless applicants by the Housing Executive concerning their rights, entitlements and available services.
(AQW 37367/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that homeless applicants are provided with the following advice and assistance:

Two detailed leaflets which are also available on the Housing Executive's website.

- Homelessness Explained and
- Homeless? How to request a review of a decision

Housing / Homeless Information Pack

In accordance with my Department's Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance Regulations (NI) 2011 the Housing Executive also provides the following advice:

- Housing advice
- Advice on social issues
- Financial advice
- Advice on legal procedures and services.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the points awarded to a Housing Executive applicants as a result of living in hostel accommodation.
(AQW 37417/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested is published and can be found on page 28 of the Housing Selection Scheme document on the Housing Executive's website at the following link:

http://www.nihe.gov.uk/housing_selection_scheme_rules.pdf

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how the Housing Executive record 'repeat homelessness'; and whether there are plans to change how it is recorded.
(AQW 37502/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that it records all instances of homelessness on its Housing Management System which retains a detailed history of an individual's or household's homeless presentations. The Housing Executive has no plans to change how this information is recorded.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the action taken by his Department to recover more than £800,000 awarded to Trinity Housing in 2008 for an Advanced Land Purchase in Crossgar; (ii) the current status of this grant; (iii) the steps he will now take to recover this money; and (ii) whether his Department has the power to seize the land in question.
(AQW 37536/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) The issue of recoupment is an operational matter for the Housing Executive as the managers of the Social Housing Development Programme.

(ii) The current status of the grant is that it was paid by the Housing Executive to Trinity Housing and subsequently expended by Trinity to purchase the site.

(iii) The decision to recover is one for the Housing Executive to take and I understand that recovery proceedings have now been initiated.

(iv) My Department has the power to vest land. However, given the problems in Trinity developing the site arise from not being able to obtain planning permission there is no benefit in having the land in departmental ownership. The best way to put this back on a proper footing is for the grant to be recovered and used elsewhere.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many residential units have been transferred to community organisations to set up social enterprises in the last five years.
(AQW 37607/11-15)

Mr Storey: There have been no residential units transferred to community organisations to set up social enterprises in the last five years.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development, given that the delay in the legislative progress of the Welfare Reform Bill has resulted in the stalling of engagement events proposed by the Social Security Agency to educate the health sector on the medical evidence which may be requested to support a claimant's Personal Independence Payment, whether he would consider providing an interim update to all GPs in relation to provision of appropriate medical evidence in support of Disability Living Allowance claims.
(AQW 37626/11-15)

Mr Storey: Where medical evidence is sought to support a claim for Disability Living Allowance, a standard report is issued to the GP to request the information and is designed to collect only the relevant clinical evidence. The covering note which accompanies all GP report requests explains the purpose of the report, advises that no examination is required and that the information can be completed from their knowledge of the patient where appropriate and their medical records. Given that there are no plans to change the current arrangements for how GP's provide reports in support of Disability Living Allowance claimants there are no plans to update the GP regarding completing medical reports for Disability Living Allowance. Engagement events are planned with GPs in relation to the introduction of Personal Independence Payments once agreement has been reached on the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 36657/11-15, for a breakdown of the £66m by areas of responsibility, as set out on his Department's website under (a) Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for voluntary and community organisations; (b) Urban Development Grants; (c) Management of the Laganside; (d) Belfast Streets Ahead; (e) Strategic Regeneration Frameworks; (f) Comprehensive Development Schemes; and (g) Area Project Team Grants.
(AQW 37639/11-15)

Mr Storey: The £66 million proposed for transfer to Councils is an indicative allocation based on my Department's 2014-2015 baseline for Urban Regeneration and Community Development. A decision on the final allocation will be taken in the context of the Executive's 2015-16 Budget and subject to a due diligence review.

The allocation model is not based on specific programmes but on the following broad themes:

- Tackling disadvantage £27,490,000
- Physical regeneration £24,440,000
- Community development £5,287,000
- Laganside £2,592,000
- Staff & administrative Costs £6,188,000

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.

Assembly Area	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 \Vest	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
MidUlster	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,%0	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 G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the public housing shortfall in East Londonderry; and how the current budgetary crisis is affecting his Department's ability to address the shortfall.
(AQW 37698/11-15)

Mr Storey: Table 1 below, provided by the Housing Executive, identifies the current approved Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2014/15 – 2016/17 for East Londonderry Parliamentary Constituency, set against the Housing Need projections for 2013-2018 for the areas in which the schemes are located.

Table 2 below, also provided by the Housing Executive, identifies the shortfall between the current Housing Need projections and the current SHDP in East Londonderry.

The adjustments to NI Block Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit as a result of the delay in implementing welfare reform in Northern Ireland will have a negative impact on spending on public services, however my Department is making best efforts to direct cuts towards those areas of spend which will have least impact on service delivery.

Table 1: Programmed Social Housing Sites in East Londonderry Parliamentary Constituency

Housing Need Assessment Area	Housing Need Projection 2013-2018	Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Dungiven	20	Apex Housing	Hass Road, Dungiven Phase 2 (Transfer)	Dungiven	New Build	General Needs	Rural	18*	2014/15	2016/17
Castlerock	6	Apex Housing	Temple Park (Transfer)	Castlerock	New Build	General Needs	Rural	5**	2014/15	2015/16
Coleraine town	150	Fold	Society Street	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	Urban	22	2014/15	2015/16
		Fold	55 Mountsandel Road	Coleraine	New Build	Elderly – Cat. 1	Urban	5	2014/15	2014/15
		Apex Housing	31a Hazelbank Road	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	Urban	11	2015/16	2016/17
		Apex Housing	Chapelfield, Laurel Hill Road	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	Urban	18	2017/18	2018/19
Total								79		

* 19 units are now supported by Housing Executive Regional Planning instead of the published 18 units at Hass Road, Phase 2.

** 6 units are now supported by Housing Executive Regional Planning instead of the published 5 units at Temple Park.

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Table 2

Housing Need Assessment Area	Housing Need Projection 2013-2018	Comments
Coleraine	94	NIHE received bids from housing associations for 7 schemes in Coleraine for the revised Programme
Portstewart	85	NIHE received bids from housing associations for 7 schemes in Portstewart for the revised Programme
Portrush	80	NIHE received bids from housing associations for 5 schemes in Portrush for the revised Programme
Limavady	20	
Portballintrae	12	12 units are currently on-site at Darkfort Drive (Phase 2)
Greysteel	10	
Magilligan	5	Includes the rural areas of Bellarena, Drumavally and Magilligan
Aghanloo (Artikelly)	5	NIHE has carried out a Site Investigation Study in Artikelly. A site has since been registered for 6 social housing units, on the basis on this Study.
Dungiven	1	
Total Unmet Need:	**312**	

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Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how much annually managed expenditure has been paid in (i) Pension Credits; and (ii) Working Family Tax Credits in each of the last four years.
(AQW 37708/11-15)

Mr Storey: The amount of Pension Credit expenditure paid by the Department for Social Development in the last four years is disclosed in the table below.

	2013-14 £m	**2012-13 £m**	**2011-12 £m**	**2010-11 £m**
Pension Credit Expenditure	£325	£334	£349	£352

The Department for Social Development does not pay Working Family Tax Credits. This is administered by HM Revenue and Customs.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) individuals; and (ii) organisations have been investigated by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland since its establishment.
(AQW 37709/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) Information has not been recorded on the number of individuals investigated by the Charity Commission since its establishment.

(ii) Some 296 organisations have been investigated by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland since its establishment. Organisations may be counted more than once due to limitations in the Charity Commission's recording process.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) sites; and (ii) the size of the sites in County Fermanagh that are under the control of (a) his Department; (b) the Housing Executive; and (c) housing associations, which could be developed for social housing.
(AQW 37710/11-15)

Mr Storey:

a. I can advise that the detail of the sites and size of sites under the control of my department, the Housing Executive and Housing Associations in County Fermanagh can be broken down as follows:

b. My Department through the Regional Development Office holds a site of 17.2 acres at the former Grosvenor Barracks in Enniskillen. Planning permission for the regeneration of the site for housing is ongoing.

The following sites are currently in the ownership of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and are retained to meet social housing need.

Location	**Site Area (Hectares)**
Cavandale, Enniskillen	0.54
Brownhill, Irvinestown	1.80
Baragh Gardens, Ballinamallard	0.78
Erne Park, Kesh	0.30
25 Trasna Park, Enniskillen	0.04
Knockninny Park, Derrylin	0.17
Ardess Villas, Kesh	0.08

c. The following two sites are currently within the ownership of Housing Associations.

Location	**Site Area (Hectares)**	**No of unit**	**Housing Association**
Lisolvan Park , Brookeborough	0.0386	1	Apex Housing
Carran Mews, Enniskillen	0.5830	16	Ulidia Housing

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been barred from operating a charity due to an investigation by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland or court conviction.
(AQW 37768/11-15)

Mr Storey: One person has been barred from operating a charity due to an investigation by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has not been notified by the courts of any people barred from operating a charity due to a court conviction.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the investigatory powers of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37769/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has a range of investigatory powers (mainly information powers and powers to act for the protection of charities) which are set out in the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

These include powers to: institute inquiries; call for documents and search records; disclose information to, or receive information from, any public body or office-holder; act for the protection of charities; suspend or remove trustees, officers, agents or employees from the exercise of that person's office or employment and also from membership of a charity; make provision with respect to the functions to be discharged by an interim manager appointed for a charity; give specific directions for the protection of a charity; direct the application of charity property; determine membership of a charity; enter and search premises (where certain conditions are met and a warrant has been issued) and order an investigation and audit of the accounts of a charitable company.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many compliants regarding the conduct of (i) an individual; and (ii) organisations have been received by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37770/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) Information on the number of complaints regarding the conduct of individuals received by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is not recorded.

(ii) The number of complaints regarding the conduct of organisations received by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in each of the last three years is as follows:

- 2011-12: 106
- 2012-13: 67
- 2013-14: 107

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Urban Villages project.
(AQW 37778/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Together: Building a United Community Strategy published by OFMdFM in May 2013, outlined that 4 Urban Villages would be established to create and stabilise change within communities. The first two Urban Villages announced by OFMdFM in March 2014 are Colin and the Newtownards Road.

The delivery of the Urban Village programme is currently being led by my Department with support from OFMdFM and resources have been secured from the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). My Department is currently working with SIB to engage stakeholders. Both projects are progressing and are at different stages of development.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development when the last external cyclical maintenance scheme was carried out by the Housing Executive in Lagan Valley.
(AQW 37826/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the last external cyclical maintenance scheme carried out in the Lagan Valley constituency was at Rushmore and Knockburn estates in Lisburn in April 2011. It involved work to 132 dwellings with a contract value of £312,000.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the delayed roof scheme for Grove Park, Culcavy.
(AQW 37828/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has confirmed that this scheme went on site on 6 October 2014 and is expected to take 13 weeks to complete. Work includes roof replacement to 23 dwellings and six garages at Grove Park, Culcavy and Dunbeg Park, Hillsborough.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what engagement his Department has had with the Irish Football Association, Ulster Rugby and GAA to develop community relations.
(AQO 6906/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department for Social Development has provided financial support from a Volunteering Innovation Fund and has had initial meetings with the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby and has had preliminary meetings to discuss a partnership arrangement to promote benefits uptake.

Financial support of £487k, covering the three year period April 2012 – March 2015 was provided for a 'Sport in the Community' project which focuses on volunteer development and community capacity building. This project involves the three organisations working closely in partnership for a range of joint development programmes which include shared learning workshops, club development programmes, community outreach initiatives, neighbourhood renewal objectives and volunteer training and development.

The Social Security Agency is seeking to promote the Make the Call benefits advice line through these sporting organisations community networks. Community level partnerships have been identified as key levers in reaching people with benefit entitlement. Engagement with these organisations is still at an early stage.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to introduce measures to set up the Warm Home Discount Scheme.
(AQW 37860/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Warm Homes Discount Scheme is a four year scheme operating in Great Britain which commenced in April 2011 and is scheduled to run to March 2015. The purpose of the scheme is to help low-income and vulnerable households with energy costs. The scheme is specifically aimed at those on a low income or receiving particular types of pension credit. The UK Government informs suppliers which households to support through sharing limited data between the Department for Work and Pensions and the energy suppliers.

The Warm Homes Discount Scheme is covered by legislation which does not apply in Northern Ireland. Responsibility for introducing any corresponding legislation in Northern Ireland would be a matter for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The Department for Social Development already offers energy efficiency improvement schemes for low income households through the Warm Homes Scheme, Boiler Replacement Scheme and the recently launched Affordable Warmth Scheme.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the legislative provision he plans, including the timescale that provision will be brought forward, to reflect the passage of the Pensions Act 2014.
(AQW 37869/11-15)

Mr Storey: I have secured the agreement of the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce a Pensions Bill in the Northern Ireland Assembly which will replicate many of the provisions of the Pensions Act 2014.

Subject to the agreement of the Speaker, it is my intention to introduce the Pensions Bill in the house on 10 November.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the correspondence he has had with older people to ensure they are availing of all applicable social security entitlements.
(AQW 37949/11-15)

Mr Storey: Since 2005, my Department has delivered annual benefit uptake programmes using a range of evidence based approaches to improving uptake. These have included direct and indirect targeting, advertising and community outreach activities.

Investment in this work has generated over £67 million in additional annual income for people across Northern Ireland. Of this, over £50 million has been generated for more than 15,500 older people.

The 2014/15 Benefit Uptake Programme is currently underway and again focuses mainly on older people. The programme includes a direct targeting exercise aimed at providing 25,000 older people with an opportunity to receive a full benefit entitlement check. In October 2014, letters were issued to those older people who

have been identified, as potentially missing out on benefits and this will continue until the end of January 2015

The annual 'Make the Call' regional advertising and promotion campaign also recommenced in October 2014. This is focused on older people and benefits greatly from the direct participation of Claire Keatinge, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland. Older people can contact the 'Make the Call' Benefits Advice Line where experienced advisors will assess their entitlement to benefits, services and other government supports. The advisor can also provide help and assist with making a claim and a visit from a Community Outreach Officer can be arranged if required.

As part of its daily business the Social Security Agency also provides information and advice on a full range of social security benefits to ensure that people, including older people, are aware of their entitlements.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) why the mandatory registration of letting agents with a redress scheme has not been introduced; and (ii) what consideration his Department has given to the introduction of such a scheme.
(AQW 37950/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department does not have any regulatory powers in relation to letting agents in Northern Ireland. The power contained in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 which allowed a redress scheme to be introduced in England does not extend to Northern Ireland.

The Housing Strategy Action Plan commits my Department to commence a review of private rented sector regulation during 2014/15 with consultation on proposals planned to take place during 2015/16. Preliminary work has begun and the regulation of letting agents is something that may be considered as part of this review. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will be consulted.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 29667/11-15, to detail for each individual council area the number of complaints and disputes received by their environmental health departments relating to the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 which (a) did not result in court action; and (b) did result in court action in the last five years; and for his assessment of this level of enforcement activity.
(AQW 37953/11-15)

Mr Storey: The number of complaints and disputes received by each council's environmental health departments relating to the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 which (a) did not result in court action; and (b) did result in court action in the last five years, are detailed in the table below.

	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		
Council	**Court action**	**No court action**	**Court action**	**No court action**	**Court action**	**No court action**	**Court action**	**No court action**	**Court Action**	**No court action**	**Overall Totals**
Antrim Borough	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	7
Ards Borough	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	5
Armagh City	0	1	0	2	1	28	0	12	0	10	54
Ballymena Borough	0	6	0	2	0	29	1	63	3	50	154
Ballymoney Borough	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Banbridge District	1	5	1	42	0	29	0	14	0	8	100
Belfast City	2	56	0	64	1	65	0	49	3	143	383
Carrickfergus Borough	0	5	0	15	2	1	1	0	0	17	41
Castlereagh Borough	0	4	0	0	0	11	0	8	0	36	59
Coleraine Borough	2	0	0	1	1	41	0	47	0	59	151
Cookstown District	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	12	0	8	32
Craigavon Borough	0	6	0	10	0	10	0	10	0	7	43
Derry City	0	0	0	14	0	8	0	20	0	9	51
Down District	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	5
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	4
Fermanagh District	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	5	0	1	11
Larne Borough	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	4
Limavady Borough	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Lisburn City	0	40	2	46	0	27	0	45	0	6	166
Magherafelt District	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	26	35
Moyle District	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Newry & Mourne District	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newtownabbey Borough	0	5	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	12	20

Council	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		
	Court action	No court action	Court action	No court action	Court action	No court action	Court action	No court action	Court Action	No court action	Overall Totals
North Down Borough	1	4	0	5	0	5	1	6	0	20	42
Omagh District	0	7	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	1	13
Strabane District	0	0	0	6	0	35	0	21	0	1	63
Total	**7**	**145**	**5**	**215**	**6**	**311**	**4**	**325**	**8**	**425**	**1451**

The number of complaints/disputes does not necessarily mean that an offence has been committed. Where an offence may have been committed in the majority of cases it is rectified without the need for enforcement action.

My officials will continue to work with councils to ensure that, where appropriate, enforcement action is taken.

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 Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the sufficiency of the parking in Rosnarick Close, Derrygonnelly; and what plans are in place to increase the number of spaces for Housing Executive tenants.
(AQW 37955/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has no plans to increase the number of spaces available as the area in question is 100% owner occupied.

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total number of new social housing units built in (i) North; (ii) South; (iii) East; and (iv) West Belfast in the last five years.
(AQW 37994/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Tables below, provided by the Housing Executive, detail the new social housing units completed in each of the last five years in each of the Belfast Parliamentary constituencies:

Table 1 – North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency

Completion Year	New Build
2009/10	221
2010/11	179
2011/12	167
2012/13	150
2013/14	63
Total	**780**

Table 2 – South Belfast Parliamentary Constituency

Completion Year	New Build
2009/10	62
2010/11	104
2011/12	67
2012/13	48
2013/14	151
Total	**432**

Table 3 – East Belfast Parliamentary Constituency

Completion Year	New Build
2009/10	140
2010/11	132
2011/12	33
2012/13	19
2013/14	92
Total	**416**

Table 4 – West Belfast Parliamentary Constituency

Completion Year	New Build
2009/10	76
2010/11	30
2011/12	101
2012/13	145
2013/14	290
Total	**642**

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.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission how much has been spent on art each year since May 2007; and what is the current value of the Assembly's collection.
(AQW 37723/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): As requested, I can confirm that the following art works have been purchased by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission since 2007:

2007

No Items were purchased.

2008

No Items were purchased.

2009

No Items were purchased.

2010

No items were purchased.

2011

Portrait of the former First Minister, the Rt Honourable Lord Trimble of Lisnagarvey, painted by David Nolan. The painting is oil on canvas, it currently hangs on the first floor of Parliament Buildings and cost £3,800.

Portrait of the former Deputy First Minister, Mark Durkan, painted by Conor Walton. The painting is oil on canvas, it currently hangs on the first floor of Parliament Buildings and cost £5,000.

Portrait of the former Speaker, Eileen Bell, painted by Conor Walton. The painting is oil on canvas, it currently hangs in the Members' Dining Room and cost £5,000.

2012

No items were purchased.

2013

11 drawings of former Members of the Northern Ireland Parliament, drawn by Rowel Friers. These are sketches on paper which are currently being restored and cost £2,500.

2014

No items were purchased.

The above items represent the entire art holdings of the Assembly. Their value is as stated.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 37557/11-15, how many passes are currently held by (i) British Irish Secretariat staff; and (ii) US Consulate staff; and why staff from the British Irish Secretariat and the US Consulate are entitled to passes to the Northern Ireland Assembly.
(AQW 38188/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Seven members of the British Irish Secretariat and five US Consulate staff have been issued with Northern Ireland Assembly passes. The issue of these passes was approved by the Speaker's office.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what steps are in place to ensure that pass holders who no longer hold their qualifying post are relieved of their passes.
(AQW 38189/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): When a member of Assembly Secretariat staff is due to leave the Assembly, arrangements are put in place for retrieval of their Assembly identity pass prior to their last day at work.

Where it becomes known that any other person who is an Assembly pass holder will no longer be entitled to continue to hold such a pass, contact is made with that person where possible, so that arrangements can be made to withdraw the pass.

In all such instances, passes are electronically and remotely invalidated by Facilities Directorate.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 14 November 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Titanic Showdown boxing event held on Saturday 6 September 2014, (i) what financial contribution in the way of sponsorship was made to the event by their Department; and (ii) what representations regarding the event were received by their Department from (a) public representatives; (b) Ministers; (c) Special Advisors; and (d) lobby interests.
(AQW 35790/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): OFMDFM made no financial contribution to the Titanic Showdown boxing event nor did the Department receive any representations from public representatives, Ministers, Special Advisers or lobby interests.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 22188/11-15, whether external organisations have delivered or arranged visits at any time to the Maze site since May 2007; and if so, to detail the (i) dates; and (ii) organisations.
(AQW 36144/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: External organisations do not deliver or arrange visits to the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Organisations interested in visiting the site must apply to the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation (MLK DC).

If approved, visits are delivered by MLK DC staff. Prior to the establishment of the MLK DC on 10 September 2012 this service was provided by OFMDFM staff.

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proportion of the Social Investment Fund budget is contractually committed on capital and revenue projects.
(AQO 6860/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding has been allocated to 23 projects totalling a commitment of £34.4million or 43% of the Social Investment Fund £80 million budget.

Mr G Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the progress being made on the United Youth programme of Together: Building a United Community.
(AQO 6861/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Together: Building a United Community is the Executive's strategic framework for improving good relations and recognises 'the need to improve attitudes amongst other young people' and 'to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations'.

One of the seven core headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the creation of 10,000 one year placements which includes the development of an employment and youth volunteering programme (United Youth Programme) which builds capacity for leadership and improves community relations.

To date there has been comprehensive and detailed engagement with youth related organisations and young people themselves to ensure the programme has maximum buy-in and consensus. This culminated in the delivery of a United Youth Programme Design Day in January of this year at the Waterfront Hall, hosted by OFMDFM and a further youth design residential in September 2014 in Corrymeela.

The Department for Employment and Learning is now leading on the development and implementation of the United Youth Programme and has established a design team to take this forward. Membership of the design team includes representation from the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department for Social Development, OFMDFM, the Department of Education, Community Relations Council, Youthnet, Youth Council, International Fund for Ireland, Public Health Agency and Education and Library Boards.

Selected pilot projects will roll out in January 2015 to the 16-24 age group who are not in education, employment or training. By summer 2016 the programme will extend the eligible age range to 14-24 age group.

The resources necessary to allow the pilot programmes to proceed have been secured and it is anticipated that the programme will be offered to approximately 300 young people in the 16 to 24 age group.

Ms McGahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the specific needs of rural communities are being taken into account in the development of the Childcare Strategy.
(AQO 6862/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The first phase of the Bright Start Childcare Strategy includes a number of Key First Actions aimed at addressing rural childcare needs. These include actions to create up to 1,000 new childminder places in rural areas and up to 1,000 centre-based school age childcare places serving rural communities.

Work to develop the Bright Start rural childminder initiative is currently underway. With regard to school age childcare, a first round of applications to the Bright Start School Age Grant Scheme has resulted in grants worth more than £400,000 being approved for rural childcare settings. These will, over a three year period, support some 360 childcare places aimed at children in the 4-14 age group.

Work to develop the full Bright Start Childcare Strategy is currently underway. Officials are engaging with key childcare stakeholders, region-wide, on the content of the Strategy. When this is complete, we will proceed to public consultation with a view to launching the final Strategy in the new year.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many business start ups the Social Investment Fund has supported in areas of deprivation in East Londonderry, since 2012.
(AQW 37829/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: None of the three projects prioritised by the Derry/Londonderry Zone Steering Group within their funding allocation are focused on supporting business start-ups.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Social Investment Fund has been used to support the community/voluntary sector as a means of targeting educational underachievement and skills shortage in East Londonderry, since 2012.
(AQW 37831/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the projects prioritised by the Derry/Londonderry Zone Steering Group in their Area Plan is the Community Work Programme. This project has been designed to improve employment prospects for the long term unemployed and particularly the under 25s. It aims to provide tailored training to participants and subsequent placements with a view to linking training and education to securing employment. Officials are currently working with the lead partner to finalise letter of offer conditions so that it can progress to delivery across the Derry/Londonderry zone.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Social Investment Fund has supported individuals and families facing economic hardship in East Londonderry since 2012.
(AQW 37833/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Three projects were prioritised by the Derry/Londonderry Zone Steering Group within the budget allocated to this zone for delivery of the area plan.

One of these projects, the Community Work Programme has been approved for funding and is subject to an agreed letter of offer. Officials are currently working with the lead partner to finalise letter of offer conditions so that it can progress to delivery shortly. Therefore, whilst delivery has not yet commenced and it is not possible at this stage to determine the impact given the focus of this project on training and employment, it is expected that on implementation it will provide support to the long term unemployed and particularly the under 25s, which are likely to include families and individuals facing economic hardship.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the current number of staff employed in their Department, broken down by the sections or areas in which they work.
(AQW 37943/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At 27 October 2014 there were 367 staff employed in the Department; the breakdown by business area is shown below.

Directorate	Number of staff (headcount)
Office of the Head of the Civil Service	7
Resources, Regeneration, International Relations & Institutional Review	99
Executive Services	55

Directorate	Number of staff (headcount)
Executive Information Service	36
North/South Ministerial Council	12
Equality & Strategy	124
Office of the Legislative Council	17
Planning Appeals Commission and Water Appeals Commission (PACWAC)	15
Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments	2
Total	**367**

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 37210/11-15, to explain the rationale behind the value of the contract ranging between £56,000,000 and £65,000,000, excluding VAT; and how this figure was derived. **(AQW 37874/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The figures given in the Notice of Intended Procurement published in the Official Journal of the European Union advised prospective suppliers that the estimated value of the contract ranged between £56,000,000 and £65,000,000 GBP (excluding VAT) for a period of up to 15 years.

The contract will cover the development of the new system - including testing, support, migration of data from the existing systems, and managing the transition to the new system, as well as on-going maintenance and upgrades for up to 15 years from Award of Contract.

NIFAIS will provide an efficient replacement for APHIS, which is central to the delivery of the majority of the Veterinary Service's work, for example the TB programme. The traceability which NIFAIS will provide will underpin the assurance of our livestock produce in local and export markets, and as such is also central to the achievement of the aims of "Going for Growth".

Business Cases are compiled under HM Treasury guidelines and the estimated costings used must include an "Optimism Bias (OB)" factor, to accommodate and make allowance for the range of risks to which all complex ICT projects are exposed. The original Outline Business Case (OBC) for NIFAIS was completed in 2009. The estimated costs for the new system were developed through detailed discussions with the ICT industry based on pricing the current functionality of the APHIS system. The OBC was reviewed and updated in 2013 to reflect additional APHIS functionality, potential costs of implementing an exit agreement from the current system and increased ICT development costs. These costs also included "OB" for NIFAIS which was calculated using the Mott McDonald Model, and applied at 62% of the capital costings.

A number of interested companies have now been short-listed and invited to participate in Competitive Dialogue from 4th November. As commercial confidentiality is key to the Department obtaining value for money and the maintenance of competitiveness, fairness and trust, it would not be appropriate to place any more detailed information into the public domain at this time. However my officials would be very happy to meet with you and explain the detail behind the Mott McDonald and the other calculations underpinning the Outline Business Case in confidence at a time of your convenience.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 37210/11-15, to detail all costs already incurred in relation to the new Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System. **(AQW 37876/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The NIFAIS programme was formally constituted in 4th July 2011.

Costs since then till end September 2014 total £1,480,163 for programme staff, and Programme Costs of £309,288, made up of £241,451 for specialist procurement support from Central Procurement Directorate, and £67,837 which includes costs associated with mandatory gateway reviews undertaken.

The programme has also incurred Consultancy Costs of £252,870 for the provision of specialist legal, financial and commercial support (including consultancy support for the revision of the Outline Business Case and development and agreement of the APHIS exit agreement).

NIFAIS will provide an efficient replacement for APHIS, which is central to the delivery of the majority of the Veterinary Service's work, for example the TB programme. The traceability which NIFAIS will provide will underpin the assurance of our livestock produce in local and export markets, and as such is also central to the achievement of the aims of "Going for Growth".

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 37632/11-15, when the application for the appointment of Private River Watchers was received by the Loughs Agency.
(AQW 38025/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have been advised by the Loughs Agency that the application for the appointment of Private River Watchers was received by the Loughs Agency on 21 March 2014.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made on the PEDU recommendations to move Rivers Agency into the Department for Regional Development and the establishment of a flood alert and forecast service.
(AQW 38041/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As I have stated before, I am not opposed, in principle, to Rivers Agency moving to the Department for Regional Development, if it improves the management of flood risk, but I believe this issue should be considered in the wider context of a review of Government Departments.

Since the publication of the PEDU report, there have been significant developments in relation to flood warning and informing, which are of benefit to the north of Ireland. Formal engagement between Rivers Agency and the Met Office now takes place routinely to inform severe weather warnings. Water level alerts, where appropriate, are also being installed to be used by selected communities to improve the overall response to flooding. Community engagement in flood-prone areas is helping to inform property owners about flood risk and how to improve their resilience to flood events.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount of funding paid to reimburse the use of Smart Passes for rural transport, in each of the last four completed financial years.
(AQW 38090/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Working in conjunction with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) my Department through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme continues to fund passenger trips on Rural Community Transport Partnership vehicles, across the north of Ireland, for elderly and disabled rural dwellers that hold a SmartPass. The following DARD funding has been provided in each of the last four completed financial years:

Financial Year	**10/11**	**11/12**	**12/13**	**13/14**
Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) Funding	£315,000	£400,000	£540,000	£570,000

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in her Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38151/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There has been some initial discussion with the Public Sector Reform Division. However this is at an early stage of development and no savings have been realised to date.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether her Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38238/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development participates in the NICS wide Cycle to Work Scheme.

(ii) Staff can join the scheme at any time throughout the year.

(iii) The NICS Cycle to Work Scheme does not extend to NDPBs as the NICS is not their employer. However the Department of Finance and Personnel, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has secured any commitment from the Chinese authorities that they will accept red meat from Northern Ireland, similar to that secured by the Irish Government.
(AQW 38435/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials are working towards this objective, however the Chinese are subject to resource constraints as we are, and negotiations to secure approval to export red meat from the north of Ireland will take time. In addition, unlike the position in the south, the north was subject to a ban on British and north of Ireland beef exports which Europe lifted in 2006.

Therefore in order to secure commitment on market access, the Chinese authorities must be assured of the high standard of our TSEs (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies) control regimes. Therefore, similar to the process adopted by the south, the Export Certification Partnership for Britain and the north of Ireland has entered into a Memorandum of

Understanding on TSEs with China which includes the establishment of a TSE working group. An expert on TSEs, based in AFBI Veterinary Sciences Division, will contribute to this group.

It is anticipated that this working group will meet in the coming months with the aim of providing evidence-based assurances to China on our TSE controls and to provide evidence of our robust traceability. This is an important step in this labour-intensive procedure. To advance the process, I am sending one of my senior veterinary officials, supported by staff from the recently established north of Ireland Bureau in China, to carry out export negotiations in Beijing in mid-November.

I will also continue to liaise with the high-level contacts I have made during my visits to China to maintain momentum on trade negotiations across all sectors.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding provided by the Ulster-Scots Agency to the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies at the University of Ulster in each year since the Institute was established in January 2001.
(AQW 37341/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The table below shows the funding provided by the Ulster-Scots Agency each year from 2001 until 2010 to the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies:

Year	Amount	Description
2001	100,000.00 10,000.00 **Total 110,000.00**	Match Funding for IUSS Programme Costs Ulster and Scotland Shared Heritage Conference
2002	100,000.00 50,000.00 6,000.00 **Total 156,000.00**	Match Funding for IUSS Programme Costs International Research Network Seminar and Recital Series
2003	100,000.00 50,000.00 5,000.00 2,291.00 3,546.72 4,744.00 **Total 165,581.72**	Match Funding for IUSS Programme Costs International Research Network International Burns Conference Laggan Army Conference New Zealand Lecture Series Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School
2004	100,000.00 50,000.00 1,348.42 4,449.90 4,744.00 **Total 160,542.32**	Match Funding for IUSS Programme Costs International Research Network Enlightenment Seminar Siege of Derry Research Project Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School
2005	100,000.00 50,000.00 5,032.00 **Total 155,032.00**	Match Funding for IUSS Programme Costs International Research Network Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School
2006	100,000.00 50,000.00 8,013.07 **Total 158,013.07**	Match Funding for IUSS Programme Costs International Research Network Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School
2007	150,000.00 3,503.46 500.00 **Total 154,003.46**	Match Funding for IUSS (inc International Research Network) Plantation and Private Enterprise Conference Review
2008	150,000.00 **Total 150,000.00**	Match Funding for IUSS (inc International Research Network)

Year	Amount	Description
2009	187,474.00 **Total 187,474.00**	Match Funding for IUSS (inc International Research Network)
2010	112,526.00 **Total 112,526.00**	Match Funding for IUSS (inc International Research Network)

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of fishing licences and permits issued to people with a disability in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38095/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The number of fishing licences and permits issued to people with a disability in each of the last three years is detailed below:

	Disabled Licences issued	Disabled Permits issued
2011	151 Coarse / 1,739 Game	1,713
2012	134 Coarse / 1,701 Game	1,650
2013	165 Coarse / 1,651 Game	1,626

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what effect the cuts to Libraries NI will have on each library in North Belfast.
(AQW 38110/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As a result of the need to make in-year budget reductions, Libraries NI is currently implementing a number of savings measures. These include releasing agency staff who covered staff vacancies, maternity leave, secondments, special projects, annual leave and sickness. In addition, all libraries in the North of Ireland, including those in North Belfast, may be affected by a reduction in expenditure on new stock. Some smaller branches may, as well, be subject to temporary ad hoc closures.

With effect from 3rd November 2014, Libraries NI has also changed or reduced the weekly opening hours, for the time being, of four libraries in North Belfast (ie Belfast Central, Cloughfern, Glengormley and Rathcoole). Weekly opening hours remain unchanged at three other libraries in the area (ie Ardoyne, Chichester and Grove). Details of the changes to weekly opening hours announced by Libraries NI for each library in North Belfast are set out in the Annex attached.

Annex

Library	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Total wklyhrs	Comment
Ardoyne Library	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-6.00	9.30-2.00	9:30-1:00	37	No change
Belfast Central	9.00-8.00	9.00-5.30	9.00-5.30	9.00-8.00	9.00-5.30	9.00-4.30	55	Reduced by 2 hours - no late night Tues or Wed. Open change to 9am rather than 9.30 am.
Chichester	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	12.30-8.00	12.30-5.30	9.30-1.00	40	No change.
Cloughfern	Closed	11.00-1.00 2.00-6.00	Closed	10.00-1.00 2.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-1.00 2.00-5.00	18	Same hours - pattern change on Tues. Previous 2-8pm.
Glengormley	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	48	Reduced by 9 hours - no longer late night on Mon, Tues or Wed.
Grove	9.30-5.30	12.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	12.30-8.00	9.30-5.30	9.30-1.00	40	No change.

Library	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Total wklyhrs	Comment
Rathcoole	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	1.00-5.30	9.30-1.00	40	Same hours - pattern change on Thurs -open all day, no late night.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the budget of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund in each year since it was established; and how much of this was allocated.
(AQW 38125/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Irish Language Broadcast Fund has an annual budget of £3 million and it has remained at this level since the Fund became operational in 2005.

Of this, £2.5 million is spent on Irish language moving image content and £0.5 million is spent on training programmes and overheads.

The allocated annual budget is spent every year.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the films and programmes, and the relevant production companies, which were supported by the Irish Language Broadcast Fund in each year since it was established.
(AQW 38126/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have attached a list of the information you have requested at Annex A.

Annex A

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2005 Round 1	Adharca Fada	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Ceol na bhFánaithe	Sonas Productions
	Idir Dhá Chomhairle	Millennium Gold
	Imeacht na nIarlaí	BBC
	Marú	Stirling
	Saol Úr in Albain	Imagine Media
	Seanchaí	Westway
	Teenage Cics	Abú Media
	Punk Angel	Vinegar Hill
2005 Round 2	An Stuif Ceart	Ikandi
	Comhraic	Zoogon
	MPH	Tús Úr
	Ní Ghaeilgóir mé	Green Inc
	Tadhaigín an tEitleán	Zoogon
	Tomás Ó Fiaich	Aisling Ghéar
2005 round 3	Béal Feirste Saor Ó Thuaidh	Stirling
	Deis Roc	Tobar Productions
2005 Development Funding	Fibín	Fibín Ltd
	Na Dodaí	Imagine Media
	When I was eleven	Vinegar Hill

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2006 Round 1	Adharca Fada	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Kings	Newgrange Pictures
	MPH2	Tús Úr
	Na Dodaí	Imagine Media
	Ceird an Cheoil 2	Sonas Productions
	Nerve Centre	Nerve Centre
	Oireachtas	Zoogon
	Sceal Ó Thuaidh	Zoogon
	Scil GAA	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Toraíocht Taisce	Ikandi
2006 Round 2	Doodlebops	Zoogon
	Dorn lán Dúil	Vinegar Hill
	Scéalta Sráide	Stirling
	Trí Shuile an Chait 1	Tobar Productions
2006 Round 3	Marú 2	Stirling
	Na Dodaí 2	Imagine Media
	Deis Roc 2	Tobar & Green Inc.
	Trí Shúile an Chait 2	Tobar Productions
	Slán a bheas mé	Tobar Productions
2006 Development funding	Féith	Stirling
	Trad Trials /Faoi Lán Ceoil	Stirling
	Na Bailitheoirí Ceoil	Stirling
	Holy Joe	Borderline
	Sitcom	Aisling Ghéar
Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2007 Round 1	Féith	Stirling
	Into the Island	Westway
	Na Bailitheoirí Ceoil	Stirling
	Scil 2	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Funded Programme	Production Company
	Toraíocht Taisce 2	Ikandi
	Trad Trials	Stirling
2007 Round 2	Ciorcal Comhrá	CanDo Interactive
	Costa Uí Chatháin	Tobar Productions
	Deis Roc 2	Tobar Productions
	Féith (Fly on the Wall)	Stirling
	Gaisce Gnó	Imagine Media
	I bhfócas le	Sonas Productions
	Imeall Geal	Big Mountain
	Rocket Boy	Stirling
	Shabby go Chic	Waddell Media

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2007 Round 3	Amhrán na Phaidí	Imagine Media
	Bo on the Go	Zoogon
	Doodlebops Series 2	Zoogon
	Féile an Phobail – 20 years on	Sonas Productions
2007 Round 3	Front	Design by Front
	Marú 3	Stirling
	Na Bliúanna Dua	Sonas Productions
	Rang 71	Imagine Media
	The Activists (Ceol Ón Croí)	Sonas Productions
	Tír na Naomh is na nOllamh	Imagine Media
2007 Development Funding	I bhFocas Le	Sonas Productions
	Na Dódaí website	Imagine Media
	Shabby go Chic	Waddell Media
	Seacht Series 2	Stirling
	Amadáin	Stirling
	Destiny Dating	Zoogon
2008 Round 1	An Páiste Beo Bocht	Glass Machine
	Barr an Ranga	Tobar Productions
	Déan Damhsa Liom	Imagine Media
	Funded Programme	Production Company
	Dissenting Voices	Imagine Media
	Meon na mBan	Waddell Media
	Preab Suas	Waddell Media
	Running the Glen	Westway
	Seacht series 2	Stirling
2008 Round 2	An Teorann	Doubleband
	Taisce na Tuaithe	Tobar Productions
	Cruit go nÓr/Cláirseach na nGael	Gallán / Lugh Films
	Lifeboat Luke	LTL Productions
	Tadhaigín an tEitleán 2	Zoogon
	Ballad traditions	Stirling

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2008 Round 3	Cailíní Cathrach/Tuaithe	Solas Productions
	Dissenting Voices	Imagine Media
	Marú 4	Stirling
	Franny's Feet	Zoogon
	Gaisce Gnó 2	Imagine Media
	Mo Spás	Imagine Media
	Stíl na Réalt	Waddell Media
	Vital Signs	Below the Radar

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2008 Development Funding	Irish Women in Prison	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Seacht 3	Stirling
2009 Round 1	Amharc Aneas	Omas Media
	Charles Byrne	Ronin Films
	Donal's Band	Stirling
	Pasáiste na Pictiúrlainne/Flicks Feirste	Tobar Productions
	Seacht 3	Stirling
	An Paidrín	Stirling
2009 Round 2	Craiceann 's a Luach	Zoogon
	Imeall Geal	Big Mountain
	Meon na mBan 2	Waddell Media
	Mo Chéad	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Tellytales	Zoogon
	Atógáil Sráid Bombay	Tobar & Independent
	Fis 24	Nuacht 24/Fusion
2009 Round 3	Marú 5	Stirling
	Talk Irish Shorts	Stirling
	UTV Archive Series	Stirling
	Cross Border House Swap	Waddell Media
	Tiománaí Tacsaí	Tobar Productions
	Oilithreacht	Imagine Media
	Faire	Imagine Media
	Scéal an Airgid	Below The Radar
	Bo ag Bogadaí	Zoogon
	An Bhearna Bhaoil	Imagine Media
2009 Development Funding	Irish of Course.com	MgTv
	Last Chance Riverdance	Stirling
	The Dispossessed	Stirling
	Seacht 4	Stirling
	Dance Off	Stirling
	Irish of Course.com	IrishofCourse.com Ltd
	An Railí	The Picture House

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2010 Round 1	Oíche i mBealtaine	Westway
	Mangairí Leabhair	Planet Korda
	An Railí	The Picture House
	Smidiríní	Imagine Media
	Laochra Loch Laoi	Imagine Media
	An Banna Ceili	Sonas Productions
	Seacht 4	Stirling
	Dance Off	Stirling
	Wow Wow Wubbzy	Stirling
	Mná Tofa	Doubleband
	Seinn Liom	Clean Slate Ltd
	Taisce na Tuaithe 2	Tobar Productions
	Greim Gasta	Tobar Productions
	Franny's Feet	Zoogon
2010 Round 1 - Other	In Onóir Uí hAmhsaigh	Gallan Teo
2010 Round 2	Mo Ghrá Gael	Waddell Media
	Droch Fhola	Dearcan Media
	Luí na Talún	Below The Radar
	Ainsprid	Stirling
	Enigma de Blaghd	Imagine Media
	Jo & Jack	Dancing Girl
	Doodlebops Animation	Zoogon
	Animal Mechanicals	Zoogon
2010 Round 3	Baol	Bóthar Ard
	Sí do Mhamó	The Picture House
	An Dodge	The Picture House
	Óro Na Casadaigh	The Picture House
	Paddy Don Patricio	Tobar Productions
	Timpiste Árainn Mhóir	Tobar Productions
	An Chultúrlann	Imagine Media
	Idir Dhá Domhain	Below The Radar
	Scéalaíocht Nua	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Dul I bhFiáin	Big Mountain
	Dúcheiste Frank Ryan	Glass Machine
	Celebrity Winners & Sinners	Zoogon
	Mícheál	Clean Slate Ltd
	Raidió Fáilte	Raidió Fáilte

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2010 Development/ Pilot Funding	Is Fann Guth An Éin	Pyxl Productions
	Mo Grá Gael	Waddell Media
	Gallaghers Coaches	Waddell Media
	Scéalaíocht Nua	Ulysses Films NI Ltd
	Dul I bhFiáin	Big Mountain
	Sí do Mhamó	The Picture House
	Scúp	Stirling
	An Béal Bocht	Raw Nerve

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2011 Round 1 Feb	Ar Skype a chéile	Tobar Productions
	Ballaí Dhoire	Dearcan Media
	Luí na Talún 2	Below the Radar
	Damhsa ar na Banta	Sonas Productions
	Amhrain an Fhir Bhain	Imagine Media
	Athar & Mac	Big Mountain
	Achomharc / Éagóir	Picturehouse
	Cairde I gCein	Triplevision
	Ceol on Chlann	Stirling
	Iomann don Chathair Gortaithe	Bóthar Ard
	Fear an Damhsa	Imagine Media
	Iarnrod Uladh	Waddell Media
	INK	Stirling
	Triur Ban Og	Solas Productions
	Imeall Geal 3	Big Mountain
2011 Round 2 June	An Bronntanas	De Facto Films
	Scup	Stirling
	Wolfland	Steadipix/Clean Slate
	Paisti na Reabhloide	Picturehouse
	An Feidir Linn	Bóthar Ard
	Og & Aerach	Solas Productions
	Mo Ghra Gael 2	Waddell Media
	Ard Albert	Tobar Productions
	Animal Mechanicals 2	Zoogon
	Ice Trail	Zoogon
	Extinctions	Zoogon
	Love in the Wild	Zoogon

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2011 Round 3 October	Filíocht Nua	Lagan Media
	Filíocht Nua Phone App	Lagan Media
	Aistear na nGael	Sequin & Imagine
	Amhráin Uladh	Clean Slate Ltd
	Meon Eile	Below the Radar
	Ceol na Tuaithe	Big Mountain
	Scéal an Mharthanóra	Below the Radar
	Michaela Mo dheirfiúr	Below the Radar
	Niall Óg	Bóthar Ard
	40 Bliain ag Fás	Tobar Productions
	Aniar Aduaidh	Independent Pictures & Tobar
	Bealach na mBusanna	Waddell Media

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2012 Round 1 March	The Story of British Pathé in Ireland	Waddell Media
	Deartháireacha	Waddell Media
	Nollaig in Éirinn	Waddell Media
	Luí na Talún 3	Below The Radar
	It's a Blas!	Below The Radar
	Taobh Thair Den Bhóna	Below The Radar
	Ceiliúradh Ceoil - Philomena Begley	Big Mountain
	Wwoofing	Stirling
	Fiacc	Stirling
	Bia Linn	Indee Productions
	Na Clamairí	Indee Productions
	Tiny Tobar Tootie Tobar	Tobar Productions
	Tóirse Don Táin	Tobar Productions
	Bliain I Saol na Cultúrlainne (Féilte is Fleadh)	Lagan Media
	An Béal Bocht	Raw Nerve
	An Chultúrlann (Cuisle)	Imagine Media
	Voyage to Iona	Imagine Media
	Na Firéin	Bóthar Ard
	Raidió Fáilte	Raidió Fáilte
	Robert Burns	Dearcan Media
2012 Round 2 June	Driver Dan (1)	Zoogon
	Joseph Campbell	Bóthar Ard
	Bangor Monks	Clean Slate Ltd
	Rónán ar Bhóthar Santiago	Waddell Media
	Taisce Tí	Stirling
	Ceol na Tuaithe Daniel O Donnell	Big Mountain
	Tomaí agus Art san Eoraip	Tern TV

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2012 Round 3 October	Things You Need to Know	360 Productions
	Dlí Rory	Below the Radar
	The Lost Village (1)	Big Mountain
	Cogar x 3 (Seirbhís)	Bóthar Ard
	Na Sufraigéidí	Dearcan Media
	Ar Thóir an tSean Uladh	Doubleband
	Marcaíocht	Imagine Media
	Wolftone (Imagining the Republic)	Imagine Media
	Bia Linn App	Indee Productions
	Raidió Fáilte (Radio Broadcast Training)	Raidió Fáilte
	Scúp (Sraith a 2)	Stirling
	Aistrúchán Ar Ais	Tobar Productions
	Caillte sa Chogadh	Tobar Productions
	Deirfiúr le Dia	Waddell Media

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2013 Round 1 April	Na Píobairí Uillinn	Dearcan Media
	Bualadh Busk	Below the Radar
	Meon Eile TWO	Below the Radar
	An Trucaillín Donn	Imagine Media
	Ar Bhealach na Gaeltachta	Imagine Media
	Wolfetone	Imagine Media
	Grá sa Ghaeltacht	Imagine Media
	Scúp (Series TWO)	Stirling
	Uncail Sean agus Uncail Joe	Macha Media
	Lá Dár Saol	Macha Media
	Opry an Iúir (SERIES TWO)	Big Mountain
	Ar Thóir an Cheoil	Sonas Productions
	Éagóir (TWO)	Indee Productions
	Taiscí Ceilte na hÉireann	Waddell Media
2013 Round 2 June	Cónaí I gCarn	Indee Productions
	Bia Linn 2	Indee Productions
	Holland agus an Lusitania	Bóthar Ard
	Hunting the Hound of Ulster	Below the Radar
	I Lár an Aonaigh	Below the Radar
	Imirce	Clean Slate Ltd
	Creafóg Dhearg na hAfraice	Waddell Media
	Wwoofáil (Sraith a 2)	Stirling
	Oíche na Gaoithe Móire	Lagan Media
	Lomax	Tobar Productions

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2013 Round 3 October	Fiche Bliain le Bréag	Sonas Productions
	Mná na gCurach	Imagine Media
	Gafa sa Túr	Macha Media
	Bronntanas na Beatha	Below the Radar
	Gaeilgeoirí an Chogaidh Mhóir	Big Mountain
	Radio Training & Broadcasting Scheme	Raidió Fáilte
2014 Round 1 May	Coláistí na n Gael san Eoraip	Tern TV
	Ar Shlí na Fírinne	Imagine Media
	Áilleacht na Sléibhte	Doubleband
	Wwoofáil 3	Stirling
	I Lár an Aonaigh 2	Below the Radar
	Opry an Iúir 3	Big Mountain
	Thuas Seal Thíos Seal	Below the Radar
	Driftwood Bay	Sixteen South
	Meon Eile 3	Below the Radar
	Gaeilgeoirí an Chogaidh Mhóir (additional funding)	Big Mountain

Year and Round of Funding	Funded Programme	Production Company
2014 Round 2 August	Bás Síocháiní	Dearcan Media
	Múinteoirí	Big Mountain
	Scéal Folk Aduaidh	Sonas Productions
	Craic na nAinmhithe	Waddell Media
	Lá Dár Saol 2 – Lá Fhéile Pádraig	Macha Media
	Scaredy Squirrel	Zoogon
	Díoltas	Indee Productions
	Na Dúlradóirí	Indee Productions
	Radio Broadcast Training Scheme	Raidió Fáilte

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the Irish Language Broadcast Fund, to detail the number of funding applications (i) received; (ii) approved; and (iii) refused in each year since it was established.
(AQW 38127/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table attached at Annex A provides the details requested regarding Irish Language Broadcast Fund applications.

Annex A

Year	Total received	Number Approved	Number refused
2005	42	20	22
2006	40	24	16
2007	53	31	22
2008	47	24	23
2009	44	30	14

Year	Total received	Number Approved	Number refused
2010	66	45	21
2011	50	39	11
2012	65	41	24
2013	55	30	25
2014 (to date)	31	19	12

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, what are the priorities of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund; and who set the priorities of the fund.
(AQW 38128/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The priorities of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) are set by the ILBF Investment Committee.

The current priorities are as set out below but these are due to be revised in the next number of weeks.

The ILBF;

- aims to fund a minimum of 60 hours per year of quality Irish language programming which will appeal to a North of Ireland audience;
- welcomes applications for content that ensures prominence of the Ulster dialect, geography, history, society and culture. A minimum of 70% of the spoken word must be Irish;
- will consider any genre that meets its funding criteria, but particularly welcomes content that is aimed at a youth audience (under 25's). This could take the form of, for example, drama, magazine series, animation, documentary, light or factual entertainment;
- is keen to develop and support the low budget drama sector in the North of Ireland and currently supports at least one Irish language drama series per year;
- welcomes enquiries regarding funding for mobile phone applications, digital games and website content, particularly those aimed at a youth audience and language learners. Consideration could be given to the translation to Irish of existing applications and games which have proven market success and/or reached a wide audience. In all cases applicants will have to provide evidence of extensive audience reach, and, if appropriate proven audience need or desire for this content, particularly if a traditional broadcaster is not attached;
- recognises the crossover of skills in radio and television production and therefore welcomes enquiries regarding funding for a training and content production scheme. It currently supports an Irish language radio content production and broadcasting scheme with strong training elements at its core and would seek to emulate this scheme;
- will only consider applications for landmark documentaries/documentary series with tariffs exceeding those set out in the joint commissioning documents if the following information can be provided: evidence of broadcaster support (support from more than one broadcaster encouraged); significant audience reach (could the series reach a wider audience in a different territory?); evidence that other funding sources are being sought (BAI's Sound & Vision Scheme, Irish Film Board etc.) evidence that the proposed project necessitates the significant & extensive use of the following: drama reconstruction, archive, animation/graphics, travel, filming in areas with risk attached.
- Irish language learners make up a significant part of its audience and they welcome applications to fund educational programming aimed at any age group. Applicants should have some experience in producing educational content and be knowledgeable of the North of Ireland curriculum.
- Interested applicants are also encouraged to examine the jointly produced commissioning documents which are updated on an annual basis. These documents provide more detail on the slots available and the specific genre and type of content that the individual broadcasters (BBC NI, TG4 & RTÉ) are seeking.

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why £1.2 million of the £3 million allocated to boxing has been withheld.
(AQW 38129/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: None of the allocated £3.27 million Lottery funding for the Boxing Investment Programme has been withheld. Administration of this programme is a matter for Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department.

Sport NI has allocated £2.5 million of this funding to take forward capital works for repairs, major refurbishment and new builds for club premises. This work is progressing with initial design work now completed for 40 eligible clubs. In addition, £170,000 has already been spent on boxing equipment for 94 clubs. The remainder of the funding is being used for costs associated with professional fees and the project management of the capital works programme.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what impact the groups funded through Sceim Phobail Gaeilge have had on the number of people who have signed up Liofa 2015; and how much funding these groups have attracted to the Irish language sector, beyond Foras Sceim Phobail Gaeilge funding.
(AQW 38158/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are no official records held in relation to the impact groups funded through Scéim Phobail Gaeilge, have had on the number of people who have signed up to Líofa

Neither the department or Foras na Gaeilge holds any information on how much funding such groups have attracted to the sector. Attracting additional funding is not part of the criteria for receipt of funding from the Scéim Phobail Gaeilge.

Foras na Gaeilge has been continuously promoting and supporting the Líofa campaign since 2011 through the groups it funds. The current groups awarded Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (since January 2011) and based in the North are encouraged to register with Líofa but are not specifically monitored on their activities involving Líofa. My department is aware these northern based groups in receipt of Scéim Phobail Gaeilge have held specific open registration days for Líofa in their respective localities and continue to encourage registration of new members through the Líofa website.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what budget has been set aside for the Audit of Traditional Music commissioned by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; (ii) how the audit will be conducted; and (iii) what the timeframe is for completion of the audit.
(AQW 38463/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total available budget for the audit of Traditional Music is £10,000 (inclusive of VAT).

The audit will be conducted using desk research and structured interviews as the core methodological approaches. Annex A, attached, provides a project description and the Terms of Reference.

A final draft report is scheduled to be brought before the Arts Council Board for consideration in January 2015.

Annex A

Project Description & Terms of Reference (extracted from the `request for quotation' document)

ACNI wishes to commission an audit of the traditional music sector in the North of Ireland in order to gain a deeper understanding of its strengths and weaknesses; the challenges it faces; and its development needs going forward.

Outputs from this research will be used to inform future planning; advocacy for increased support and to raise the public profile of the sector.

Consultant(s) will be expected to:

- Work with the Arts Council to develop an agreed definition of the Traditional Musics sector in the North of Ireland;
- Establish the quantity & quality of all Traditional Music services (including tuition);
- Detail the context of Traditional Music tuition delivery (statutory / non-statutory i.e. identify opportunities, profile participants, etc;
- Assess the level of accessibility to Traditional Music instruments;
- Identify organisations who participate in Traditional Music competitions;
- Provide details on performance infrastructure i.e. in formal & informal settings;
- Identify Traditional Music organisations offering professional development i.e. training, mentoring etc;
- Identify partnerships & collaborations within the Traditional Music sector;
- Identify existing investment within the Traditional Music sector and potential funding opportunities;
- Provide an overview of media coverage & presentation i.e. who, what, when where and how; and
- Establish level of recording and commercial CD/online release activity

Department of Education

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 30987/11-15, to detail (i) the rate per thousand of fifteen to seventeen year old pupils who had less than 85 per cent attendance in 2013/14, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) electoral ward; and (ii) what further action is being taken to reduce levels of absenteeism.[R]
(AQW 38040/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):

(i) The information provided in AQW 30987/11-15 is still current. Data for 2013/14 will not be available until March 2015.

(ii) Regular school attendance and educational attainment are inextricably linked. Regular attendance ensures that pupils get the best possible outcomes from their period in compulsory education and improves their chances of employment and life chances in the longer term.

I have given close attention to the conclusions and recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee report on this issue, in particular that we need a Pupil Attendance Strategy. A Memorandum of Reply was published in August and it sets out a programme of work for my Department and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

Much has already been done. For example, to assist with the development of the Pupil Attendance Strategy, my officials have held workshops with schools and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). Direct engagement will also take place with pupils, parents, school governors, other government departments and the wider community.

My Department's guidance to schools on "Pupil Attendance and Absence Recording" has been revised and will issue in the coming weeks. It strongly recommends, among other things, that each school should have a clear pupil attendance policy. This has been supplemented by "School Attendance Matters – a Parent's Guide" which was issued in September for distribution to the parents/carers of all school-age children.

My Department and the ELBs continue to provide support to vulnerable groups, such as Looked after Children, Travellers, School-Age Mothers and Newcomers. This work is supported by the EWS, looked after children teams, the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) and the Inclusion and Diversity Service.

The levels of unauthorised pupil absences are unacceptable. Evidence shows that not all schools are following up on the reasons for absences. My Department will be writing to these schools in the coming weeks to highlight how many days of education have been missed by their pupils where the reason for the absence is unknown. If we are to develop a meaningful Pupil Attendance Strategy, we need to know the underlying causes of absenteeism which develop into educational underachievement for so many of our young people.

I remain committed to addressing the issue to ensure that our young people have every opportunity to reap the benefits of regular school attendance.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 30988/11-15, to detail (i) the rate per thousand of primary school pupils who had less than 85 per cent attendance in 2013/14, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) electoral ward; and (ii) what further action is being taken to reduce levels of absenteeism.[R]
(AQW 38042/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The information provided in AQW 30988/11-15 is still current. Data for 2013/14 will not be available until March 2015.

(ii) Regular school attendance and educational attainment are inextricably linked. Regular attendance ensures that pupils get the best possible outcomes from their period in compulsory education and improves their chances of employment and life chances in the longer term.

I have given close attention to the conclusions and recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee report on this issue, in particular that we need a Pupil Attendance Strategy. A Memorandum of Reply was published in August and it sets out a programme of work for my Department and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

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I remain committed to addressing the issue to ensure that our young people have every opportunity to reap the benefits of regular school attendance.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 30989/11-15, to detail (i) the rate per thousand of post-primary school pupils who had less than 85 per cent attendance in 2013/14, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) electoral ward; and (ii) what further action is being taken to reduce levels of absenteeism. [R]
(AQW 38044/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The information provided in AQW 30989/11-15 is still current. Data for 2013/14 will not be available until March 2015.

(ii) Regular school attendance and educational attainment are inextricably linked. Regular attendance ensures that pupils get the best possible outcomes from their period in compulsory education and improves their chances of employment and life chances in the longer term.

I have given close attention to the conclusions and recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee report on this issue, in particular that we need a Pupil Attendance Strategy. A Memorandum of Reply was published in August and it sets out a programme of work for my Department and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

Much has already been done. For example, to assist with the development of the Pupil Attendance Strategy, my officials have held workshops with schools and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). Direct engagement will also take place with pupils, parents, school governors, other government departments and the wider community.

My Department's guidance to schools on "Pupil Attendance and Absence Recording" has been revised and will issue in the coming weeks. It strongly recommends, among other things, that each school should have a clear pupil attendance policy. This has been supplemented by "School Attendance Matters – a Parent's Guide" which was issued in September for distribution to the parents/carers of all school-age children.

My Department and the ELBs continue to provide support to vulnerable groups, such as Looked after Children, Travellers, School-Age Mothers and Newcomers. This work is supported by the EWS, looked after children teams, the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) and the Inclusion and Diversity Service.

The levels of unauthorised pupil absences are unacceptable. Evidence shows that not all schools are following up on the reasons for absences. My Department will be writing to these schools in the coming weeks to highlight how many days of education have been missed by their pupils where the reason for the absence is unknown. If we are to develop a meaningful Pupil Attendance Strategy, we need to know the underlying causes of absenteeism which develop into educational underachievement for so many of our young people.

I remain committed to addressing the issue to ensure that our young people have every opportunity to reap the benefits of regular school attendance.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many foreign national children are taking additional English language lessons in each Education and Library Board; and to detail (i) the additional cost incurred by this; and (ii) whether the additional cost is covered by each Education and Library Board's budget or the schools delegated budget.
(AQW 38049/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not routinely collected by my Department.

My Department's policy "Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomer Pupils", published in April 2009, aims to ensure that newcomer pupils receive the support they need to access the curriculum so that they can fulfil their potential.

My Department provides funding to schools, through the Common Funding Formula, for each newcomer pupil who has significant language acquisition needs. This enables schools to provide the support most appropriate to their newcomer pupils and it is for them to decide how this funding is utilised. If a school decides to provide additional English language classes for newcomer pupils, the costs are not covered by the Education and Library Boards.

My Department funds the Education and Library Boards' Regional Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) which provides a range of support and advice services to schools, to guide and assist them in making appropriate provision for newcomer pupils, including pupils with English as an additional language.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, following the creation of a single education board, how the staff of the North Eastern Education and Library Board located in County Hall Ballymena will be affected.
(AQW 38062/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The staff of all five education and library boards will transfer to the Education Authority. These staff will have their current terms and conditions of employment protected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Education Bill. All staff will also be afforded pension protection.

The establishment of the Education Authority will represent a rationalisation of existing structures and the new Authority is therefore expected to employ fewer staff, particularly in management grades, than are currently employed by the education and library boards.

Significant reductions in staff have already been made in anticipation of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. It is therefore my expectation that any remaining reductions under the Education Authority will be achieved through voluntary redundancy, retirement and resignation.

The location of Education Authority staff and functions will be determined by the new Education Authority through the development of a location strategy in consultation with Trades Unions.

It will take time for the Education Authority to arrive at a "steady state" and so issues around location of staff and functions will be implemented incrementally. These will need to be reviewed at the appropriate time to determine their equality impact as well as conducting other screening processes such as rural proofing.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education how many primary school teachers have a science degree.
(AQW 38063/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Data held by the General Teaching Council (GTCNI) indicates that there are currently 122 teachers employed in primary schools, including preparatory departments, who hold a degree qualification in which the main specialism is a science subject.

This figure does not include those 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 here. 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 there may also be teachers employed in schools who have not advised the GTCNI of additional qualifications they may hold over and above those required to teach here.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many integrated schools have sought to expand their numbers in the last five years.
(AQW 38075/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Based on published development proposals, nine integrated schools have sought to increase their enrolment in the last five years. Their details are listed in the table below.

Name of School	Position	Increased enrolment
Ulidia Integrated College	DP published 6 November 2014	From 500 to 660 pupils (proposed)
Rowandale Integrated PS	Decision pending	From 174 to 399 pupils (proposed)
Millennium Integrated PS	DP approved	From 203 to 392 pupils
Shimna Integrated College	DP approved	From 480 to 620 pupils
Portadown Integrated PS	DP not approved	None
Priory Integrated College	DP approved with modification	From 450 to 500 pupils
Enniskillen Integrated PS	DP approved	From 244 to 392 pupils
New-Bridge Integrated College	DP approved	From 500 to 620 pupils
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	DP not approved	Decision currently being retaken

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many integrated schools have sought to expand their numbers since the Drumragh Judgement.
(AQW 38076/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the Drumragh Judgement two integrated schools - Rowandale Integrated Primary School and Ulidia Integrated College, have sought to expand their numbers.

A record of all current development proposals and decisions made is available on my Departments website at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/14-schools_estate_devprop_pg.htm

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education for an update on the revised written departmental guidance to encourage and facilitate integrated education after the Drumragh Judgement.
(AQW 38078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I explained in my answer to AQW 33963/11-15, the court judgement provided clarity as to whom the Article 64 (1) duty of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 is owed. I have already instructed my officials to ensure that the application of the duty placed on the Department to encourage and facilitate integrated education takes account of that clarity.

Additional guidance has now been provided to all senior staff within the Department via internal workshops that have presented an opportunity to make clear my expectations that the statutory duties to encourage and facilitate both integrated and Irish-medium education are discharged fully, positively and proactively and to explain the implications of both statutory duties, including in the context of the Drumragh Judgement. The use of the workshop approach has proved a very effective means of communication and this approach will be rolled out to other relevant staff in the months ahead.

At the same time, I have been considering what additional guidance is needed for the executive non-departmental bodies which are accountable to my Department and which must play their part in supporting us in discharging these important duties. I expect to see much greater prominence given by our non-departmental public bodies to supporting the Department in encouraging and facilitating both integrated and Irish-medium education and I shall be signalling this to the appropriate bodies, including the new Education Authority, as we move forward into a new business planning period.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how he envisages the new education authority making positive steps or removing obstacles to integrated education
(AQW 38079/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring that my Department continues to have a rigorous approach to its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.

The new Education Authority will be accountable to, and operate within the strategic framework set by, the Department. This will include assisting the Department in discharging its statutory duty to integrated education. In addition, the Department will hold the Authority to account through the Management Statement/Financial Memorandum (MSFM), as it does with the existing five Education and Library Boards.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how his Department exercises its scrutiny and challenge role in relation to Area Plans; and (ii) the process by which it approves Area Plans.
(AQW 38080/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area Plans are developed by the Education & Library Boards working in conjunction with CCMS and engaging with the other school sectors. Given that this is a new approach to planning the schools estate, the Department has provided ongoing advice and guidance to ensure a consistent approach across the Board areas. I have also established the Area Planning Steering Group to ensure regular engagement with the Department on strategic issues relating to area planning.

Departmental officials meet representatives of the Boards and CCMS to discuss and examine area plans prior to and following public consultation. Any significant changes required to individual schools are subject to the rigour of the Development Proposal process. There is no legislative requirement at present for the Department to approve area plans.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the membership of the Area Planning Steering Group.
(AQW 38081/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Area Planning Steering Group (APSG) is chaired by a senior official from the Department and of Education and comprises representatives the Chief Executives of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). A senior official from the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) attends as an observer to provide advice on FE issues and policies.

The table below sets out the current membership of the Group:

Name	Organisation
Dr Clare Mangan	Belfast ELB
Shane McCurdy	North Eastern ELB
Gregory Butler	South Eastern ELB
Gavin Boyd	Southern ELB
Barry Mulholland	Western ELB
Jim Clarke	CCMS
Noreen Campbell	NICIE
Dr Micheál Ó Duibh	CnaG
Dr Mary McIvor	DEL

Given the number of Catholic Maintained schools and the regional nature of the work to be covered by CCMS, it should be noted that Gerry Lundy (CCMS) also attends the meetings to support the CCMS CEO.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what steps are in place to build on the progress made through the recruitment of teachers under the Delivering Social Change Programme in 2013.
(AQW 38099/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Delivering Social Change Signature Programme to improve Literacy and Numeracy continues to provide support to pupils at risk of underachievement in English and/or maths.

A key component of the programme has been the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of schools' delivery of the programme. ELB officers have been appointed to the programme to provide support to schools and they 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 will also be a valuable tool in the dissemination of this best practice.

In relation to the overall evaluation of the programme, the WELB led project team is currently collecting and collating information on the pupils supported in the last academic year. In addition the Education and Training Inspectorate will shortly be undertaking a qualitative evaluation of the first year's delivery of the programme.

This quantitative and qualitative evaluation evidence will be disseminated to ensure that effective practices are shared across the school system.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail the new nursery schools and nursery units that have been established in the past ten years; and the year in which each of them opened.
(AQW 38124/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following table provides details of all new nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools that have opened in the past ten years following the publication and approval of a Development Proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986:

School	ELB area	School Type	Year Opened
Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh, Belfast	BELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	BELB	Nursery School	2012
Scoil an Droichid, Belfast	BELB	Nursery Unit	2008
Gaelscoil Ui Dhocartaigh, Strabane	WELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir, Londonderry	WELB	Nursery Unit	2009
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh	WELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Gaelscoil an Chaistil, Ballycastle	NEELB	Nursery Unit	2011
Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí	NEELB	Nursery Unit	2013
Ballymoney Nursery School	NEELB	Nursery School	2011
Tonagh Primary School	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2012
Ballynahinch Primary School	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2008
Dundonald Primary School	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2011
Moira Primary School	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2009
Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2014
Millennium Integrated Primary School	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2014
Millennium Integrated Primary School, Saintfield	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2009
King's Park Primary School, Craigavon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Waringstown Primary School, Craigavon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013
Maralin Primary School, Magheralin, Craigavon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2008
Howard Primary School, Dungannon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2014
Bocombra Primary School, Portadown	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013
Fair Hill Primary School, Dromara	SELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Bronte Primary School	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013
Drumadonnell Primary School, Ballyroney	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013
Orchard County Primary School, Portadown	SELB	Nursery Unit	2012
Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh	SELB	Nursery Unit	2009
St Anthony's Primary School, Craigavon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2011
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone, Banbridge	SELB	Nursery Unit	2011
St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2014
St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon	SELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown	SELB	Nursery Unit	2014
St Francis' Primary School, Lurgan	SELB	Nursery Unit	2011
Seagoe Primary School, Portadown	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013

School	ELB area	School Type	Year Opened
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	SELB	Nursery Unit	2010
Gaelscoil Eoghain	SELB	Nursery Unit	2014
Portadown Integrated Primary School	SELB	Nursery Unit	2013
Millington Nursery School, Portadown	SELB	Nursery School	2010
Drumnamoe Nursery School, Lurgan	SELB	Nursery School	2011

The following settings are scheduled to open in September 2015.

School	ELB area	School Type	Year Opened
Bush Primary School	SELB	Nursery Unit	2015
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	SEELB	Nursery Unit	2015
Phoenix Integrated Primary School, Cookstown	SELB	Nursery Unit	2015

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38148/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is co-operating with preparations for an OECD led strategic review of public sector reform, to be commissioned by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Public Sector Reform Division. I have met with the DFP Minister to discuss public sector reform and my Department has suggested areas which may be considered suitable as case studies to inform this review.

An Executive Sub Committee for Improving Public Services will oversee this work and determine which case studies are to be progressed. It is premature at this stage to speculate on any efficiencies that may result from this engagement.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the expected cost saving from establishing a single Education Board.
(AQW 38163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to the answer to AQO 6770/11-15 which was published on 10 October 2014.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to outline the timescale for schools being on site at the Lisanelly campus.
(AQW 38178/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current delivery schedule estimates completion of the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus by 2020, with five post primary schools coming into operation in September of that year.

Arvalee School & Resource Centre will be constructed earlier as part of Phase 1 of the programme and is due to open in September 2016.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether the schools on the Lisanelly campus will own their own school site.
(AQW 38179/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials are working with the relevant school managing authorities on a broad range of matters, including how the campus will be governed and managed. The issue of ownership is being taken forward as part of that work. Discussions on ownership are at an early stage and no decisions have been taken.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail the (a) number; and (b) percentage of children who have not continued education in grammar schools after completing GCSEs in the last five years.
(AQW 38237/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information contained in the table below includes year 12 grammar pupils leaving the school system and those year 12 pupils leaving grammar schools and enrolling in other schools to continue their education.

Number and percentage of year 12 pupils leaving grammar schools 2008/09 to 2012/13

2008/09		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1,140	12.2	1,039	11.1	1,060	11.4	1,069	11.5	1,056	11.2

Source: School Leavers Survey

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils in Ulidia Integrated College who currently receive free school travel.
(AQW 38286/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board informs me that it provides transport assistance to 258 pupils who attend Ulidia Integrated College.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school pupils that are in receipt of free school meals in East Antrim, broken down by school, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38287/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table overleaf. The information provided relates to the 2013/14 school census, the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will be available in December, finalised figures in February.

Pupils entitled to free school meals in schools situated in East Antrim, 2011/12 - 2013/14

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
School name	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Acorn Integrated Primary School	31	13.7%	26	11.3%	34	14.7%
Ballycarry Primary School	8	9.8%	10	13.9%	15	22.1%
Cairncastle Primary School	19	14.4%	14	11.2%	16	12.8%
Carnalbanagh Primary School	9	20.9%	11	28.9%	10	27.8%
Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School	7	17.5%	7	17.5%	13	31.0%
Carrickfergus Central Primary School	31	28.7%	32	36.8%	38	44.2%
Carrickfergus Model Primary School	46	11.4%	53	13.0%	56	13.8%
Corran Integrated Primary School	37	17.5%	40	19.6%	41	21.1%
Eden Primary School	29	13.7%	38	18.0%	31	14.8%
Glenann Primary School	9	20.5%	7	13.5%	13	21.7%
Glynn Primary School	21	26.3%	20	24.1%	19	21.3%
Greenisland Primary School	26	6.6%	37	9.3%	43	10.7%
Hollybank Primary School	69	43.9%	73	46.2%	75	52.4%
Kilcoan Primary School	5	12.8%	*	*	5	10.6%
Larne and Inver Primary School	54	32.5%	66	37.1%	70	38.9%
Linn Primary School	114	28.3%	127	30.5%	144	35.0%
Moyle Primary School	126	36.5%	145	40.3%	136	34.9%
Mullaghdubh Primary School	7	10.9%	10	16.1%	9	12.2%
Oakfield Primary School	114	31.0%	107	30.1%	105	30.6%
Olderfleet Primary School	29	17.0%	36	20.5%	43	24.3%
Seaview Primary School, Glenarm	9	17.6%	6	17.1%	10	26.3%
Silverstream Primary School	57	46.0%	48	41.7%	67	56.3%
St Anthony's Primary School, Larne	25	30.5%	24	31.2%	32	38.1%
St Ciaran's Primary School, Ballymena	11	18.3%	7	11.7%	8	13.8%
St James' Primary School, Newtownabbey	53	17.4%	69	22.6%	71	22.5%
St John's Primary School, Ballymena	29	16.3%	32	17.9%	42	22.6%
St Macnissi's Primary School, Larne	52	24.3%	55	26.1%	53	25.7%
St Mary's Primary School, Cushendall	28	14.6%	35	18.4%	35	18.0%
St Nicholas' Primary School, Carrickfergus	23	16.1%	39	26.5%	47	28.0%
St Patrick's Primary School, Waterfoot, Glenariffe	11	10.2%	12	11.4%	23	20.4%

School name	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sunnylands Primary School	72	62.1%	67	58.3%	70	57.9%
Toreagh Primary School	0	0.0%	*	*	6	6.0%
Upper Ballyboley Primary School	8	19.5%	10	21.7%	11	24.4%
Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus	76	15.3%	84	16.6%	103	19.9%
Whiteabbey Primary School	12	2.9%	15	3.6%	18	4.3%
Whitehead Primary School	64	14.9%	64	14.8%	67	16.1%
Woodburn Primary School	48	24.9%	45	23.8%	56	28.6%
Woodlawn Primary School	101	39.3%	141	49.3%	136	46.7%
Total	**1470**	**20.4%**	**1617**	**22.4%**	**1771**	**24.3%**

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. Constituency refers to where the school is situated rather than where pupils reside
4. * denotes fewer than 5 pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how many Catholic Maintained School Estates are wholly owned by the Catholic Church.
(AQW 38311/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently 482 schools under Catholic Trusteeship. These schools are all vested in the Department of Education, which enables the Department to pay capital grants in respect of them.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what role the Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have in planning for integrated education, given their capacity as Planning Authorities; and what accountability his Department has in ensuring Planning Authorities plan for integrated education.
(AQW 38312/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new Authority will assume, unchanged, the powers, duties and responsibilities of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), including those in relation to Area Planning. Until the new body is established, responsibility for Area Planning for all sectors, including the Integrated sector, remains with those bodies with statutory responsibility for planning, i.e. the ELBs (and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in relation to planning for the Catholic Maintained sector.)

However, the Terms of Reference for Area Planning recognise that the other sectoral bodies have an important contribution to make, and it is an explicit requirement that they be involved in the process. It is important, therefore, that those representing the Integrated sector make a robust case in discussions with the Boards and CCMS to ensure that genuine need for local expansion in the sector is reflected in the area plans.

The Department's role in the process is one of scrutiny and challenge. To this end, Departmental officials meet representatives of the Boards and CCMS to discuss and examine area plans prior to and following public consultation.

Also, the Chief Executive of NICIE is a member the Area Planning Steering Group which provides a platform for regular engagement with the Department on strategic issues relating to Area Planning.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQO 6778/11-15, what he meant by "work with schools within the sector to develop and maintain the collective ethos of the sector including, where appropriate, a role in identifying, encouraging and nominating governors and in ensuring ethos is part of employment considerations".
(AQW 38313/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It will be the responsibility of the Controlled Schools Support Body, when it is established, to determine its core principles and values and to work with schools and the Education Authority to ensure that a collective ethos is promoted. This may include a range of activities such as working with school governors in developing schemes of management.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38324/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All NICS Departments – including the Department of Education - are participants in the NICS Cycle to work scheme.

The NICS cycle to work scheme is open to all NICS staff all year round.

The scheme is a NICS Cycle to Work Scheme and therefore does not extend to NDPBs for whom the NICS is not their employer. However DFP, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the current membership of the Area Planning Steering Group.
(AQW 38331/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Area Planning Steering Group (APSG) is chaired by a senior official from the Department and of Education and comprises representatives the Chief Executives of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). A senior official from the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) attends as an observer to provide advice on FE issues and policies.

The table below sets out the current membership of the Group:

Name	Organisation
Dr Clare Mangan	Belfast ELB
Shane McCurdy	North Eastern ELB
Gregory Butler	South Eastern ELB
Gavin Boyd	Southern ELB
Barry Mulholland	Western ELB
Jim Clarke	CCMS
Noreen Campbell	NICIE
Dr Micheál Ó Duibh	CnaG
Dr Mary McIvor	DEL

Given the number of Catholic Maintained schools and the regional nature of the work to be covered by CCMS, it should be noted that Gerry Lundy (CCMS) also attends the meetings to support the CCMS CEO.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what priority areas have been identified in the work programme of the Area Planning Steering Group.
(AQW 38332/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The work of the Area Planning Steering Group is focused on embedding a single approach to area planning and implementation across all existing organisations and identifying priority areas for action in the short and medium term.

The Group is currently dealing with a number of key issues.

- The development of revised area planning structures and governance arrangements in advance of the new Authority. The group's recommendations are due to be presented to me shortly.
- The development of new practical guidance to support the school amalgamation process.

Its future work will include consideration of the process for reviewing and revising the Area Plans.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what changes he envisages to the membership of the Area Planning Steering Group in the light of the proposal to reorganise education administration.
(AQW 38333/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The membership of the Area Planning Steering Group currently reflects the present education structures and responsibilities. It will, however, be kept under review and future arrangements will reflect the new structures including the Education Authority when it becomes established.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what responsibilities the proposed Education Authority would have in relation to Area Planning.
(AQW 38334/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new Education Authority will assume, unchanged, the powers, duties and responsibilities of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), including those in relation to Area Planning. There will be no change to the Sustainable Schools Policy or terms of reference for area planning as a result of the Authority's establishment.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education when he intends to publish the regional plan for Special School provision.
(AQW 38335/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I commissioned a review of special needs provision, the purpose of which

was to undertake an assessment of existing provision and recommend a regional plan for the future structure and provision of Special Schools. The review group is due to present its report to me in the near future. I will wish to take time to consider it.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail the (a) number; and (b) percentage of children who have not continued education in grammar schools after AS level in the last five years.
(AQW 38346/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information contained in the table below includes year 13 grammar pupils leaving the school system and those year 13 pupils leaving grammar schools and enrolling in other schools to continue their education.

Due to the nature of these data, it is not possible to determine how many of these year 13 pupils were enrolled on an AS level course.

Number and percentage of year 13 pupils leaving grammar schools 2008/09 to 2012/13

2008/09		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
500	5.8	505	5.8	542	6.2	591	6.7	563	6.4

Source: School Leavers Survey

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how his Department is promoting cycling in schools.
(AQW 38356/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is promoting cycling through a range of measures.

The statutory curriculum provides teachers with opportunities to encourage children to take up cycling and my Department delegates funding to schools, which is used for a range of curricular based activities. The specifics of what is taught under each Area of Learning within the curriculum is determined by individual schools.

During 2014/15, my Department fully participated in the Giro d'Italia Schools programme. Giro d'Italia and cycling related resources were made available to teachers and these are still available at (http://www.ccea.org.uk/giro/giro2014/).

In addition my Department, together with the Public Health Agency, jointly funded the 'Sustrans Giro Schools Challenge' competition. A key aim of this competition was to maximise participation and engagement in cycling and physical activity beyond May 2014.

As part of the Department for Regional Development's Active School Travel Programme, my Department is also currently carrying out scoping for provision of school cycle parking facilities in 60 schools across the schools' estate. Decisions on capital investment will be made after this exercise is complete.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, given that the North Eastern Education and Library Board published a revised vision of post-primary Area Plans in August 2014, whether revised plans will be published for each Education and Library Board; and if so, when this will take place.[R]
(AQW 38363/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Area Plans are living documents and therefore need revision as circumstances change and more up-to-date information becomes available.

The Department intends to work with the Area Planning Steering Group (APSG) to consider and agree the process for reviewing and revising the Area Plans.

Currently each Education and Library Board, in conjunction with CCMS and the other sectors where necessary, can update its Area Plans to reflect the current position.

I understand the North Eastern Education and Library Board has recently updated its Area Plan to take account of decisions on Development Proposals and updated statistical information.

Department for Employment and Learning

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many job vacancies have been notified to NI Employment services and advertised on the jobcentreonline website during September 2014, in the (i) Strabane; and (ii) Omagh districts, broken down by occupational area.
(AQW 38059/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): During September 2014 there were 205 vacancy positions raised in the Omagh and Strabane area. This is broken down into 140 vacancy positions in Omagh and 65 vacancy positions in Strabane.

During the past three months August 2014 to October 2014 inclusive there were 512 vacancy positions raised in the Omagh and Strabane area. This is broken down into 325 vacancy positions in Omagh and 165 vacancy positions in Strabane.

Annex 1 shows the breakdown of the information by occupational area for September 2014.

Annex 2 shows the breakdown of the information by occupational area for the past three months August/September/October 2014.

Annex A1

Jobcentre	**Omagh and Strabane**	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	7	7
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6	6
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	2	2
Bar Staff	1	1
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	4	4
Caretaker	3	3
Chef Or Cook	7	11
Childcare	8	9
Cleaners	6	6
Clerical Occupations	15	15
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	1	3
Driver / Machine Drivers	10	10
Gardening / Horticulture	2	2
Hairdressing	1	1
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	2	2
Industrial Plant and Machine	4	4
Information Technology	5	5
Kitchen/Counter Staff	6	6
Managers in Agriculture and Services	2	2
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	2	2
Other Professions	4	4
Receptionist / Telephonist	2	2
Sales Assistants	24	31

Jobcentre	Omagh and Strabane	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Sales Reps.	4	4
Science and Engineering Professionals	2	2
Secretarial Occupations	1	1
Security	3	5
Semi Skilled Construction	9	9
Skilled Construction Trades	8	8
Skilled Engineering Trades	11	11
Social / Health Professionals	8	8
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	2	2
Stores / Despatch Operatives	6	6
Teaching Professionals	1	1
Technicians	2	2
Waiting Staff	2	2
Grand Total	**189**	**205**

Annex A2

Jobcentre	Omagh	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	3	3
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3	3
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	2	2
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	3	3
Caretaker	2	2
Chef Or Cook	3	6
Childcare	8	9
Cleaners	4	4
Clerical Occupations	13	13
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	1	3
Driver / Machine Drivers	4	4
Gardening / Horticulture	2	2
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	2	2
Industrial Plant and Machine	4	4
Information Technology	4	4
Kitchen/Counter Staff	5	5
Managers in Agriculture and Services	2	2
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	1	1

Jobcentre	**Omagh**	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Other Personal Service Occupations	1	1
Other Professions	4	4
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	19	19
Sales Reps.	3	3
Science and Engineering Professionals	2	2
Secretarial Occupations	1	1
Semi Skilled Construction	4	4
Skilled Construction Trades	5	5
Skilled Engineering Trades	7	7
Social / Health Professionals	8	8
Stores / Despatch Operatives	6	6
Teaching Professionals	1	1
Technicians	1	1
Grand Total	**134**	**140**

Annex A3

Jobcentre	**Strabane**	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	4	4
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3	3
Bar Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	1	1
Caretaker	1	1
Chef Or Cook	4	5
Cleaners	2	2
Clerical Occupations	2	2
Driver / Machine Drivers	6	6
Hairdressing	1	1
Information Technology	1	1
Kitchen/Counter Staff	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	1	1
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	5	12
Sales Reps.	1	1
Security	3	5
Semi Skilled Construction	5	5
Skilled Construction Trades	3	3
Skilled Engineering Trades	4	4
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	2	2
Technicians	1	1

Jobcentre	Strabane	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Waiting Staff	2	2
Grand Total	**55**	**65**

Annex B

Jobcentre	Omagh and Strabane	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	12	12
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	10	10
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	6	6
Bar Staff	7	7
Call Centre Staff	2	2
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	12	12
Caretaker	5	5
Chef Or Cook	22	27
Childcare	18	19
Cleaners	12	12
Clerical Occupations	35	35
Corporate Managers and Administrators	4	4
Domestic / Housekeeper	4	6
Driver / Machine Drivers	30	31
Food / Drink Process Operative	4	4
Gardening / Horticulture	6	6
Hairdressing	1	1
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	5	5
Industrial Plant and Machine	8	9
Information Technology	12	19
Kitchen/Counter Staff	28	28
Managers in Agriculture and Services	5	5
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	4	4
Other Personal Service Occupations	4	4
Other Professions	6	6
Receptionist / Telephonist	2	2
Sales Assistants	69	76
Sales Reps.	8	9
Science and Engineering Professionals	3	3
Secretarial Occupations	2	2
Security	5	7
Semi Skilled Construction	27	27

Jobcentre	Omagh and Strabane	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Skilled Construction Trades	22	25
Skilled Engineering Trades	27	29
Social / Health Professionals	14	14
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	3	3
Stores / Despatch Operatives	14	14
Stores Controller / Manager	1	1
Teaching Professionals	6	6
Technicians	7	7
Waiting Staff	5	6
Grand Total	**479**	**512**

Annex B1

Jobcentre	Omagh	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	7	7
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5	5
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	6	6
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	9	9
Caretaker	3	3
Chef Or Cook	8	11
Childcare	14	15
Cleaners	10	10
Clerical Occupations	31	31
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	2	4
Driver / Machine Drivers	19	19
Food / Drink Process Operative	1	1
Gardening / Horticulture	5	5
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	2	2
Industrial Plant and Machine	5	5
Information Technology	7	7
Kitchen/Counter Staff	20	20
Managers in Agriculture and Services	3	3
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	3	3
Other Personal Service Occupations	2	2
Other Professions	5	5
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1

Jobcentre	Omagh	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Sales Assistants	46	46
Sales Reps.	5	6
Science and Engineering Professionals	3	3
Secretarial Occupations	2	2
Security	1	1
Semi Skilled Construction	14	14
Skilled Construction Trades	14	16
Skilled Engineering Trades	20	22
Social / Health Professionals	14	14
Stores / Despatch Operatives	14	14
Teaching Professionals	3	3
Technicians	5	5
Grand Total	**314**	**325**

Annex B2

Jobcentre	Strabane	01-Aug 2014 to 31 Oct 2014
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	5	5
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5	5
Bar Staff	7	7
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	3	3
Caretaker	2	2
Chef Or Cook	14	16
Childcare	4	4
Cleaners	2	2
Clerical Occupations	4	4
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	2	2
Driver / Machine Drivers	11	12
Food / Drink Process Operative	3	3
Gardening / Horticulture	1	1
Hairdressing	1	1
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	3	3
Industrial Plant and Machine	3	4
Information Technology	5	12
Kitchen/Counter Staff	8	8
Managers in Agriculture and Services	2	2
Other Labourers / Occupations	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	2	2

Jobcentre	Strabane	01-Aug 2014 to 31 Oct 2014
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Other Professions	1	1
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	23	30
Sales Reps.	3	3
Security	4	6
Semi Skilled Construction	13	13
Skilled Construction Trades	8	9
Skilled Engineering Trades	7	7
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	3	3
Stores Controller / Manager	1	1
Teaching Professionals	3	3
Technicians	2	2
Waiting Staff	5	6
Grand Total	**165**	**187**

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the amount of funding initially allocated to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15; and (ii) whether this amount has been reduced due to budget pressures.
(AQW 38067/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department offered funding to Gingerbread NI amounting to £265,736 (£163,530 40% ESF and £102,206 25% DEL contribution) during 2014/15 for their Choices Plus project, which is funded under Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-13. The project is required to provide an additional 35% of match funding of £143,090. The amount of funding offered by the Department to Gingerbread over 2014/15 has not been reduced due to any budgetary pressures

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many job vacancies have been notified to NI Employment services and advertised on jobcentreonline website over the past three months in the (i) Strabane; and (ii) Omagh district, broken down by occupational area.
(AQW 38088/11-15)

Dr Farry: During September 2014 there were 205 vacancy positions raised in the Omagh and Strabane area. This is broken down into 140 vacancy positions in Omagh and 65 vacancy positions in Strabane.

During the past three months August 2014 to October 2014 inclusive there were 512 vacancy positions raised in the Omagh and Strabane area. This is broken down into 325 vacancy positions in Omagh and 165 vacancy positions in Strabane.

Annex 1 shows the breakdown of the information by occupational area for September 2014.

Annex 2 shows the breakdown of the information by occupational area for the past three months August/September/October 2014.

Annex A1

Jobcentre	Omagh and Strabane	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	7	7
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6	6
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	2	2
Bar Staff	1	1
Call Centre Staff	1	1

Jobcentre	**Omagh and Strabane**	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	4	4
Caretaker	3	3
Chef Or Cook	7	11
Childcare	8	9
Cleaners	6	6
Clerical Occupations	15	15
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	1	3
Driver / Machine Drivers	10	10
Gardening / Horticulture	2	2
Hairdressing	1	1
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	2	2
Industrial Plant and Machine	4	4
Information Technology	5	5
Kitchen/Counter Staff	6	6
Managers in Agriculture and Services	2	2
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	2	2
Other Professions	4	4
Receptionist / Telephonist	2	2
Sales Assistants	24	31
Sales Reps.	4	4
Science and Engineering Professionals	2	2
Secretarial Occupations	1	1
Security	3	5
Semi Skilled Construction	9	9
Skilled Construction Trades	8	8
Skilled Engineering Trades	11	11
Social / Health Professionals	8	8
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	2	2
Stores / Despatch Operatives	6	6
Teaching Professionals	1	1
Technicians	2	2
Waiting Staff	2	2
Grand Total	**189**	**205**

Annex A2

Jobcentre	**Omagh**	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	3	3
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3	3
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	2	2
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	3	3
Caretaker	2	2
Chef Or Cook	3	6
Childcare	8	9
Cleaners	4	4
Clerical Occupations	13	13
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	1	3
Driver / Machine Drivers	4	4
Gardening / Horticulture	2	2
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	2	2
Industrial Plant and Machine	4	4
Information Technology	4	4
Kitchen/Counter Staff	5	5
Managers in Agriculture and Services	2	2
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	1	1
Other Professions	4	4
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	19	19
Sales Reps.	3	3
Science and Engineering Professionals	2	2
Secretarial Occupations	1	1
Semi Skilled Construction	4	4
Skilled Construction Trades	5	5
Skilled Engineering Trades	7	7
Social / Health Professionals	8	8
Stores / Despatch Operatives	6	6
Teaching Professionals	1	1
Technicians	1	1
Grand Total	**134**	**140**

Annex A3

Jobcentre	**Strabane**	
Occupational Group	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	4	4
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3	3
Bar Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	1	1
Caretaker	1	1
Chef Or Cook	4	5
Cleaners	2	2
Clerical Occupations	2	2
Driver / Machine Drivers	6	6
Hairdressing	1	1
Information Technology	1	1
Kitchen/Counter Staff	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	1	1
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	5	12
Sales Reps.	1	1
Security	3	5
Semi Skilled Construction	5	5
Skilled Construction Trades	3	3
Skilled Engineering Trades	4	4
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	2	2
Technicians	1	1
Waiting Staff	2	2
Grand Total	**55**	**65**

Annex B

Jobcentre	**Omagh and Strabane**	**01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14**
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	12	12
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	10	10
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	6	6
Bar Staff	7	7
Call Centre Staff	2	2
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	12	12
Caretaker	5	5
Chef Or Cook	22	27
Childcare	18	19
Cleaners	12	12
Clerical Occupations	35	35

Jobcentre	Omagh and Strabane	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Corporate Managers and Administrators	4	4
Domestic / Housekeeper	4	6
Driver / Machine Drivers	30	31
Food / Drink Process Operative	4	4
Gardening / Horticulture	6	6
Hairdressing	1	1
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	5	5
Industrial Plant and Machine	8	9
Information Technology	12	19
Kitchen/Counter Staff	28	28
Managers in Agriculture and Services	5	5
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	4	4
Other Personal Service Occupations	4	4
Other Professions	6	6
Receptionist / Telephonist	2	2
Sales Assistants	69	76
Sales Reps.	8	9
Science and Engineering Professionals	3	3
Secretarial Occupations	2	2
Security	5	7
Semi Skilled Construction	27	27
Skilled Construction Trades	22	25
Skilled Engineering Trades	27	29
Social / Health Professionals	14	14
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	3	3
Stores / Despatch Operatives	14	14
Stores Controller / Manager	1	1
Teaching Professionals	6	6
Technicians	7	7
Waiting Staff	5	6
Grand Total	**479**	**512**

Annex B1

Jobcentre	Omagh	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	7	7
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5	5
Assemblers	1	1
Auto Trade	6	6

Jobcentre	Omagh	01 Aug 14 to 31 Oct 14
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	9	9
Caretaker	3	3
Chef Or Cook	8	11
Childcare	14	15
Cleaners	10	10
Clerical Occupations	31	31
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	2	4
Driver / Machine Drivers	19	19
Food / Drink Process Operative	1	1
Gardening / Horticulture	5	5
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	2	2
Industrial Plant and Machine	5	5
Information Technology	7	7
Kitchen/Counter Staff	20	20
Managers in Agriculture and Services	3	3
Operators	1	1
Other Labourers / Occupations	3	3
Other Personal Service Occupations	2	2
Other Professions	5	5
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	46	46
Sales Reps.	5	6
Science and Engineering Professionals	3	3
Secretarial Occupations	2	2
Security	1	1
Semi Skilled Construction	14	14
Skilled Construction Trades	14	16
Skilled Engineering Trades	20	22
Social / Health Professionals	14	14
Stores / Despatch Operatives	14	14
Teaching Professionals	3	3
Technicians	5	5
Grand Total	**314**	**325**

Annex B2

Jobcentre	Strabane	01-Aug 2014 to 31 Oct 2014
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Accounts / Wages Clerk / Bookkeepers	5	5

Jobcentre	Strabane	01-Aug 2014 to 31 Oct 2014
Occupational Area	**Vacancies**	**Positions**
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5	5
Bar Staff	7	7
Call Centre Staff	1	1
Care Assistant / Nursing Auxiliary	3	3
Caretaker	2	2
Chef Or Cook	14	16
Childcare	4	4
Cleaners	2	2
Clerical Occupations	4	4
Corporate Managers and Administrators	2	2
Domestic / Housekeeper	2	2
Driver / Machine Drivers	11	12
Food / Drink Process Operative	3	3
Gardening / Horticulture	1	1
Hairdressing	1	1
Health / Nursing / Paramedical	3	3
Industrial Plant and Machine	3	4
Information Technology	5	12
Kitchen/Counter Staff	8	8
Managers in Agriculture and Services	2	2
Other Labourers / Occupations	1	1
Other Personal Service Occupations	2	2
Other Professions	1	1
Receptionist / Telephonist	1	1
Sales Assistants	23	30
Sales Reps.	3	3
Security	4	6
Semi Skilled Construction	13	13
Skilled Construction Trades	8	9
Skilled Engineering Trades	7	7
Stitchers / Other Textiles Production	3	3
Stores Controller / Manager	1	1
Teaching Professionals	3	3
Technicians	2	2
Waiting Staff	5	6
Grand Total	**165**	**187**

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of his Department's treatment of staff under the Inefficiency Sick Absence policy.
(AQW 38117/11-15)

Dr Farry: Managing sickness absence within the Northern Ireland Civil Service is a particularly challenging task and unfortunately there is no easy solution to what has become a persistent problem. In recent years, significant resources have been dedicated to reducing sickness absence levels and ensuring employees and managers are aware of and fulfil their roles and responsibilities however absence levels remain stubbornly high.

My Department implements the comprehensive range of NICS policies and procedures which are designed to address sickness absence and which are carefully balanced to ensure that employees are supported to maintain their health and wellbeing and remain in work or, where absence has occurred, to return to the workplace at the earliest possible opportunity. Unfortunately, circumstances can arise where neither of these options applies and in such cases early exit is appropriate.

The NICS Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy allows for inefficiency action, ranging from written warning to dismissal, to be taken where absence levels are unsatisfactory however mechanisms are in place for employees to challenge such decisions. I receive regular updates from my senior officials on sickness absence inefficiency activity and all such matters are also subject to regular internal and external scrutiny.

I am satisfied that my Department applies the NICS policy in a consistent, robust and entirely proportionate manner which takes account of the circumstances of each individual case. I am also satisfied that the appropriate strategies, governance, reporting and monitoring arrangements are in place to support this approach.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's Human Resources negotiations with NIPSA over the establishment of an Industrial Relations Framework.
(AQW 38120/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department recognises the value of good industrial relations and is committed to ensuring to the highest level of cooperation with Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) for the benefit of the organisation and its employee.

Negotiations with NIPSA over the establishment of an Industrial Relations Framework are currently ongoing. Negotiations commenced on 7 October 2013 and NIPSA representatives were provided with a draft Industrial Relations Framework on this date. Human Resources (HR) met with NIPSA on 17 October 2013 at which time representatives were invited to put forward comments on the draft. NIPSA subsequently provided a revised draft Industrial Relation Framework to HR on 15 September 2014. HR is currently in the process of reviewing this draft and it is envisaged that a final document will be agreed by the end of the financial year.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 36805/11-15, when people working in the Further Education sector will be paid their increments from 2013/14.
(AQW 38182/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further education employers inform me that the increments from 2013/14 were paid as follows:

Non-Teaching Staff	Eligible staff (more than 6 months service at 1 April 2013) - paid April/May 2013 Non-eligible staff (less than 6 months service at 1 April 2013) – paid February 2014
Lecturing staff	paid September/ October 2014
Principals and Vice Principals	DFP approval received in October 2014; payments currently being implemented

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total number of undergraduate students at the University of Ulster; and the percentage who are (i) members of the Protestant community; (ii) members of the Roman Catholic community; and (iii) of unknown background.
(AQW 38268/11-15)

Dr Farry: The attached table was produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and shows the latest figures available.

All Undergraduates enrolments at University of Ulster by Religion 2012/13

	Enrolments at University of Ulster 2012/13					
Campus	**Protestant**	**Catholic**	**Other**	**Not Known / available**	**Non NI Domiciled**	**Total Under-graduates**
Belfast	475	660	225	90	110	1,560
%	**30%**	**42%**	**14%**	**6%**	**7%**	**100%**
Coleraine	1,655	1,345	485	235	365	4,085
%	**41%**	**33%**	**12%**	**6%**	**9%**	**100%**
Jordanstown	2,930	5,195	830	530	820	10,305
%	**28%**	**50%**	**8%**	**5%**	**8%**	**100%**
Magee	580	2,080	300	300	485	3,745

Campus	Enrolments at University of Ulster 2012/13					
	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known / available	Non NI Domiciled	Total Under-graduates
%	**16%**	**56%**	**8%**	**8%**	**13%**	**100%**
Birmingham	0	0	0	0	210	210
%	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**100%**	**100%**
London	0	0	0	0	750	750
%	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**100%**	**100%**
Total	5,640	9,280	1,840	1,150	2,740	20,655
%	**27%**	**45%**	**9%**	**6%**	**13%**	**100%**

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, for each campus of the University of Ulster, to detail the total (i) number; and (ii) percentage of undergraduate students who (a) are members of the Protestant community; (b) are members of the Roman Catholic community; and (c) have an unknown background.
(AQW 38336/11-15)

Dr Farry: The attached table was produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and shows the latest figures available.

All Undergraduates enrolments at University of Ulster by Religion 2012/13

Campus	Enrolments at University of Ulster 2012/13					
	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known / available	Non NI Domiciled	Total Under-graduates
Belfast	475	660	225	90	110	1,560
%	**30%**	**42%**	**14%**	**6%**	**7%**	**100%**
Coleraine	1,655	1,345	485	235	365	4,085
%	**41%**	**33%**	**12%**	**6%**	**9%**	**100%**
Jordanstown	2,930	5,195	830	530	820	10,305
%	**28%**	**50%**	**8%**	**5%**	**8%**	**100%**
Magee	580	2,080	300	300	485	3,745
%	**16%**	**56%**	**8%**	**8%**	**13%**	**100%**
Birmingham	0	0	0	0	210	210
%	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**100%**	**100%**
London	0	0	0	0	750	750
%	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**100%**	**100%**
Total	5,640	9,280	1,840	1,150	2,740	20,655
%	**27%**	**45%**	**9%**	**6%**	**13%**	**100%**

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis College.
(AQW 38400/11-15)

Dr Farry: I refer to my response to AQW 30880/11/15 which also addressed this issue. The Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College has advised the Department that the position in relation to the proposed merger with Queen's University Belfast has been superseded by the College's submission to the second stage of the Review of Teacher Training Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The stage two review has now completed and following the publication of the International Review Panel's report – "Aspiring to Excellence", I have commenced engagement with the four Initial Teacher Training providers to seek a way forward.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) who will pay for the additional generating capacity that SONI Ltd is seeking by tender; (ii) how much this is estimated to cost; and (iii) will such result in an increase on the average household bill.
(AQW 37669/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The additional generation capacity will have some impact on consumers' electricity bills.

An update paper on security of supply is being prepared by my Department and the Utility Regulator for publication within the next few weeks. This will include more detail on the costs and benefits associated with the additional generation capacity.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on SONI Ltd's tendering process for extra generating capacity.
(AQW 37670/11-15)

Mrs Foster: SONI, in co-operation with the Utility Regulator, has taken forward a competitive process resulting in the award of a contract to provide 250 megawatts of additional generation capacity.

The additional capacity is to be in place by January 2016.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the ongoing integration of the systems, how far is SONI Ltd now dependent on EirGrid to operate the Northern Ireland system.
(AQW 37671/11-15)

Mrs Foster: SONI's key function is the operation of the transmission network in Northern Ireland. SONI and EirGrid each have separate control centres from which dispatch instructions to generation sets in each of their respective jurisdictions are issued. The SONI Transmission System Operator licence facilitates SONI to work in conjunction with EirGrid in relation to generation in the Single Electricity Market and operational planning.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what updates she has had from the Utility Regulator on licence compliance monitoring of SONI Ltd, EirGrid and NIE; and on what dates were the last compliance reports submitted by SONI Ltd and NIE.
(AQW 37672/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As I indicated in response to AQW/26473 11-15 and AQW 26400/11-15 tabled by the Member in October 2013, licence compliance monitoring is a matter for the Utility Regulator which is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly, not my Department. As the Regulator is required to act independently of Government, my Department does not interfere in this matter and I neither ask for, nor receive, updates on compliance monitoring as a matter of routine. I am advised by the Regulator that it requested information on licence compliance from SONI and received a response in September which it is currently considering. The Regulator has also advised that NIE submitted a compliance report in accordance with Condition 12 of NIE's Licence to Participate in Transmission and NIE's Electricity Distribution Licence on 27 June 2014 to cover the period April 2013 – March 2014.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in her Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 37674/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No efficiencies have been realised in my Department as a direct result of the work of DFP's Public Sector Reform Division.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any interest for inward investment in East Londonderry since 1 April 2013; and how her Department and Invest NI have followed each of these up.
(AQW 37701/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There have been three visits by potential investors to the East Londonderry PCA between 1 April 2013 and 1 October 2014. One of these developed into an investment project but the company concerned decided to locate elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

Invest NI remains in contact with the other two companies; however at this point discussions are still at an early stage.

Invest NI seeks to build positive relationships with potential investors through hosting visits and maintaining regular contact. The decision whether to invest and where, is a matter for the company concerned and often takes place after a prolonged period of internal research and evaluation. All discussions and contact between Invest NI and a potential investor are regarded as 'commercial in confidence' until a formal offer is accepted.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what inward investment benefits have resulted from the International Sales Conference stakeholder event that was held in Portstewart in March 2011.
(AQW 37786/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The primary aim of the event on 30 March 2011 was to outline the Coleraine proposition to the Invest NI overseas sales teams. This was a successful event and the overseas teams were able to see first-hand the initiatives that the Council has undertaken, including Digital Causeway Ireland.

The conference was just one of the ways that Invest NI works with local stakeholders to encourage the development of regional propositions which can help ensure that the offering for their area is maximised to attract visits and investment by potential investors.

Since the conference in March 2011 Invest NI has hosted visits to the Coleraine Borough Council area. However, securing an inward investment project is the end point of an extensive process which may span a period of years. A potential investor can often make a number of visits to a number of areas before deciding on where to locate its business. It may therefore not be possible to directly link it back to the sales conference.

Invest NI is committed to working with local councils on how to develop a sales proposition that shows the strength and opportunities within their area. The agency has developed an “FDI app” and a “District Council App”, which will help present a snapshot of the benefits of setting up in Northern Ireland to potential investors. The new Causeway Coast and Glens Council has indicated that it wishes to be involved and Invest NI is working with it to develop downloadable mobile applications which will form a promotional toolkit highlighting the area’s attractiveness as a potential investment location.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact of the cancellation of the Tourism Events Fund on the recent growth in tourism and hospitality.
(AQW 37989/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The overall financial position for the Northern Ireland Block for 2015/16 is very difficult. It is on this basis that applications are not being sought for the Events Fund for National Sponsorship Scheme and new International Events in 2015/16.

Currently 9 International events have a commitment of receiving 3 year letter of offer from 2014/15 through to 2016/17 and will not be affected by the current funding situation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department received a request to include Larne Oil and Gas on Petroleum Licence PL1/10; and whether this request has been agreed.
(AQW 38091/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to set out Tamboran’s grounds for judicially reviewing her decision to terminate its licence; and whether her Department intends to contest the application for leave.
(AQW 38262/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As the matter is before the courts it would not be appropriate to set out the grounds of the application for leave.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department has acted in accordance with the Aarhus convention on access to justice and information on environmental matters in their refusal to disclose environmental information to third parties affected by the outcome of the judicial review by Tamboran Resources.
(AQW 38441/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department seeks to act in compliance with European legislation in relation to Environmental Information Regulations but reserves the right to apply the exemptions set out in that legislation where appropriate.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what land in the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council area is available or zoned for industrial development.
(AQO 6991/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The zoning of land is currently a matter for the Department of the Environment through the area plan process.

I can, however, advise that Invest NI holds ninety one acres within the Council area. Of this total there remain five acres available to support economic growth. This area of land is located within Dungannon Business Park

The organisation is also aware of a range of private sector commercial property options available across the Council area including sites previously operated by Tyrone Brick that were brought to market last month. Further information can be found through the agency’s commercial property database through the NIBusiness Information website.

I understand that the Chief Executive of Invest NI will be meeting with members of the Council on Thursday 13th November to discuss the provision of industrial land within the area.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what further measures she will put in place to support knowledge economy businesses including increasing the percentage of the workforce employed in this sector.
(AQO 6992/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As highlighted in the recent Knowledge Economy Index report, produced by NISP Connect in the Northern Ireland Science Park, Northern Ireland is now the second fastest growing knowledge economy region in the UK. This is excellent news. It is critical, however, that we work collaboratively, businesses academia and government, to replicate this growth across all sectors of the Northern Ireland economy. The recently published Innovation Strategy sets out a range of actions designed to achieve this.

The further development of Northern Ireland's knowledge economy businesses remains a key strategic priority for the NI Executive and through my Department and others we will ensure that knowledge economy businesses continue to receive a high level of support tailored to their needs.

Invest NI already provide a comprehensive range of support to large and small businesses throughout the knowledge sector across Northern Ireland. This support includes an extensive range of Business Solutions and initiatives as well as providing direct funding to support new knowledge sector start-ups and business expansions. The new twenty six point three million pounds fund, TechStart NI, is just one example of this.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her plans for the implementation of the Going for Growth strategy.
(AQO 6994/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive Response to Going for Growth contains a comprehensive action plan which sets out how Departments will take forward those actions which fall to Government. The Agri-Food Strategy Board will have a key role to play, in partnership with Government, in driving the third of recommendations in Going for Growth which fall to the industry to deliver.

My Department has already been taking forward a range of actions such as the introduction of the Agri-Food Loan Scheme and a major review of Northern Ireland agri-food marketing and promotion.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to improve the availability of gas to rural towns.
(AQO 6996/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I continue to support the economic and efficient development of the natural gas industry in Northern Ireland. Further extension of the gas network will depend on the availability of sufficient gas loads and willingness of a gas company to apply for a licence to provide new networks.

Where it is not feasible to provide natural gas, my Department will continue to support the availability of other energy options, such as renewable heat technologies, as alternatives to heating oil.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's commitment to support economic recovery and tackle disadvantage.
(AQO 6997/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Economic Strategy sets out what the Executive is doing collectively to boost the competitiveness of the economy and create wealth and prosperity for all.

I have recently published the second Economic Strategy Annual Report which illustrates that considerable progress has been made in implementing Departments' commitments.

Latest figures at end May 2014 indicate that my Department, through Invest NI, has promoted 25,543 jobs. £402million investment was secured in R&D by March 2014, and 451 businesses were supported to undertake R&D for the first time.

I am also working with Minister Farry to develop a Strategy to tackle Economic Inactivity which will seek to reduce economic inactivity and provide support through skills, training, incentives and jobs creation.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the economic return on investment of grants awarded through the International Tourism Events Funds and the Tourism Events National Sponsorship Scheme.
(AQO 6998/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the financial year 2014/15 NITB funded sixty three National events under the Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme and thirteen International events under the International Tourism Events Fund with a total contribution from NITB of £2.8million.

NITB is in the process of completing independent economic evaluations for ten of these events.

Department of the Environment

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment why the Northern Ireland Environment Agency objected to plans to develop a community sports facility at Lough Park in Ballynahinch.
(AQW 37568/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) had raised concerns, in relation to planning application R/2013/0307/F, about the impact of the submitted location of the 3G pitch on priority habitats and bats, a European protected species. However, NIEA officials engaged with the Project Development Officer to look at options for adjusting the location of the pitch.

On 11 September 2014, I met with Councillor Mark Murnin and local community representatives, to hear their views. At a subsequent project meeting involving officials from my Department and all interested parties, a number of options were discussed.

I understand that the Department has recently received an amended application proposing a revised positioning of the pitch. Further information has been requested before engagement with consultees can commence. The Department shall then proceed to determine the application.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, given the eleven written objections to the demolition of the Orpheus building in Belfast, what research was completed in relation to architecture for the newly proposed Belfast city campus of the University of Ulster, regarding to the surrounding Cathedral Quarter conservation area with reference to the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 Article 104, section (11).
(AQW 37717/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The planning application for the new Belfast campus for the University of Ulster (UU), which was granted planning permission by the Department on 16 May 2013 under planning reference Z/2012/0361/F, was accompanied by an Environmental Statement, a Design Statement and a Built Heritage Appraisal.

The proposed development comprises three blocks (Blocks A, B and C) to be erected at the junction of York Street, Frederick Street and Great Patrick Street and requires the demolition of the existing buildings on the site. Block B lies within the Cathedral Conservation Area whereas Blocks A & C are outside the conservation area but adjacent to its boundary. The sites are also adjacent to a number of listed buildings, including St. Patrick's Church and St Anne's Cathedral in Donegal Street. Accordingly, in deciding to approve the new campus proposal, and therefore accepting the demolition of the Orpheus building, the Department fully assessed the development proposals, having particular regard to relevant architectural and built heritage issues. This included an assessment against the policies contained in Planning Policy Statement 6 – Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage, specifically policies:

- BH 11 'Development affecting the setting of a listed building';
- BH12 'New development in a Conservation Area' and
- BH14 'Demolition in a Conservation Area.'

You refer to Article 104 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which deals with Conservation Areas. Although the Act received Royal Assent on 4 May 2011 after completing its passage through the previous NI Assembly, the bulk of the Act, including Article 104, will not come into force until planning powers transfer to councils. The current relevant legislation is set out under Article 50 (5) of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. This article requires that "where any area is for the time being designated as a conservation area special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing its character or appearance." This will be the prime consideration for the Department in the exercise of its planning functions within conservation areas.

Policies BH 12 and BH14 reflect this statutory requirement and I am satisfied that my Department took into account relevant architectural and built heritage issues.

In deciding to approve the new campus proposal and therefore accepting the demolition of the Orpheus building, the Department took into account all the relevant material considerations in the case, including: the economic benefits of regeneration; the design of the new build and its impact on the character of the area and the setting of the Cathedral and Belfast City Centre Conservation Areas.

In addition the Department fully considered the environmental information contained in the Environmental Statement, the comments of consultees, third party representations and had regard to the relevant planning policy context, the statutory development plan and all other relevant material considerations.

I am satisfied that the decision to approve was the correct decision and will secure a much needed investment of £250 million to this part of the city with enormous economic and social regeneration benefits to Belfast as a whole and the north part of the city in particular.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36990/11-15, how many Belfast public hire taxis currently have a dual tariff programmed into their meters.
(AQW 37854/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver & Vehicle Agency records show that currently five licensed Belfast public hire taxis have a dual tariff programmed into their meters.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36987/11-15, how enforcement officials from the Driver and Vehicle Agency conduct roadside spot checks on meters of Belfast public hire vehicles who operate from private hire companies, given that private hire fares are unregulated.
(AQW 37856/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Belfast Public Hire plated taxis are permitted to have dual tariffs programmed into their meters. The first tariff, the regulated fare, must be displayed when the driver is providing a public hire service and the driver cannot charge a fare greater than that prescribed by the Department. The second tariff can be used when the vehicle is pre-booked and operating on a private hire basis.

DVA Enforcement Officers routinely conduct roadside spot checks on taxi meters installed in licensed Belfast Public Hire Taxis to ensure they satisfy fitment requirements, remain properly sealed and to validate the tariff being used. Where a taxi meter is inspected and found to be insecure, unsealed or inaccurate, enforcement action can be taken including the issue of a Defect Notice or a Prohibition Notice. Where prohibition action has been taken this

would result in the suspension of the vehicle's PSV Vehicle Licence until remedial action has been taken and the taxi meter re-tested and sealed by the Agency.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue the Carrier Bag Levy has generated since it was introduced.
(AQW 37894/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The first set of official Carrier Bag Levy statistics, covering the period 8 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 were published by my Department on 27th August 2014 informing that in its first year the levy generated net proceeds of £4.17 million.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment who is responsible for covering the costs of fines imposed by Europe as a result of successful infraction proceedings brought against the UK in relation to environmental failures affecting Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37925/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Infraction proceedings under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union are brought by the European Commission against a member state which the Commission considers has infringed EU law. Consequently, it is against the relevant member state that any EU fine will be levied.

If any penalty were to be imposed against the UK by the European Court of Justice, it would be a matter for the UK Government to determine how the penalty would apply to a devolved administration. The outcome cannot be predicted since the UK has never been the subject of financial sanctions imposed by the European Court of Justice.

Northern Ireland district councils may, under discretionary powers introduced by the Localism Act 2011, be required to pay some or all of a fine where they have caused or contributed to the imposition of the sanction.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37092/11-15, to provide the regulations for his Department and its agencies when proposing legislation which directly involves existing government contacted companies and for which the proposed legislation would be advantageous.
(AQW 37947/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The existence of a service wide contract between the NICS and the company in question does not affect the way my Department develops, or has developed, policy or legislation in respect of taxis.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of cases of illegal dumping, broken down by local council, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37970/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The figures in the attached table indicate the number of cases of illegal dumping received by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last three years. These cases include a range of unauthorised activities, from illegal dumping of various wastes (construction and demolition, fuel laundering etc.) through to unlicensed treatment facilities for end of life vehicles.

Additional Flytipping figures where Councils participate in the Flytipping Protocol

	2014 to date		2013		2012	2011
Antrim	36	11	36	8	18	18
Ards	30	2	24	1	29	40

	2014 to date		2013		2012		2011
Armagh	22	23	21	58	40	31	31
Ballymena	35		12		21		23
Ballymoney	9		4		7		7
Banbridge	17	6	11	2	10		17
Belfast	53		27		29		22
Carrickfergus	7	2	7	1	7	2	4
Castlereagh	16	1	8		2		7
Coleraine	14	1	14	5	19		19
Cookstown	18	7	11	5	17	6	10
Craigavon	27	9	27	7	20	6	19
Derry	35	2	26	7	24	2	15
Down	27	1	35		42		13
Dungannon	54		27		36		34
Fermanagh	25	4	33	1	17		24
Larne	11		14		10		12
Limavady	10	2	4	1	15		13
Lisburn	40	4	25	6	39		28
Magherafelt	12	2	5	7	7		12
Moyle	6	1	6	4	3	1	7
Newry and Mourne	38	59	46	82	32	53	31
Newtownabbey	36	8	28		28		17
North Down	5	4	3	1	8		3
Omagh	14	2	11		17		9
Strabane	9	0	15	0	8		25

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the anticipated time period for approving planning applications for large scale wind turbine developments.
(AQW 38051/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The processing times for wind energy applications can vary. The applications raise a number of highly technical and complex planning issues which requires my Department to consult with a range of other authorities by reason of their specific environmental responsibility. However, as with all applications, the aim is to bring them to conclusion in a timely manner having fully considered all the issues. In 2014 I increased the number of staff within the renewable energy team. This has been focused on dealing primarily with a backlog of applications however the result of this should be an improvement in processing times for renewable energy applications in the future.

I would also add that not all planning applications involving wind turbines are approved. Whilst there is a presumption in favour of all development, a careful balance has to be struck between the benefits associated with harnessing wind energy and the protection of the environment and the amenity of nearby residents.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has consulted with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment regarding the implications of planning decisions for large scale wind turbine developments for the local economy.
(AQW 38052/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials notify the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on all wind farm developments. The purpose of this process is to assist DETI in their responsibility for monitoring the renewable energy targets under Northern Ireland's Strategic Energy Framework.

The economic benefits, along with the wider environmental and social benefits of wind farm development, are material considerations in the determination of all applications and are given significant weight in determining whether planning permission should be granted. However comments are not sought from DETI on the implications of individual planning

applications for the local economy as the weight to be attached to these considerations is a matter of planning judgement on the merits of each individual case.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the situation on the Sixmile River following the major fish kill, given that the river is a major tributary to Lough Neagh and is the third major incident in the last six years.
(AQW 38064/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) was first alerted to this fish kill at 11:15hrs on Wednesday 29 October 2014, when a report was received, via NIEA's Water Pollution Hotline of a number of dead fish in the Six Mile Water at Ballyclare. NIEA staff were immediately tasked to investigate the report and determine the environmental impact.

During the subsequent NIEA investigation statutory samples were collected from two different premises. A number of other potential sources of pollution in the catchment were also visited and investigated by NIEA staff.

Department for Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) Inland Fisheries Group was informed of the fish kill. The DCAL investigation confirmed that a total of 964 fish of all sizes had been killed.

As part of the investigation NIEA have also collected a number of investigatory water samples from the river and its tributaries, and have carried out a detailed biological survey of insect life in the river and its tributaries. Analysis of the findings from these samples and surveys are continuing.

I can assure you that NIEA is committed to continuing to work to find the cause of this latest fish kill.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has been involved in the last two years in (a) Coleraine Borough Council; and (b) Limavady Borough Council.
(AQW 38083/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In the 2012-13 business year the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) were consulted on 143 planning applications in Coleraine Borough and on 78 applications in Limavady Borough. In the 2013-14 business year NIEA were consulted on 157 planning applications in Coleraine Borough and on 80 planning applications in Limavady Borough. These figures are provided from Planning administrative systems and do not form part of published and validated DOE Official Statistics.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment what value Planning Service places on planning applications that increase economic development and jobs.
(AQW 38086/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a key role to play in promoting economic development by ensuring that the planning system is a vehicle to grow a dynamic, innovative and sustainable economy, safeguard and create a better environment, aid economic recovery, unlock development potential and support job creation.

In doing so, I recognise that many planning applications have associated economic and job benefits and thus my Department seeks to ensure such applications are processed successfully in line with statutory requirements. Over 90% of planning applications received by my Department are approved.

My Department also has a key commitment under the Programme for Government 2011-2015 to ensure that 90% of large scale investment (LSI) planning decisions are made within 6 months and applications with job creation potential are given additional weight.

For the first three months of 2014/15, 19 LSI applications were either received, or carried forward from the previous year, where a decision was either reached or it was possible to reach a decision within the 6 month processing target. Of these, 18, or 95%, were processed within 6 months.

I intend to continue to make prompt and sound planning decisions and to build on a planning system that is fast, fair, fit for purpose and will create a better environment and a stronger economy.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline Tamboran Resources' grounds for judicially reviewing his decision to require an Environmental Impact Assessment for exploratory drilling at Belcoo, County Fermanagh; and whether his Department intends to contest the application for leave.
(AQW 38096/11-15)

Mr Durkan: It would not be appropriate for me to make any comment in relation to this case due to the ongoing legal proceedings.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37026/11-15, whether the materials imported to the site under planning approval K/2013/0072/F which is in close proximity to the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation, constitute waste.
(AQW 38098/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Investigations have demonstrated that material imported to this site is consistent with processed aggregate. My officials are continuing to investigate activity at this site.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on application (P/2013/0189/F) from St. Bronagh's GAA, including the expected timeframe.
(AQW 38104/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This is a substantial and complex planning application from the St Bronagh's Club for the development of a new playing facility at Drumsesk Road.

My officials have met with club representatives on a number of occasions. Those discussions have produced a series of revisions to the application, not least, a proposed new means of access to the site and changes to the proposed clubhouse.

The amended scheme is currently the subject of a consultation exercise. A number of consultations remain outstanding.

The Department hopes to be in a position to conclude its assessment of this application in February or March 2015.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37358/11-15, what rationale was given by each council, other than Belfast, for not issuing fixed penalty notices under the provisions of the Noise Act 1996.
(AQW 38191/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act (NI) 2011, which came into operation on 1 April 2012, amended the Noise Act 1996 to allow district councils the discretion to use the Noise Act powers as and when it was deemed appropriate. As this is a discretionary power, the Department is not required to hold any details on the non issue of fixed penalty notices. However, the information may be available from each individual council.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37924/11-15, on what date his Department issued warning letters to the operators of the unauthorised sand extraction taking place from the bed of Lough Neagh Special Protection Area; and what assurances he can give that this unregulated activity has now ceased.
(AQW 38206/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials issued letters between 25 September and 10 October 2014.

Inspections of the Lough Neagh area are currently being arranged. These inspections will observe whether operations have ceased.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department is working with the DVLA offices in Swansea to address teething problems since the centralisation of services from Coleraine.
(AQW 38217/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Vehicle registration and licensing services were centralised within the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea on 21 July 2014. From that date, responsibility for the delivery of vehicle registration and licences in Northern Ireland transferred to DVLA.

Following the transfer, I was aware that the DVLA were experiencing a number of transitional issues which were affecting local customers. I wrote to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Robert Goodwill MP, on 13 August 2014, on behalf of Northern Ireland customers to express my disappointment that the level of service provided by DVLA was not of the high standard expected in Northern Ireland.

In response to my letter, Claire Perry MP, replied confirming that she was aware that there were issues with a small number of records, reassuring me that these would be rectified as a matter of priority. DVLA have since stated, at official level, that the initial teething problems have been rectified.

Since the transfer of the service to Swansea, DVA has no access to the DVLA system to monitor or resolve issues relating to Northern Ireland motorists. Therefore, should you need to highlight a particular issue on behalf of a constituent you can raise it directly with the DVLA at the address below:

Mr Oliver Morley, Chief Executive, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Swansea SA6 7JL

There is also a dedicated telephone number and email address for MPs and other elected representatives, including MLAs, to contact DVLA on behalf of their constituents. Emails should be sent to dvlaministerials@dvla.gsi.gov.uk, or alternatively the telephone number is 01792 788585.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37576/11-15, to detail the specific planning permissions associated with onshore operations which were used to justify the granting of each of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme certificates relating to Lough Neagh.
(AQW 38303/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The attached table is the record held in relation to the granting of each of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme certificates.

Alcs No.	Name & Site address	Date applied for	Date Certificate Issued	Other Information
49	Norman Emerson & Sons Ltd Kinnego House, 1 Annoloiste Rd, Lurgan	9 Feb 2004	Not issued	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed. However Certificate was not issued as the Discharge Consent for Water was outstanding.
51	Norman Emerson & Sons Ltd, Ardmore Readymix, 118 Ardmore Rd, Lurgan	9 Feb 2004	18 Nov 2004	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed.
99	A E Mulholland & Sons, Derryclone Rd, Gawleys Gate, Craigavon, BT67 0BP	20 May 2004	12 Apr 2005	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed. Planning permission N/2000/0161/F date 20 Feb 2001
100	Mulholland Bros. (B&S) Ltd, 17 Shore Rd, Ballinderry Upper, Lisburn BT28 2LQ	2 Aug 2004	17 Nov 2004	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed.
125	Cemex (NI) Ltd, Toomebridge Sand Depot, 30 Creagh Rd, Toomebridge BT41 3SE	17 May 2004	26 Jan 2005 to Readymix (NI) Ltd Reissued 16 Oct 2007 to Cemex (NI) Ltd	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed. Retrospective planning permission granted 6 Sept 2004 (H/2004/1188/F). Discharge consent TC354/04 granted 8 Nov 2006.
137	Northstone (NI) Ltd Sandybay Site, 19 Shore Rd, upper Ballinderry BT28 2LF	23 June 2004	17 Nov 2004 to Scott (Toomebridge) Ltd reissued 4 Jul 2006 to Northstone (NI) Ltd	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed. Discharge consent TC330/06 granted 26 Mar 2007
138	Northstone (NI) Ltd, Ballyginniff Site, Loughview Rd, Crumlin, Co Antrim BT29 4EE	23 June 2004	17 Nov 2004 to Scott (Toomebridge) Ltd reissued 4 Jul 2006 to Northstone (NI) Ltd	Permission to process material at Ballyginniff was granted on 20 May 1969. Discharge consent TC331/06 granted 26 Mar 2007
139	Northstone (NI) Ltd, Hutchinson's Site, Creagh Rd, Toomebridge, Co Antrim BT41 3SD	23 June 2004	17 Nov 2004 to Scott (Toomebridge) Ltd reissued 4 Jul 2006 to Northstone (NI) Ltd	Planning Service confirmed no authorisation needed. Discharge consent 333/06 granted 3 jul 2007

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37576/11-15, whether it was appropriate for his Department to grant onshore planning permissions to facilitate unauthorised Environmental Impact Assessment Development taking place within Lough Neagh Special Protection Area; and whether he has concerns regarding the implications of such a practice. **(AQW 38304/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: While historically planning permissions have been granted for the land based operations associated with sand extraction on Lough Neagh, once the unauthorised development was brought to my attention I sought to remedy this.

It is my policy that all unauthorised extractive and waste operations require the most rigorous and prompt enforcement action. It is not acceptable that mineral extraction activities be allowed to continue without first having been through relevant assessments and obtained appropriate planning approval.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37628/11-15, why the level of detail of the explosive store, which was considered sufficient for approval K/2014/0387/F, was not considered necessary for the approval of K/2013/0072/F given that his Department claims that full approval for an explosives store was granted under the earlier permission.
(AQW 38361/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Information required in determining a planning application will be dependent upon the particular merits of that application, the site and the development proposed. It is considered that the Department had sufficient information in order to determine K/2013/0072/F.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the timescale for the requirement for all taxis to have meters and carry receipt printers.
(AQW 38456/11-15)

Mr Durkan: All taxis will be required to have taximeters and printers from September 2015.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland.
(AQO 7001/11-15)

Mr Durkan: On 4 February 2014, I issued for public consultation the draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS). The SPPS sets out the Department's regional planning policies for securing the orderly and consistent development of land under a reformed two-tier local planning system. It is a proportionate and appropriate framework for delivery of the reformed planning system when the primary responsibility for planning functions transfers from the Department to councils on 1 April 2015.

The 12 week public consultation exercise on the draft SPPS was facilitated by means of online digital consultation with stakeholders invited to respond electronically. This is the first time the Department has incorporated digital engagement into the policy-making process. The consultation closed on 29 April 2014.

Over 700 responses were received from individuals and a wide range of stakeholders, such as Business and Industry interests (including CBI, NIIRTA, IOD, NIFHA); Environmental interests (including NIEL, RSPB); Community / Academic / NGO interests (including Royal Town Planning Institute, Belfast Civic Trust, Historic Monuments Council, various residents groups); and Local Government interests (including NILGA and a number of local councils).

The scale of the response and the diverse composition of respondents is considered to be encouraging as it indicates a healthy public interest in planning matters generally but particularly the future of planning under the new two tier system that will be brought into effect in April 2015.

Officials have finalised the detailed analysis of all responses received to the public consultation exercise. A full synopsis of consultation responses report was presented to the Environment Committee on 6 November 2014.

The Department is aiming to finalise the SPPS by the end of the year, subject to Executive Agreement.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the urban regeneration and community planning functions that are yet to be scheduled for transfer to the new councils.
(AQO 7004/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Member's question concerns two elements of the reform of local government.

The first is the provision to councils of urban regeneration powers currently exercised by the Department for Social Development and which requires primary legislation to be brought forward by DSD. As this is firmly the remit of the Minister for Social Development, I do not intend outlining this function in any great detail, other than to state that I have raised my concern in recent meetings with Ministerial colleagues, including Minister Storey, at the continued delay in reaching Executive agreement for the introduction of the DSD Bill to provide councils with regeneration powers to the Assembly.

Whilst a failure to provide councils with urban regeneration and community development powers will not prevent the rest of the reform programme from going ahead, it is, nonetheless, a very important element of the reform process. I believe that the re-coupling of regeneration with the planning functions transferring from my department will provide councils with the ability to shape their communities.

The second function raised by this question, relates to community planning. Councils will have duties and powers of community planning, but these are not transferring to councils – they are entirely new and have been provided by the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

Community planning involves integrating the various streams of public life, such as the services and functions that are delivered in an area, and producing a plan that will set out the future direction of a council area. Councils will lead this process. However, they will not be able to achieve this on their own. A duty has been placed on all Government Departments to promote, encourage and have regard for community planning. Councils will also work with statutory

bodies, agencies and the wider community, including the voluntary, community and business sectors, to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of an area and improving the quality of life of its citizens.

I recently launched a consultation on those bodies to be named in subordinate legislation as statutory community planning partners, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in community planning to respond to that consultation.

Local government has been preparing for the new community planning powers for some time, and capacity building work is ongoing with both central and local government to ensure that all key partners are able to fulfil their community planning responsibilities from April 2015.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of how the measures proposed in the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill NIA 35/11-15 will impact rural dwellers.
(AQO 7006/11-15)

Mr Durkan: At the outset, I should highlight the fact that rural roads present a particular road safety problem. Over the 5-year period from 2009 to 2013, 70% of all fatalities and 51% of serious injuries occurred on rural roads. PSNI statistics for 2014 to date indicate that of 68 fatalities so far this year, 47 have occurred on rural roads. This is why almost every DOE road safety campaign has a rural element.

The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill has 3 key elements. These are a range of new drink driving provisions, a new graduated driver licensing regime and enabling provision to require quad bike users to wear helmets on public roads.

I will not dwell on the drink driving provisions of the Bill. For both rural and urban communities the message is clear - Never, ever, drink and drive.

The graduated driver licensing provisions include proposals for a mandatory minimum learning period and passenger restrictions for new drivers. The minimum learning period is designed to ensure that learner drivers gain sufficient and appropriate driving experience under supervision, which in turn, better prepares them for driving solo. The passenger restrictions apply only to those drivers under 24 years of age and in the first 6 months post test. They recognise the increased risk when newly qualified drivers carry other teenage passengers. The aim is to help such drivers to gain further experience in a safe driving environment prior to being exposed to these additional risks.

I acknowledge that some people believe that the proposed passenger restrictions in particular have an undue impact on rural communities. In response, I would emphasise that the restrictions are limited to a 6 month period post test, with exemptions in place for the carriage of immediate family members. I believe that this strikes an appropriate balance between minimising the impact on mobility and achieving a reduction in road casualties.

Finally, I should mention the proposal to require quad bike users to wear helmets on public roads. Quad bikes provide minimal protection for riders in the event of a collision. I acknowledge that such provision might have implications for farmers who may be working on and off the road quite frequently. However it remains my view that the requirement to wear a helmet is a sensible safety precaution.

In conclusion, the objective of the Road Traffic Amendment Bill is to improve safety on our roads – an objective which we all share. I look forward to working with Members to shape the precise provisions of the Bill as it continues its passage through the Assembly.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how he plans to raise the awareness of drivers of motorised vehicles in relation to the safety of cyclists and pedestrians.
(AQO 7007/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

We all have the right to use our roads; as a pedestrian, cyclist, rider or driver and therefore we all must share the responsibility to keep each other safe. My Department continues to work towards building greater mutual respect and understanding between all road users.

Drivers are responsible for the majority of collisions, with the main causes being speeding, drink driving and inattention on our roads. Changing the attitudes and behaviours of drivers is therefore the most effective way of protecting all road users and our campaigns concentrate on changing such behaviours.

The Department has also taken steps with regard to improving attitudes and raising mutual respect between pedestrians and drivers and cyclists and drivers through two recent campaigns.

Television campaigns, supported by radio, outdoor, press releases, online and social media activity, address drivers, pedestrians and cyclists alike, remind drivers of the vulnerability of pedestrians and cyclists and advise all three road user groups to pay attention when sharing the road with other road users. Both these campaigns carry the core message “Respect Everyone’s Journey”.

The campaigns encourage drivers to give extra consideration to more vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists. Likewise, the messages also encourage pedestrians and cyclists to increase their own safety by behaving appropriately on the road.

I cannot emphasise enough that the vast majority of casualties on our roads are caused by human error and ultimately each of us as individuals has to take personal responsibility for our attitudes and behaviours whatever type of road user we are.

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment, given that planning decision making powers are transferring to local councils in April 2015, whether associated funding will transfer in relation to legacy undetermined planning applications and enforcement cases.
(AQO 7009/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In addition to the annual funding local councils shall receive post reform, the Local Government sector will also receive a one-off payment in 2015-16. This payment is the Local Government's share of the planning fee income from those uncompleted planning applications transferring on 1 April 2015.

My Department operates a Deferred Income System with regards to the money received from Planning Applications. The Deferred Income Policy divides the planning application process into 6 key stages. My Department considers fees from planning applications to be earned only after the application passes through various stages of the planning process. This deferred income policy has been in place for a number of years and is periodically reviewed and audited.

The principles of the Deferred Income Policy will be followed when identifying the percentage of the planning fee my department will retain and the percentage of the fee which will transfer to the councils for each application that transfers. This principle will ensure that councils will be adequately funded to perform the uncompleted steps.

In relation to enforcement actions, my department has analysed past and projected volumes of enforcement cases and has identified, through a workforce planning model, the resources required for all current and anticipated enforcement actions per council area. On 27 August 2014, my Department presented figures to councils setting out the financial and other resource consequences of the transfer of planning functions to local government. In calculating the funding that will be required by the councils my Department took account of those costs the councils will pick up as a result of the transferring enforcement action cases.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the costs associated with his Department's operational plan for managing and regulating waste.
(AQO 7010/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A key finding of the Mills Report was that the Department needs to better co-ordinate its existing waste management resources much more effectively. The Operational Plan is, therefore, designed to be delivered with the resources currently allocated to the Department of the Environment.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Development concerning the transfer of Neighbourhood Renewal to local councils following the expiry of the current policy framework.
(AQO 7011/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In accordance with the Executive agreement, from 1 April 2015 the Department for Social Development is to confer powers to enable councils to undertake regeneration and community development activity in their districts. The legislation which is required to confer those powers has yet to be introduced to the Assembly and I have discussed this continued delay in recent meetings with Ministerial colleagues, including Minister Storey.

That legislation will allow councils to take decisions about how they address urban regeneration and community development. The new community planning duties provided by the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 mean that councils will have to do that within the context of the community planning process. This identifies the long term objectives for improving social, economic and environmental well being of their communities.

It is, however, a matter for the Minister for Social Development to determine how future council-led activity in terms of tackling deprivation meets the objectives of his department's Urban Regeneration and Community Development policy framework.

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how many groups in Upper Bann have received funding from the Carrier Bag Levy for the NGO Challenge Fund 2015.
(AQO 7012/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Assessment of all applications for the 2015 Challenge Fund concluded on Friday 7 November. No groups have received funding as of yet.

10 applications were received for projects in the Upper Bann constituency from 9 different groups. All applications were considered based on their own merit.

I have allocated £1.3 million from the Carrier Bag Levy to the 2015 Challenge Fund and look forward to again seeing the positive environmental and community outcomes this support enables.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether the £60 million allocated to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the October monitoring round will be sufficient to address the current in-year operating deficit across Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQO 7017/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): As the Member will be aware the Department of Health stated it was facing an in-year funding gap of some £160 million. In August 2014, Minister Poots made it clear that if the Health Service was provided with £80m, DHSSPS would be able to ensure that patient safety and quality of care would not be compromised.

In response I, with the endorsement of my Executive colleagues, was able to provide this £80m to DHSSPS during in-year monitoring rounds and further to this, I have protected DHSSPS from the in-year budgetary reductions that other Departments have had to manage.

In his statement to the Assembly on 30 October the Health Minister outlined a series of actions to be taken forward in the remainder of 2014-15. These reflect what is achievable in maintaining patient safety and minimising costs between now and the end of the financial year.

It now remains a matter for the Health Minister to ensure that the Department of Health effectively manages their available resources to ensure that the Department and the Health and Social Care Trusts remain within their agreed Budgetary allocations, while also ensuring that high quality front-line Health Services are maintained.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the recent announcement by HMRC which stated that "HMRC will support these staff to look for jobs in other offices in HMRC or across the Civil Service", whether he has been approached by HMRC officials.
(AQO 7018/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is my understanding that the reference to the "Civil Service" in the announcement by HMRC is in fact the GB Civil Service and not the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which is a separate employer.

My officials have already been approached by HMRC with a request to redeploy their staff surpluses within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Northern Ireland Civil Service is facing its own considerable challenges in managing staff surpluses and major staff redeployment. The Northern Ireland Executive has committed to taking steps to manage recent DVA staff surpluses, including redeployment to other suitable posts within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Executive has also agreed to DFP bringing forward a range of proposals for strategic personnel interventions to manage a significant pay bill reduction across the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Other major programmes, such as Welfare Reform and Universal Credit, have potential to result in considerable staff redeployment and reductions in the future, including the redeployment of those Northern Ireland based HMRC staff that are directly impacted by the Universal Credit arrangements.

I should also add that all appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service are regulated by the NI Civil Service Commissioners in accordance with their Recruitment Code, which governs that appointments must be made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. Any departure from this can only be made in very exceptional circumstances and on the basis of a robust business case approved by the Commissioners.

For the reasons which I have outlined, it is not possible to consider redeploying HMRC staff that are to be declared surplus into the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the estimated timescale for the Assembly scrutiny of the 2015/16 Budget.
(AQO 7020/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: On 3rd November I announced the draft Budget and set an eight week consultation period. Assembly Committees will undoubtedly request briefings with departmental officials as they seek to develop their 2015-16 Budgets.

In addition, I will be having a series of departmental bi-laterals with Ministers during the course of this consultation period.

I anticipate that the Executive will agree a final Budget for 2015-16 in early January and this will be presented to this House for debate and Assembly vote.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the current Executive review of fiscal powers has taken into account the British Government's recent concession that further tax and welfare powers would be devolved.
(AQO 7021/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Government has not recently set out any formal proposals in respect of the transfer of responsibility for taxation powers to the devolved administrations. In addition, it is not expected to respond to the recommendations for further devolution to Scotland from the Smith Commission until January 2015.

However, the work we are currently undertaking to examine the potential for the devolution of additional fiscal powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly will reflect the recent developments on this issue in Scotland and Wales.

This includes the analyses and findings from the various commissions which have previously made recommendations in respect of the main UK taxes and duties which would be appropriate to devolve, and those where it would be better for the Government to retain responsibility.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any engagement he has had with Cerberus with regard to the National Asset Management Agency's former loan portfolio.
(AQO 7022/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have met with representatives of Cerberus to discuss their operations in Northern Ireland, and my officials continue to liaise with the company on a regular basis.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work of the Joint Ministerial Taskforce on Banking and Access to Finance.
(AQO 7023/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The work of the Joint Ministerial Taskforce is progressing well and we held our third meeting on 15th October 2014. Most recently we have been considering the operation of national initiatives intended to promote access to finance, and in particular, the range of Business Bank interventions and the impact that they are having in Northern Ireland. We have also had positive discussions about the implementation of the Wholesale Guarantee Programme and the progress of the Investment Programme locally.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why a recent response to a departmental Freedom of Information request referred to variations between HM Treasury data and departmental data regarding local expenditure as "opening a can of worms".
(AQO 7024/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is not for me to interpret the handwritten notes of a junior official taken at an internal meeting over five years ago.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how his Infrastructure Action Plan is being implemented.
(AQO 7026/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is vital that we can have confidence in the commissioning and delivery of high priority infrastructure projects. The Infrastructure Action Plan was developed to remove barriers to successful commissioning and delivery of these projects, which are integral to improving the economy. While several Executive Ministers have supported it, I am disappointed that some have reserved their position. I will continue to work with Ministerial Colleagues to convince them that this is a proper course of action. In the meantime, practical issues need to be addressed and an implementation plan covering a series of best practice improvements has been drawn up.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the financial benefits of removing the upper limit of £400,000 on domestic rates.
(AQO 7027/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The removal of the maximum capital value would provide additional rates revenue for the Executive of just over £4 million a year.

Just over £3 million a year would be received by councils.

The financial benefits to regional and local government of removing the maximum capital value at a local level would need to be assessed against the financial impacts at an individual household level.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the annual cost of running the Health and Social Care Regional Medical Locum Service.
(AQW 37684/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Health and Social Care (HSC) E-locum system (formerly known as Regional Medical Locum Service) is currently operated by a range of authorised booking staff across the HSC who undertake this role alongside other responsibilities. The cost of the Trust Administrators is therefore not currently quantifiable. This is an area in which the Service is now progressing towards the long term objective of having a single regional booking office to streamline this activity. Each Trust participating in the service will pay a proportion of the costs.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total expenditure on locum doctors sourced during the last ten months through (i) the Health and Social Care e-locum regional service; (ii) approved framework locum agencies; and (iii) non-approved locum agencies.
(AQW 37685/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information in the table below was provided by Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and provides a breakdown of the expenditure for employing locum doctors through (i) the e-locum service, (ii) Approved Framework Agencies and (iii) Non Approved Framework Agencies.

HSCT	E-Locum Service	Approved Framework Agencies	Non Approved Framework Agencies
BHSCT	£2,685,022	£7,483,133	£1,674,665
SEHSCT	£259,653	£2,473,548	NIL
SHSCT	£156,825.56	£2,790,863	£214,147.43
NHSCT	£31,331	£3,947,015	£1,654,091
WHSCT	NIL	£7,561,000 WHSCT unable to separate these costs	

Locums are particularly vital to provide services across a range of specialties and/or locations where junior doctor or consultant vacancies have been difficult to fill on a substantive basis, therefore our smaller hospitals and those in the Western HSCT (SWAH and Altnagelvin) and Northern HSCT (Causeway) are disproportionately affected.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the private health insurance companies with provision on the island of Ireland that are (i) accepted; and (ii) not accepted for cover in the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen.
(AQW 37813/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT) does not have a process of accepting/ not accepting private insurance companies at the South West Acute Hospital. Rather, the Trust has contracts with a number of companies, whilst others are dealt with on individual patient basis. The insurance companies from which the WHSCT received payment in 2013/14 were as follows:

- Allianz Worldwide;
- Aviva Healthcare - Ireland ;
- Aviva Healthcare - UK;
- AXA PPP Healthcare, including QBE Health Insurance);
- General & Medical Healthcare;
- PRUHealth;
- LAYA;
- Simply Healthcare;
- Universal Provident;
- VHI Healthcare;
- Western Provident Association;
- GLOHealth; and
- St.Paul's Gardia Medical.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual cost of the free prescriptions programme, compared to the previous system which included exemptions.
(AQW 37960/11-15)

Mr Wells: Based on the income generated under the previous system when a prescription charge of £3.00 per item was in place, alongside a number of exemption categories, it is estimated that the annual cost of the introduction of free prescriptions in April 2010 is £5m - £6million per annum.

It should be noted, however, that in the four years from 2010/2011 2013/2014 the Health and Social care Board has reported that it has reduced expenditure on prescriptions from £426m to £346m a reduction of over 18%.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money his Department has recouped from the insurance companies of drivers involved in road traffic accidents, to cover the costs of his departmental resources being used to rescue or provide transport to hospital, in the last five years.
(AQW 38016/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provides for a scheme for the recovery of charges in cases where an injured person who receives a compensation payment in respect of his injury, has received health services hospital treatment or ambulance services. The charges are specified in certificates issued by the Department for Social Development and are payable by persons who pay compensation to the injured person.

Recoveries in respect of ambulance costs in the past five financial years are detailed in the table below.

Financial year	£'000
2009-10	243.4
2010-11	325.0
2011-12	413.5
2012-13	390.8
2013-14	402.6
	1,775.3

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether full risk assessments are carried out in all cases of care packages being reviewed prior to the reduction or removal of any supplied services for senior citizens living independently within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38017/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Southern Trust advise me that all individuals, including older people, have a full assessment of their needs carried out before an initial care package is put in place. Subsequently clients will then be subject to regular review of their needs, to establish whether the allocated care package is continuing to meet their identified eligible needs.

At the point of review and reassessment, staff will consider, in partnership with the client and their carer/family as appropriate, any risks that would potentially present to the client should the care package be reduced or removed.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cancer nurse specialists in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that specialise in Urology, broken down by facility.
(AQW 38026/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust currently employs one full-time Nurse Specialist in urological cancers, at the Causeway Hospital. A further 3.0 whole-time equivalent Urology Nurse Specialists can also provide care to patients with a cancer diagnosis.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to commission an audit similar to the National Prostate Cancer Audit for England and Wales in order to compare available resources.
(AQW 38028/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board has no plans to commission an audit similar to the National Prostate Cancer Audit at this time.

The Board has, however, commissioned the National Peer Review Team to roll out the National Peer Review Programme for Cancer Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs). Through this programme, MDTs treating urological cancer, including prostate cancer, will be reviewed against the National Manual of Cancer Services measures with visits scheduled for June 2015.

The findings of the peer review visits will allow direct comparison of Urological MDTs across Northern Ireland as well as with England and Wales.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the timescale for the closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor.
(AQW 38030/11-15)

Mr Wells: The minor injuries unit at Bangor Community Hospital will close, on a temporary basis, from 1 December 2014.

People who can no longer access minor injuries services in Bangor Community Hospital can access the minor injuries service at Ards Hospital, Newtownards, or contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the rationale for the temporary closure of the minor injuries unit in Bangor Community Hospital was that there are two minor injuries units in the North Down and Ards area and amalgamating two units into one would achieve economies of scale, whilst still providing the population with a minor injuries service. An options appraisal, on where the minor injuries unit should be located, identified the Ards minor injuries unit as the preferred option, as this location is better able to serve the whole population of the North Down and Ards area, including the Ards peninsula.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average daily number of patients treated in the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor.
(AQW 38032/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the last 12 months (October 2013 to September 2014), there was an average of 41 attendances (new, unplanned and planned review) each day at Bangor Minor Injuries Unit. This average is based on the department being open Monday to Friday each week.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can provide regarding the temporary nature of the closure of hospital beds and Minor Injury Units.
(AQW 38033/11-15)

Mr Wells: The contingency plans announced by Health and Social Care Trusts are to apply until the end of March 2015. If Health and Social Care Trusts were to propose to make any significant service changes permanent, those proposals must be subject to appropriate public consultation. I would expect engagement from Trusts in their local areas so that the public would be kept fully informed.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative arrangements are being implemented to cater for patients who are unable to use the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor.
(AQW 38034/11-15)

Mr Wells: The minor injuries unit at Bangor Community Hospital will close, on a temporary basis, from 1 December 2014.

People who can no longer access minor injuries services in Bangor Community Hospital can access the minor injuries service at Ards Hospital, Newtownards, or contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the rationale for the temporary closure of the minor injuries unit in Bangor Community Hospital was that there are two minor injuries units in the North Down and Ards area and amalgamating two units into one would achieve economies of scale, whilst still providing the population with a minor injuries service. An options appraisal, on where the minor injuries unit should be located, identified the Ards minor injuries unit as the preferred option, as this location is better able to serve the whole population of the North Down and Ards area, including the Ards peninsula.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the rationale for the closure of the Minor Injury Unit in Bangor.
(AQW 38035/11-15)

Mr Wells: The minor injuries unit at Bangor Community Hospital will close, on a temporary basis, from 1 December 2014.

People who can no longer access minor injuries services in Bangor Community Hospital can access the minor injuries service at Ards Hospital, Newtownards, or contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the rationale for the temporary closure of the minor injuries unit in Bangor Community Hospital was that there are two minor injuries units in the North Down and Ards area and amalgamating two units into one would achieve economies of scale, whilst still providing the population with a minor injuries service. An options appraisal, on where the minor injuries unit should be located, identified the Ards minor injuries unit as the preferred option, as this location is better able to serve the whole population of the North Down and Ards area, including the Ards peninsula.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has concerns regarding the roll out of pulse oximetry for all newborns in relation to (i) the costs involved; and (ii) the accuracy of the saturation probe monitor test.
(AQW 38072/11-15)

Mr Wells: In 2013, the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) issued, for consultation, a review of the evidence on adding pulse oximetry to the screening pathway to detect congenital heart disease in newborns. The consultation closed in December 2013 and was discussed by the NSC at their meeting in March 2014.

The NSC review of the evidence raised some important questions that require further consideration and therefore recommended piloting the pulse oximetry test to screen newborn babies for congenital heart defects.

The NSC will use the findings from the pilot to help define the optimal test procedures for pulse oximetry and better understand the implications of its introduction for neonatal services. Following the evaluation of this pilot the NSC will make a policy recommendation for the UK and I will await this recommendation before making a policy decision on this for Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety detail (i) the number of employees currently on temporary contracts through a recruitment agency; (ii) the duration of the contracts; (iii) the total cost of the contracts; and (iv) the element claimed by the recruitment agency by way of commission and servicing.
(AQW 38082/11-15)

Mr Wells: HSC Employers have advised that this information is not readily available in the format requested and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the transfer of £0.2m under Delivering Social Change for family support hubs will be allocated.
(AQW 38105/11-15)

Mr Wells: The £0.2m funding will be used to meet the projected cost of the Delivering Social Change Family Support Hub Signature Project in year. This is not additional investment; the funding has already been committed. The funding will be allocated to the HSCB in the normal manner by way of an allocation letter.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to review the funding allocation to Foyle Hospice in Derry, given the level of need in the North West region.
(AQW 38108/11-15)

Mr Wells: Responsibility for the commissioning of health and social care services lies with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) in conjunction with the Public Health Agency (PHA).

The Western Health and Social Care Trust currently sub-contracts with the Foyle Hospice for palliative care services in the north-west. Services provided by the Hospice include inpatient beds, day hospice and community services.

The HSCB recently reviewed the funding provided to voluntary hospice organisations across Northern Ireland. The result of their analysis highlighted that Foyle Hospice had a funding pressure in respect of the services they provide. The HSCB, in discussion with the Hospice, Western HSC Trust and the Local Commissioning Group, have agreed the following:

- To uplift the SLA with Foyle Hospice by £200,000 in 2014/15, bringing the value of the funding for services in 2014/15 to £662,497; and
- In conjunction with the Foyle Hospice to further review the financial position going forward into 2015/16 and 2016/17.

The HSCB, Local Commissioning Group and Western Health and Social Care Trust met with Foyle Hospice on 6 November 2014 to confirm the uplifted funding for the 2014/15 SLA.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust and Foyle Hospice share the services of a Consultant in Palliative Medicine. The Trust is commissioned to fund 50% of this post.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Dublin regarding the North West Health Innovation Corridor.
(AQW 38109/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have not had any direct discussions with the Irish Health Minister regarding the North West Health Innovation Corridor. However, there has been engagement between officials regarding the initiative and we await the outcome of the Department of Health's deliberations.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current waiting times for patients referred (i) urgently; and (ii) routinely by their GP to the dermatology department at the Ulster Hospital.
(AQW 38123/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern HSC Trust has advised that all GP referrals to the Dermatology Department are triaged by a consultant, who may change the priority status of the referral. The hospital's computer system will subsequently be updated to align with the consultant's priority decision. Therefore, the priority type presented in the answer may not reflect the original priority assigned by the patient's GP.

The current waiting times for patients referred (i) urgently and (ii) routinely by their GP to the dermatology department at the Ulster Hospital are shown in the tables below, broken down by time band and type of clinic, i.e. consultant led, nurse led or Integrated Clinic Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS).

(i) Urgent Referrals

Type of Clinic	Length of time waiting (weeks)					Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15	
Consultant led	214	70	7	0	31	322
Nurse led	21	6	1	16	0	44
ICATS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**235**	**76**	**8**	**16**	**31**	**366**

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

(ii) Routine Referrals

Type of Clinic	Length of time waiting (weeks)					Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15	
Consultant led	912	286	243	316	711	2,468
Nurse led	48	9	24	31	77	189
ICATS	100	36	1	0	0	137
Total	**1,060**	**331**	**268**	**347**	**788**	**2,794**

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

The figures in the answer refer to the waiting time position as at the week beginning 3rd November 2014.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the Alcohol and Drugs Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-2016 completed consultation on the 18th April 2013, why the report has not yet been published.
(AQW 38156/11-15)

Mr Wells: Under the cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to substance misuse, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2, 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.

52 organisations responded to the subsequent public consultation on the draft Framework which closed in April 2013. Following this, the HSCB and the PHA published an analysis of, and a response to, the issues raised during the consultation in July 2013.

Since this time 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 by the beginning of April 2015. The HSCB and PHA anticipate that the finalised framework will be published once the procurement process currently underway has been completed.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what criteria were used to decide on the closure of intermediate care beds in Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 38165/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has to reduce its spend by almost £7m between now and the end of March 2015. Frontline and emergency services have, as far as possible, been protected, and by consolidating on fewer sites, the Trust will divert staff from non-acute areas to acute and community services.

The Trust has 5 non acute hospitals: Dalriada (Ballycastle), Robinson (Ballymoney), Inver (Larne), Mid Ulster (Magherafelt) and Whiteabbey. Overall there are 106 intermediate care beds and 64 sub acute beds across these sites. Over 40% of the intermediate care beds lie in the Causeway area. The Trust has sought to ensure that non acute beds would continue to be available across the localities within the Trust. As Causeway area is served by two intermediate care facilities less than 20 miles apart and an acute hospital within 20 miles of Dalriada and 10 miles of Robinson, it was considered that one of the intermediate care facilities would temporarily close in this area to allow skilled staff to be redirected to Causeway acute hospital and community response services. In view of its central location at Ballymoney, Robinson Hospital was identified as having the potential to ensure intermediate beds are accessible to a greater number of the population in the causeway area.

The length of stay in intermediate care beds has reduced as the Trust has increased active rehabilitation. The Trust is confident that although there will be reduced bed numbers the more efficient use of beds means that sufficient capacity will be provided for patients in each locality within the Trust to access intermediate care and rehabilitation beds.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the total amount of funding given to GP practices in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38173/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total amount of funding given to GP practices in each of the last five years was as follows:

Funding to GP Practices over last 5 years

Year	Amount
2009/10	£234.4m
2010/11	£230.8m

Year	Amount
2011/12	£232.3m
2012/13	£232.7m
2013/14	£245.7m

Source: Technical Steering Committee (TSC) returns. The TSC is chaired by the Health & Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) with representatives from UK Departments, NHS Employers, NHS England and the British Medical Association (BMA).

Funding of local GP Practices compared to the rest of UK (i) per capita and (ii) as a percentage of the overall health budget is set below:

GMS Costs per Capita 2011/12 to 2013/14

	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
England	£142	£141	£140
Wales	£130	£128	£127
Scotland	£165	£163	£158
Northern Ireland	£125	£119	£120
UK	£143	£141	£140

Source: Expenditure data was sourced from TSC returns and per capita figures calculated by DHSSPS. To enable comparability across the UK countries, some elements of funding have been excluded (e.g. IT funding) and some funding figures that sit outside the remit of TSC (e.g. NHS Direct and NHS 24) have been sourced separately and included. Dispensing costs are funded from community pharmacy budgets and have therefore been excluded from all countries. The population denominator is the GP registered list for each country.

GMS Funding as a % of the Total Health Budget

	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
England	8.40%	8.50%	8.48%
Wales	7.81%	7.77%	7.76%
Scotland	7.76%	7.78%	7.93%
Northern Ireland	7.96%	8.10%	8.22%
UK	7.98%	8.03%	8.09%

Source: Total health budgets were sourced from annual expenditure figures published by each UK country. GMS expenditure was sourced from TSC returns. For comparability, social care expenditure has been excluded from the total health budget for Northern Ireland.

I am not in a position to respond to the Member's question regarding plans to increase the percentage share of the health budget awarded to GP practices at this time as financial planning for 2015/16 cannot be completed until after an announcement on the Final Budget for 2015/16 which is not due to be published until January 2015.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken by his Department to provide input on, and to co-ordinate, a cross departmental action plan to tackle Female Genital Mutilation.
(AQW 38185/11-15)

Mr Wells: Female Genital Mutilation is an important issue which cuts across a number of Departments. That is why, alongside others, my Department has been involved from the early stages in assisting in developing Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines on Female Genital Mutilation which were published in July by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

I understand that a cross departmental meeting is being arranged to discuss and agree how best to raise the profile of these guidelines and take forward actions required to address the issue of FGM here, and my officials stand ready to participate in that event.

The joint DHSSPS and DOJ strategy Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland is currently being developed. It recognises that domestic violence and abuse can manifest itself through the perpetration of unlawful activities and practices such as female genital mutilation.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 32350/11-15, whether the replaced bath in Pinewood Residential Care Home is fully operational; and whether all aparatus and equipment needed to assist in the bathing of residents is in place.
(AQW 38192/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust has advised me that the bid for funding for a new bath for Pinewood Residential Care Home remains on the Trust's priority list.

In the interim, a bath from another facility has been fitted and is available for the use of residents although the availability of additional apparatus suitable for use with this bath is limited.

The majority of the residents in Pinewood Residential Care Home use the showering facilities available, and these have all the apparatus and equipment required.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many bedrooms in Pinewood Residential Care Home are currently (i) empty; or (ii) being used as a storeroom.
(AQW 38193/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust have advised me that Pinewood Residential Care Home has 30 bedrooms in full use. The bedrooms operate on a booking system so may be empty on occasion whilst waiting on a discharge from hospital or to facilitate a terminal clean following discharge.

3 former bedrooms are in use to store the additional equipment which is required to provide services to more complex intermediate care residents.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has spent on maintenance of Pinewood Residential Care Home in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38194/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have provided the following figures for maintenance spend on Pinewood residential care home in the past five years:

- 2010/11** £3,307.42 (6 months figure for this year)
- 2011/12 £8,327.41
- 2012/13 £10,075.99
- 2013/14 £17,364.80
- 2014/15 (YTD) £6,592.94

**Please note previous figures are not held electronically and cannot be provided within the timeframe specified

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37063/11-15, to provide this information broken down by Programmes of Care.
(AQW 38197/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Serious Adverse Incident (SAI) system was established by the Department in July 2004. The Department did not record SAI's by Programme of Care so this information is not available for the period July 2004 – 30 April 2010.

The HSC Board took over responsibility for the SAI system on 1 May 2010. The figures for 2010 cover the period 1 May 2010 to 31 December 2010.

The number of Serious Adverse Incidents, broken down by Programmes of Care, from 1 May 2010 to 31 December 2013 is outlined in the table below. This information was provided by the HSCB.

Programme of Care by Calendar Year	BHSCT	NHSCT	SEHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT	Total
2010 *figures from 1 May 2010	**37**	**29**	**25**	**33**	**22**	**146**
Acute Services	9	4	2	4	6	25
Maternity and Child Health	2	0	0	1	0	3
Family and Childcare (inc CAMHS)	1	9	4	4	1	19
Elderly	2	4	0	0	3	9
Mental Health	21	10	19	18	9	77
Learning Disability	0	1	0	2	1	4
Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment	0	0	0	1	0	1
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention	1	0	0	3	0	4

Programme of Care by Calendar Year	BHSCT	NHSCT	SEHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT	Total
Primary Health and Adult Community (inc GP's)	0	0	0	0	2	2
POC - Corporate Business / Other	1	1	0	0	0	2
2011	**79**	**49**	**37**	**48**	**28**	**241**
Acute Services	31	7	0	8	2	48
Maternity and Child Health	1	1	1	3	1	7
Family and Childcare (inc CAMHS)	8	6	2	9	0	25
Elderly	1	5	2	3	2	13
Mental Health	30	27	29	21	18	125
Learning Disability	1	1	3	4	2	11
Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment	1	0	0	0	0	1
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention	1	0	0	0	0	1
Primary Health and Adult Community (inc GP's)	0	0	0	0	1	1
POC - Corporate Business / Other	5	2	0	0	2	9
2012	**77**	**63**	**47**	**41**	**36**	**264**
Acute Services	31	14	5	6	2	58
Maternity and Child Health	3	1	1	3	5	13
Family and Childcare (inc CAMHS)	4	16	2	4	1	27
Elderly	2	5	3	3	5	18
Mental Health	29	20	34	22	21	126
Learning Disability	1	1	1	1	1	5
Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment	1	0	0	0	0	1
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention	0	0	0	1	0	1
POC - Corporate Business / Other	6	6	1	1	1	15
2013	**84**	**130**	**57**	**57**	**53**	**381**
Acute Services	29	40	14	8	9	100
Maternity and Child Health	20	9	5	7	6	47
Family and Childcare (inc CAMHS)	1	10	5	2	2	20
Elderly	1	20	6	9	3	39
Mental Health	27	40	24	28	26	145
Learning Disability	3	5	1	1	1	11
Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment	0	1	2	0	0	3
Primary Health and Adult Community (inc GP's)	1	1	0	2	0	4
POC - Corporate Business / Other	2	4	0	0	6	12
Totals:	**277**	**271**	**166**	**179**	**139**	**1032**

The data outlined in the table above is provided from a live database which is subject to change; SAI reports can be based on limited information at the time of reporting and on further investigation the situation may change. This can result in the incident no longer meeting the criteria of an SAI and, in line with the HSCB Procedure for the reporting and follow up of SAIs; the SAI can subsequently be de-escalated

Figures for 2013 are not completely comparable with previous years as the definition of an SAI and the associated guidance was changed in October 2013 to encompass a wider range of incidents.

The HSCB/PHA publishes information on SAIs on a six monthly basis. The latest SAI report for the period 1 October 2013 to 31 March 2014 can be accessed at -

http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/board/meetings/June%202014/Item%2015%20-%2004%20-%20HSCB-PHA%20Serious%20Adverse%20Incidents%20Learning%20Report%20March%202014%20PDF%20689KB.pdf#search="learning report"

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38235/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department has been liaising with the Public Sector Reform Division to explore opportunities to collaborate in our shared public sector reform agenda. It is important to recognise, however, that this work is still at an early stage and, as such, there are no associated efficiencies to report.

My Department has, however, been delivering challenging efficiencies over many years in order to continue to meet the increasing health and social care needs of the population and deliver safe and effective services while remaining within allocated resources.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38242/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) The Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety is a participant in the NICS cycle to work scheme.

(ii) The NICS cycle to work scheme is open to all NICS staff all year round.

(iii) The scheme is a NICS Cycle to Work Scheme and therefore does not extend to NDPBs for whom the NICS is not their employer. However DFP, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the closure of the Regional Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle will have on the care of patients diagnosed with MS.
(AQW 38246/11-15)

Mr Wells: Respite Services to MS patients will still be provided and everyone who requires respite will receive it. The Health and Social Care Trusts affected by the temporary closure of the Respite Centre are working to ensure that service users' assessed needs are met.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the number of people currently receiving treatment for Multiple Sclerosis.
(AQW 38297/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of people receiving treatment for Multiple Sclerosis at the end of October 2014, the most recent data available, is shown in the table below. This data is broken down by Trust of Residence.

Number of patients on treatment for Multiple Sclerosis at 31st October 2014

HSC Trust of residence	No. of patients on treatment
Belfast	239
Northern	422
South Eastern	317
Southern	268
Western	240
Northern Ireland	1,486

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will reconsider the decision to close twenty beds and the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital by 1 December 2014.
(AQW 38307/11-15)

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 a range of contingency proposals to achieve financial break even. Each Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain safe and effective.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it has no plans to reconsider the contingency measures within the current financial year. The closures are temporary measures and the contingency plans are to apply until the end of March 2015.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust made the correct decision to close twenty beds and the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38328/11-15)

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 a range of contingency proposals to achieve financial break even. Each Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain safe and effective.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it has no plans to reconsider the contingency measures within the current financial year. The closures are temporary measures and the contingency plans are to apply until the end of March 2015.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on the decision to close beds at Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 38349/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust has advised that an equality impact assessment was not carried out prior to the implementation of the temporary measures. An Equality Screening exercise followed by an Equality Impact Assessment will, if appropriate, form part of the formal consultation process for any proposed permanent service changes.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38373/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department does not have a separate Equality Unit. 2.25 FTE staff are engaged on Equality functions as well as other duties relating to Human Rights, Disability Action plan, etc. The full annual cost of equality related work is £87,142.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what changes have recently been agreed to IV Infusion services for children with Osteogenesis; and (ii) how affected patients have been informed of these changes.
(AQW 38414/11-15)

Mr Wells: Over the next year there is a planned change in the provision of this service from Orthopaedics to a joint service with the Endocrine or the Rheumatology Service. The service will remain within the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and should not have any impact on patient welfare or services.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the proposals to close beds at Dalriada Hospital was subject to rural proofing prior to being announced.
(AQW 38416/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust has advised that a rural proofing exercise was not carried out prior to the implementation of the temporary measures.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost savings which are expected to be made as a result of the proposed closures at Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38418/11-15)

Mr Wells: The savings which are expected to be made as a result of proposed closures at Bangor Community Hospital are as follows:

- The temporary closure of the GP Ward (planned from 1 December 2014) will save approximately £207k.
- The temporary closure of the Bangor MIU (planned from 1 December 2014) will have a cash releasing savings of approximately £65k.

They form part of the Trust's overall plan to achieve financial break even while maximising patient safety.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an assurance was provided to patients in the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital that the centre will remain open until the end of the current financial year.
(AQW 38473/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has to reduce its spend by almost £7m between now and the end of March 2015. Frontline and emergency services have, as far as possible, been protected, and by consolidating on fewer sites, the Trust will divert staff from non-acute areas to acute and community services.

The savings plan includes the temporary closure of 12 MS Respite beds and 20 Intermediate Care beds in Dalriada Hospital. The changes are proposed as temporary measures to protect patient safety and will apply until the end of March 2015.

Following the announcement on 30 October 2014, the Northern HSC Trust contacted MS service users and families from the Northern area to advise of the decision that the unit would temporarily close from 30 November 2014, and that relevant key workers would be in contact to arrange appointments to meet and discuss options for their future respite care.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much will be saved as a result of the temporary closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38484/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the temporary closure of minor injuries unit in Bangor Community Hospital will have a cash releasing saving of approximately £65,000.

It forms part of the Trust's overall plan to achieve financial break even while maximising patient safety.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for patients requiring complex palliative care support and end of life care following the closure of Dalriada Hospital, given that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust Chief Executive has advised that he has no plans to increase funding for district nursing which is already under strain and that the Robinson Hospital in Ballymoney is at 96 per cent occupancy without the additional 94 per cent occupancy beds from Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 38497/11-15)

Mr Wells: The "Living Matters, Dying Matters" Strategy for Palliative and End of Life Care for adults in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2010) recommended that access to specialist palliative care advice and support should be available across all care settings on a 24/7 basis. The responsibility to ensure that such care is available to patients with identified complex need, their families and carers, spans across the commissioner, statutory, voluntary and independent sector and across care settings.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) have embraced the opportunity to ensure through partnership working a robust service is available to support those with palliative and end of life care needs across the entire Trust area. A 12 bed specialist palliative care unit, the Macmillan Unit, is based on the site of Antrim Area Hospital. GPs and acute services can refer patients with complex palliative care needs to this specialist inpatient care. This model of care enables the patient and their family to be supported by a specialist multi-disciplinary team and is similar to the level of expertise also available within hospices across Northern Ireland. Furthermore as is practice in other areas of the Trust, where bed based care is required, which cannot be delivered in the home setting, consideration can be given to nursing home placements.

To meet the response to complex palliative care need across the NHSCT, Palliative Medicine consultants provide 24/7 telephone advice to medical colleagues to support treatment decisions and optimise symptom management. Specialist Palliative Care nurses working across the acute and community hospitals are also available to support ward and district nursing teams to manage the holistic care needs of the patient and their family and provide specialist advice regarding the complexity of issues which can arise.

A similar specialist palliative care nursing team is also available within the community, provided by Northern Ireland Hospice. Complex palliative care needs can be managed by the community nursing team or care home team with the support of the specialist advice and experience provided by the NI Hospice community specialist care team. In addition to this Marie Curie and Hospice at Home compliment the community nursing service and domiciliary care by providing care and support to patients as far as possible, in accordance with their wishes, to be cared for and die in their own homes.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the effect the closure of the 32 beds at Dalriada Hospital will have on other services currently based at the site.
(AQW 38535/11-15)

Mr Wells: The following services will remain operational at Dalriada Hospital:

- Treatment Room Nursing;
- Ballycastle Intermediate Team (District Nursing / Social Workers / Occupational Therapy);
- Domiciliary care services;
- Outpatient clinics;
- Dental;
- Community children's Speech and language therapy;
- Midwifery;
- Podiatry;
- Dietetics;
- Physiotherapy;

- Mental health team;
- Health visiting services;
- Orthoptics;
- Community and voluntary services;
- GP Health Centre.

These services will not be affected by the bed closures. For staff delivering these services, their work will continue as normal.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how he intends to address the issue of trips and conferences attended by Health and Social Care Board representatives.
(AQW 38618/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSCB has advised that any travel, including that outside the UK and Ireland, must be required for business purposes and contribute towards improving the Health and Social Care Board's objective to commission safe, high quality and effective care for the population of Northern Ireland.

Travel outside the UK and Ireland is necessary on occasion to share learning or best practice, participate in seminars or conferences, build relationships and expertise, or to attend training events or staff development opportunities not available in Northern Ireland.

The governance arrangements associated with such travel require all proposed travel to be approved by the Health and Social Care Board's Senior Management Team with oversight being provided by the Board's Governance Committee who receive a report of all travel undertaken outside the UK and Ireland.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will conduct an audit or investigation into the granting of Legal Aid by deputy District Judges covering magistrates courts, balancing the figures against the usual practice of the presiding District Judge in each court division.
(AQW 37963/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Where a person is charged with any offence in the magistrates' court or is brought before it to be dealt with, the court may grant in respect of him a criminal aid certificate where it is satisfied that his means are insufficient to obtain legal aid and that it is in the interests of justice that he should have free legal aid. Each district judge, or deputy, must consider these two tests before granting legal aid. Where there is doubt, the legislation requires the judge to exercise discretion to the benefit of the applicant. This is a judicial decision and I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Office of the Lord Chief Justice. I am aware that the judiciary keep these issues under review.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why no agreement was in place between his Department or the Prison Service and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs on the taxation issues relating to applications for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme prior to the launch of the scheme in 2012.
(AQW 37983/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials in the Northern Ireland Prison Service were in contact with HM Revenue and Customs from August 2011 in relation to taxation issues. Staff were treated in accordance with the tax rules at the date of their departure.

The correspondence dated 16 February also states HMRC will check that PAYE is operated on the earliest of the two dates (i.e. when the person is entitled to payment or when they are actually paid). The launch document issued in November 2011 provided the leaving date of 31 March 2012. Moving this date could have been interpreted as facilitating tax avoidance.

This was an entirely voluntary scheme. As taxation depends on individual circumstances staff were advised to contact their tax office.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why his Department informed the Committee for Justice that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) that told the Prison Service (NIPS) that NIPS staff had to be paid at the end of March 2012, when HMRC had informed NIPS on 16 February 2012 that when an employee is entitled to payment is a factual matter based on the terms and conditions of the contract of employment and the redundancy package.
(AQW 37986/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials in the Northern Ireland Prison Service were in contact with HM Revenue and Customs from August 2011 in relation to taxation issues. Staff were treated in accordance with the tax rules at the date of their departure.

The correspondence dated 16 February also states HMRC will check that PAYE is operated on the earliest of the two dates (i.e. when the person is entitled to payment or when they are actually paid). The launch document issued in November 2011 provided the leaving date of 31 March 2012. Moving this date could have been interpreted as facilitating tax avoidance.

This was an entirely voluntary scheme. As taxation depends on individual circumstances staff were advised to contact their tax office.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the email correspondence with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs on 15 February 2013, why the Prison Service did not allow staff to revoke their applications to the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme.
(AQW 37987/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials in the Northern Ireland Prison Service were in contact with HM Revenue and Customs from August 2011 in relation to taxation issues. Staff were treated in accordance with the tax rules at the date of their departure.

The correspondence dated 16 February also states HMRC will check that PAYE is operated on the earliest of the two dates (i.e. when the person is entitled to payment or when they are actually paid). The launch document issued in November 2011 provided the leaving date of 31 March 2012. Moving this date could have been interpreted as facilitating tax avoidance.

This was an entirely voluntary scheme. As taxation depends on individual circumstances staff were advised to contact their tax office.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what cash reserves are held by his Department.
(AQW 38007/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice, including its agencies, does not retain cash reserves.

It retains a minimum balance in bank accounts in order to meet day-to-day working capital requirements in line with Managing Public Money NI.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what cash reserves are held by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 38008/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not retain cash reserves.

It retains a minimum balance in bank accounts in order to meet day-to-day working capital requirements in line with Managing Public Money NI.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what cash reserves are held by the PSNI.
(AQW 38009/11-15)

Mr Ford: As stated in previous AQW/37241/11-15 answered on 23 October 2014 the Department of Justice's arm's length bodies do not retain cash reserves. This includes the PSNI.

They retain a minimum balance in bank accounts in order to meet day-to-day working capital requirements in line with Managing Public Money NI.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown, or an estimate in absence of available totals, of the costs in the recent aborted trial of Mr Fred McClenaghan.
(AQW 38027/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated costs for the recent aborted trial are given in the table below.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
Legal Aid [1]	£36,311
Prosecution [2]	£472
Court Costs [3]	£21,626
Total [4]	**£58,409**

1 The fees in respect of the Crown Court proceedings have been estimated in accordance with the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011.

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 £472 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.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current proposal to scrap police cautions in England and Wales for minor offences; and whether he has any plans to introduce a similar policy.
(AQW 38029/11-15)

Mr Ford: In England and Wales a caution is issued at the discretion of a police officer.

In Northern Ireland, however, a police caution is not issued at the discretion of an individual police officer and can only be issued following a direction by the Public Prosecution Service.

The proposal to simplify the use of out of court disposals in England and Wales, including ending the use of police cautions, is to be piloted for a twelve month period before being evaluated.

My Department will be monitoring the progress of the pilots but I have no plans to introduce a similar policy in Northern Ireland at this time.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether judges can order set amounts to be paid to charitable causes in lieu of fines following conviction of criminal offences, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland; and (i) if so, how often this has been done; and (ii) if not, whether he will consider introducing such a scheme.
(AQW 38036/11-15)

Mr Ford: Courts in Northern Ireland have no powers to require payments to charitable causes in lieu of fines along the lines of the "Court Poor Box" system in the Republic of Ireland. Other options are available both to the courts and to my Department to ensure that monies recovered from offenders are directed to victims of crime and relevant support organisations.

Under the Offender Levy, £250,819 was collected across the last two financial years and distributed to a range of victim support projects via the Victims of Crime Fund. Across the same period, courts also imposed 6573 compensation orders whereby an offender can be required to pay compensation to the victim of his/her crime.

I understand that the Irish Government has plans to abolish the "Court Poor Box" scheme and create a new statute-based Reparation Fund to provide additional funding for services for victims of crime, compensation and reparation.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what action he took in response to representations in late 2012 from two women about the handling of a prosecution case in which they featured as victims of sexual abuse along with Mairia Cahill.
(AQW 38048/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not comment on individual cases. I have no role in decisions taken by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). In response to letters to me about prosecution matters, I explain this and, if appropriate, I forward correspondence to the PPS for consideration and reply.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice what length of sentences have been given to foreign nationals for criminal convictions for (i) assault; (ii) actual bodily harm; (iii) sexual assault; (iv) attempted murder; (v) threats to kill; (vi) theft; (vii) drug offences; and (vii) other serious offences, over the last three years.
(AQW 38111/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prosecutions and convictions datasets held by the Department of Justice do not currently contain information in relation to the nationality of the defendant. The information requested is not therefore available from these and could be obtained, if at all, only by individual examination of individual records.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice how many foreign nationals, convicted for criminal offences, have re-offended over the last five years.
(AQW 38112/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice does not currently hold information pertaining to the nationality of the defendant within its reoffending datasets. In addition, a continuous series of reoffending information for the period in question is not yet available.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the proposed shared Police, Fire and Prison Service training facility at Desertcreat.
(AQW 38119/11-15)

Mr Ford: Development of a joint training college for the police, Prison Service and Fire and Rescue Service is a Programme for Government commitment. Decisions on this will be taken by the Executive.

At a recent meeting of the programme's Steering Group, the three Services reiterated their commitment to some form of integration but expressed concern at the impact of budget reductions on their long term training requirements and their ability to meet future running costs.

As a result, the Steering Group has commissioned a two stage review. The first stage will involve the Programme Board urgently establishing what the present position means for the current procurement process. This will be completed within a short, two-week timescale. During this period, the Programme Board will also firm up the scope of the second stage review which will, inter alia, re-affirm the training requirements of the three Services and the scope for integration; review underlying assumptions; and establish what is appropriate, affordable and deliverable in the current budgetary climate.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38138/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Yes the DOJ is a participant in the NICS Cycle to work scheme;

(Ii) The NICS cycle to work scheme is open to all NICS staff all year round;

(iii) The scheme is a NICS Cycle to Work Scheme and therefore does not extend to NDPBs for whom the NICS is not their employer. However DFP, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Committal Warrants have been issued for fine defaults in each of the last two years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 38141/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details how many Committal Warrants have been issued for fine default in each of the last two years, broken down by court division.

County Court Division	2012	2013	Total
Antrim	2,723	572	3,295
Ards	2,337	464	2,801
Armagh & South Down	2,710	714	3,424
Belfast	7,076	2,394	9,470
Craigavon	1,948	419	2,367
Fermanagh & Tyrone	3,424	981	4,405
Lonfonderry	2,481	891	3,372
Queens Bench Division	5		5
Total	**22,704**	**6,435**	**29,139**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37468/11-15, (i) how these instances of internet access were achieved if the computers are not equipped with the relevant software or hardware; (ii) what was the nature of the internet access in each case; (iii) apart from breaching prison regulations, whether any law was broken in the process of accessing the internet; (iv) if so, was this reported for prosecution; (v) were the computers permanently removed in each instance; and (vi) how each case was adjudicated.
(AQW 38143/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) None of the incidents detailed in AQW/37468/11-15 involved in-cell computers. The incidents all occurred on computers in classrooms. Prisoners permitted to use classroom computers are:

- following an education programme which requires use of the internet;
- using computers which give limited access to certain sites on the internet;
- risk assessed as suitable to participate;
- having their internet use monitored;
- supervised by a teacher.

(ii)

2012	2 incidents of unauthorised access to the internet	One occasion where a prisoner accessed Facebook. One occasion where two prisoners accessed Facebook. Upon further consideration two cases of unauthorised access were as a result of the same incident. The figure has been adjusted accordingly.
2012	1 incident of unauthorised access to a user account	Based on further information found, there was no evidence of unauthorised access to the internet. Corrected as shown.

2013	1 incident of unauthorised access to the internet	One occasion where two prisoners accessed Facebook.
2013	1 incident of unauthorised access to a user account	No access to the internet.
2014	1 incident of unauthorised access to the internet	One occasion where one prisoner had accessed BBC and Wikipedia websites.

(iii) No law was broken

(iv) No law was broken, therefore not reported

(v) Computers were only removed temporarily for the purposes of investigation.

(vi)

2012	2 incidents of unauthorised access to the internet	Two prisoners found guilty at adjudication. Internet access removed for second incident.
2012	1 incident of unauthorised access to a user account	A teacher was reprimanded
2013	1 incident of unauthorised access to the internet	One prisoner found guilty at adjudication.
2013	1 incident of unauthorised access to a user account	No one held accountable
2014	1 incident of unauthorised access to the internet	No one held accountable

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether John McDermott resided for any time in Dromore, County Down, either directly following release from prison, or at any subsequent time since his release.
(AQW 38144/11-15)

Mr Ford: Individuals subject to post-release supervision are managed by Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). PBNI does not provide information on an individual's location post-release in recognition of their right to protection of their personal data.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many defendants have gone missing whilst on bail in each of the last five years; (ii) what are the alleged offences or charges in each case; and (iii) how many remain at large, broken down by court division.
(AQW 38145/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the number of defendants issued with at least one arrest (Magistrates' Court) or bench (Crown Court) warrant in each of the last five years who failed to surrender to court in accordance with their bail.

Court records show that on 6 November 2014, 971 defendants currently have an outstanding arrest or bench warrant.

	Year					Number of outstanding arrest or bench warrants1
Court Division	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Belfast	586	572	615	571	525	272
Londonderry	178	143	170	178	170	57
Antrim	297	254	192	169	154	87
Fermanagh and Tyrone	231	225	226	195	206	210
Armagh and South Down	262	173	154	129	91	200
Ards	136	134	147	108	120	40
Craigavon	234	198	230	200	170	105
Total	**1,924**	**1,699**	**1,734**	**1,550**	**1,436**	**971**

Source: Integrated Court Operations System

1 At 06 November 2014

Provision of data on the charges relating to each of these warrants would incur a disproportionate cost.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Justice whether the ongoing cost of pensions for early retirement under the Patten severance scheme is met directly out of the annual departmental budget or is there a special compensatory arrangement with HM Treasury to help defray this pressure.
(AQW 38157/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no specific funding arrangement in place with HM Treasury for the payment of pensions relating to the Patten Severance Scheme. The cost of pensions is met directly from the PSNI annually managed expenditure (AME) budget.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37324/11-15, (i) whether the two judges who preside in the affected courts were not personally consulted before the change was made; (ii) if not, why this was the case; and (iii) whether a Section 75 exercise was completed in respect of this change.
(AQW 38187/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The two judges were not consulted. However, the Lord Chief Justice and Presiding Judges were consulted in advance of the proposal being approved by the Minister.

(ii) It is usual practice for Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service officials to consult with the Lord Chief Justice and Presiding Judges in the first instance regarding any policy or other changes affecting the running of the courts.

(iii) An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in respect of the transfer of business from the Old Townhall to Laganside Courts which included consideration of any Section 75 persons impacted by the changes.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether his consultation on abortion was taken to, and approved by, the Executive as a cross-cutting and controversial matter.
(AQW 38190/11-15)

Mr Ford: The scope of the consultation is confined to proposals to change the criminal law on abortion, which is the responsibility of the Department of Justice. It is therefore not a cross cutting issue.

It is my intention to bring proposals to the Executive once policy consultation has been concluded.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice what has been the cost to date of developing the joint public services college at Desertcreat.
(AQW 38210/11-15)

Mr Ford: As at 30 September, the total spend on the project was £9.6m. This excludes the £2.85m in relation to site acquisition.

The Department is not undertaking any option studies of alternative sites. Such studies would only be appropriate if the current project was unable to proceed as planned.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he would accept any body recognised by his Department as alternative representation for members of the police force who are not members of the Police Association as per Regulation 25 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1988; and if so, what criteria would be appropriate in the setting up of a separate association.
(AQW 38263/11-15)

Mr Ford: By law, every member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a member of the Staff Association with membership dependent on the rank of the officer.

Within the Association, the Police Federation exists to represent its members in matters affecting welfare and efficiency, and is the only official representative body for ranks below superintendent with whom consultation on matters affecting terms and conditions is required.

In addition, police officers are forbidden by legislation from membership of any trade union or association which seeks to control or influence the pay, pensions or conditions of service of the PSNI.

As the current arrangements fulfil their objectives it is not my intention to change any of these protections.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of inmates in each prison; and of these, how many are serving a second or subsequent sentence.
(AQW 38278/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of inmates in custody in each prison and the number serving a second or subsequent sentence are included in the table below. The figures are based on the NIPS population in custody on 10 November 2014.

Name of Establishment	Number of Inmates in Custody on 10 November 2014	Number of Reoffenders (Inmates serving a second or subsequent sentence)
Hydebank Wood – Female	68	22
Hydebank Wood – Male	150	36
Maghaberry	1021	389
Magilligan	550	263

The figures for reoffending are based on custodial records held on the Prison Record Information System since its inception in November 2006. Prior to this date the information was not recorded on PRISM.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total annual cost of providing (i) food; and (ii) education in each prison; and the average cost per inmate.
(AQW 38279/11-15)

Mr Ford: The tables below sets out the total annual cost and the average cost per inmate requested in parts (i) and (ii) above for the financial year 2013-14.

Prison	(i) Food costs 2013-14		(ii) Education costs 2013-14	
	Annual Cost	Average Cost per inmate	Annual Cost	Average Cost per inmate
Maghaberry	£1,152,957	£1,085	£1,552,025	£1,460
Magilligan	£626,215	£1,143	£1,208,357	£2,205
Hydebank Wood	£270,207	£1,160	£918,740	£3,943

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice what steps his Department has taken to facilitate better understanding between the judiciary and social services in adoption cases, in order to prevent adopted children being reallocated between parents and potential adopters.
(AQW 38294/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legal framework governing the determination of public law cases by courts is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. In accordance with the principle of judicial independence, the application of that legislation to individual cases is a matter for the judiciary, as is judicial training. However, sharing knowledge and experience can only improve the operation of the system and outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case number 14/099194 at Dungannon Magistrates' Court, why the alleged drugs issue has been split from the charges which were processed and dealt with; and to detail the estimated cost of prosecuting any potential offence from the same detection and directly connected to the convictions.
(AQW 38321/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is responsible for investigating crimes and submitting a file of complaint to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). The decision as to whether to prosecute a complaint is taken by the PPS.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the PPS. You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI or the PPS.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case numbers (a) 12/087230; and (b) 12/087229 at Downpatrick Magistrates' Court, to detail (i) how many times this case has been adjourned, including the dates and reasons for adjournment; and (ii) why this case has been delayed repeatedly.
(AQW 38323/11-15)

Mr Ford: A timeline of the court hearings and the adjournment reasons in case numbers 12/087229 and 12/087230 are detailed in the table below. Adjournments and the listing of cases are judicial decisions.

Date	Hearing Type	Adjournment Reason
30-Oct-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
16-Oct-14	Preliminary Enquiry	By Direction of Judge
18-Sep-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready

Date	Hearing Type	Adjournment Reason
04-Sep-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
21-Aug-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
07-Aug-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
10-Jul-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
12-Jun-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
29-May-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
01-May-14	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Prosecution Not Ready
27-Mar-14	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Defence Not Ready
13-Mar-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
03-Mar-14	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Prosecution Not Ready
20-Feb-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
06-Feb-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
09-Jan-14	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
14-Nov-13	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Defence Not Ready
07-Nov-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
26-Sep-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
27-Jun-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
23-May-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
09-May-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
25-Apr-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
11-Apr-13	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Defence Not Ready
14-Mar-13	Preliminary Enquiry	Prosecution Not Ready
14-Feb-13	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Prosecution Not Ready
31-Jan-13	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Defence Not Ready
21-Jan-13	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Defence Not Ready
03-Jan-13	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Prosecution Not Ready
01-Nov-12	Preliminary Enquiry	Defence Not Ready
06-Sep-12	Preliminary Enquiry - For Mention	Defence Not Ready
09-Aug-12	Preliminary Enquiry - 1st Appearance	Defence Not Ready

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37422/11-15, how many law firms have been instructed in these cases; and how many times each law firm acted per judicial review.
(AQW 38403/11-15)

Mr Ford: From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 26 law firms took instructions in 51 judicial reviews, as per the table below.

Number of law firms	Number of Judicial Reviews instructed
2	6 (12)
1	5 (5)
2	4 (8)
1	3 (3)
3	2 (6)
17	1(17)

From 1 April 2014 to 22 October 2014 26 law firms have taken instructions in 37 judicial reviews, as per the table below.

Number of law firms	Number of Judicial Reviews instructed
1	4 (4)
8	2 (16)
17	1 (17)

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) number and location of illegal fuel laundering plants that have been detected in each of the last ten years; and (ii) prosecutions which followed in each case.
(AQW 38458/11-15)

Mr Ford: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), who lead in relation to fuel laundering, have provided the following figures:

Year	Fuel laundering plants dismantled in Northern Ireland
03/04	13
04/05	18
05/06	16
06/07	18
07/08	08
08/09	05
09/10	16
10/11	20
11/12	29
12/13	22
13/14	38

HMRC have advised that it is not their policy to detail locations.

In relation to associated prosecutions, in AQW/34252/ 11-15 I provided details of conviction for oils fraud in recent years.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps will he take to ensure that defaced road signs are replaced in such a way as to make further vandalism more difficult.
(AQW 36328/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): It is an offence under Article 33 of the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1981 for a person to unlawfully and intentionally interfere with or damage a traffic sign and anyone caught defacing road signs will be prosecuted.

However, as you will appreciate it can be difficult proving a case in this regard, as the courts will require substantial and clear evidence before an effective prosecution can be brought.

My Department carries out regular inspections of all public roads and footways, to ensure that essential maintenance needs are identified and remedial work is 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.

The need for an anti-graffiti coating will be considered by engineers before replacing any signage which is the subject of regular vandalism. Whilst this is done routinely for new signs, it is generally only done on a sign-by-sign basis for replacement or existing signs when the sign has either reached the end of its serviceable life, has been vandalised beyond repair or needs replaced to reflect changes to the local road network.

However, treating traffic signs with anti-graffiti coating only makes it easier for the graffiti to be removed and does not prevent the graffiti from being applied in the first instance. Officials will continue to remove graffiti from traffic signs and prioritise those deemed offensive or affecting road safety.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many NI Railways trains are currently in storage.
(AQW 36842/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Railways has no operational trains in storage.

One retired Class 450 train is being kept to provide engineering spares for support of NIR's Sandite train (a locomotive and carriage set which is used to apply Sandite to railhead to avoid wheel slip conditions during the Autumn).

In addition old MKII carriages for the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland in Whitehead remain in temporary storage in Lisburn station sidings.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money his Department has received from sources other than the Executive, in each of the last two years.
(AQW 37229/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer you to my answer to AQW 37230/11-15.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the lack of repairs being carried out to street lights, whether his Department has made provision for additional legal claims.
(AQW 37700/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not received any additional legal claims.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what bicycle parking facilities he plans to provide for staff and visitors to County Hall in Ballymena.
(AQW 37767/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Bicycle parking facilities at the County Hall in Ballymena currently consist of a covered stand which accommodates six bicycles. They are available for use by the 550 staff currently based at the location and members of the public. Based on observations by the Premises Officer since the facility was installed, this level of provision is considered sufficient to meet current demand.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to address the road safety and car parking concerns raised by the parents of pupils who attend Derryhale Primary School, Portadown.
(AQW 37857/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The school already benefits from the provision of flashing Safer Routes to School signs and enhanced road markings, which were installed in 2012, and there have been no recorded injury collisions at this location in the last eight years.

In addition, an assessment has been scheduled for the possible provision of traffic calming measures on Derryhale Road. This will determine the priority of this provision, relative to the numerous other requests for work of this nature, and I will arrange for you to be advised directly of the outcome when it is available.

The provision of additional car parking facilities at the school would be a matter for the local Education Board.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cycling parking spaces or loops were available for public use in Belfast in (i) 2012; (ii) 2013; and (iii) 2014.
(AQW 37942/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has been developing the infrastructure and providing improved facilities for cyclists in Belfast over a number of years. With regard to the 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 financial years, details of additional cycle stands/loops provided in Belfast, which were available for public use, are shown in the table below:

Year	Number of cycle stands/hoops provided
2011/12	97
2012/13	97
2013/14	192

In addition, Councils and the Department for Social Development, as part of public realm works, may have also installed cycle stands and other cycling facilities prior to and during this period, details of which are not maintained by my Department.

My draft Bicycle Strategy highlights the need for a comprehensive cycle network with end to end routes. This will include the provision of secure cycle parking where it is required. As part of our development plans, we will be making an assessment of current parking provision in Belfast.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to promote a better understanding of the economic benefits to businesses of cycling.
(AQW 37945/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has particular focus on encouraging and assisting people to use the bicycle as a means of everyday travel and the promotion of cycling through the Travelwise initiative.

I recognise that employers have an important role to play in facilitating and encouraging people to travel to work by bicycle and my department already works with employers through

- Bike to Work Day
- Promotion of the Cycle to Work Scheme; and
- The development of Workplace Travel Plans

My Department's draft Bicycle Strategy highlights the many benefits of cycling including the economic contribution to town and city centres by making them vibrant and safer urban spaces which are more attractive in encouraging people to spend time in.

Evidence from elsewhere indicates that higher levels of bicycle use equate to a range of economic benefits to society. Investment in infrastructure for the bicycle has also been demonstrated to represent a cost-effective investment.

A developed cycling culture can help:

- Create jobs;
- Inject money directly into the economy via the cycle trade;
- Boost the vitality of town centres; and
- Transport people and deliver goods efficiently

A significant additional economic benefit to businesses is the improved health and well-being of their employees when they adopt more active lifestyles. Cycling and walking even part of a journey on a regular basis will result in fitter and healthier employees, lowering levels of obesity and resulting in fewer sick absences.

The draft bicycle strategy highlights that while other bodies may have a remit for a specific area, such as tourism and leisure, there are areas of common interest where bodies can work together to support projects that deliver mutual benefits, such as greenways beyond urban areas.

The public consultation events which have taken place to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in the draft Bicycle Strategy have sought to engage with large businesses as well as the public so that businesses are fully informed about the strategy and the range of benefits that the strategy will deliver when implemented.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been realised of the anticipated release of £20 million from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.
(AQO 7025/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: To date 'Release of Value' Schemes totalling £41.5 million have received full planning approval, and are at various stages of development.

City Quays 1 a £10 million, 83,000 sq ft office accommodation project, was granted planning approval in September 2013. Following a competitive tendering process Heron Brothers Ltd, were appointed as the main contractor. Construction commenced in January 2014, with completion expected in early 2015. Belfast Harbour has had expressions of interest, mainly via Invest NI, in letting the accommodation and expects that it will be substantially let by early 2015.

City Quays 2 is a £20 million, 124,000 sq ft office accommodation. Planning Approval has been granted. The project design team has been appointed and the construction works are due to be competitively tendered in early 2015, with a view to construction commencing mid-2015 and ready for occupation in 2016.

Belfast Harbour Commission also funded the developed Concourse 2 at a cost of £5.5 million and this building is now fully occupied.

Concourse 3 is the £6 million, 55,000 sq ft Science Park. Planning Approval is already in place with tenancy terms agreed; a date for project commencement is directly linked to the conclusion of ongoing discussions between the Department of Finance and Personnel and HM Treasury regarding the Financial Transactions Capital scheme.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the PEDU recommendations to move Rivers Agency into his Department and the establishment of a flood alert and forecast service.
(AQW 38043/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I remain firmly of the view that the consolidation of the flood response agencies within a single department, will improve our ability to respond to emergency situations, and thus improve the service we provide to the public. The Executive has deferred a final resolution on this as part of the wider review of post-2015 structures of government.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is the lead Department for coordinating the response to the recommendations contained in the PEDU Report. DARD has advised that since the publication of the PEDU report, there

have been significant developments in relation to flood warning and informing which are beneficial for Northern Ireland. Formal engagement between Rivers Agency and the Met Office now takes place to inform severe weather warnings. Water level alerts, where appropriate, are also being installed to be used by selected communities to improve the overall response to flooding. Community engagement in flood-prone areas is helping to inform property owners about flood risk and how to improve their resilience to flood events.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update from Roads Service on application (P/2013/0189/F) from St. Bronagh's GAA, including the expected timeframe.
(AQW 38103/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am familiar with this planning application, having attended meetings with local residents who are objecting to the proposed new GAA pitches at Drumsesk Road.

My Department's TransportNI (formerly known as Roads Service), in its capacity as a statutory consultee, was re-consulted by the Department of the Environment's Planning Division on 24 October 2014 regarding a proposed increase in parking provision and a reduction in the size of the clubhouse. These latest amendments are being considered by my officials and a response to the Department of the Environment's Planning Division will issue after this work has been completed.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38140/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department of Finance and Personnel operates the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Cycle to Work Scheme and staff from my Department are able to join the scheme at any time. The scheme does not extend to NDPBs for whom the NICS is not their employer. However the Department of Finance and Personnel, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 37514/11-15, how many Assembly Questions, relating to the passing loop provision on the Londonderry to Coleraine railway line, were tabled in the period between him being made aware of the increase in the estimated cost of phase 2 of this line, and his statement to the Assembly on Monday 3 November 2014.
(AQW 38274/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The question you refer to, AQW 37514/11-15, which I answered on 29 October 2014, is the only question tabled in relation to the provision of the passing loop on the Coleraine to Londonderry line during the period between when I was made aware of the estimated costs increase and 3 November 2014.

There were three questions received during the same period in relation to Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail scheme but none of these referred to passing loop provision.

I explained in detail during my statement to the Assembly on 3 November that the independent review commissioned by myself in relation to the Phase 2 project was received at the end of September and was then communicated to and discussed with Translink in early October. The results of the review were communicated to the Assembly at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development when Translink's current contract with Lissan Coal Company is due to expire.
(AQW 38343/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The contract that Translink has with Lissan Coal Company is due to expire in March 2016.

Department for Social Development

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development when he expects construction to be completed following the award to Coleraine Rural Urban Network for a purpose built building in Coleraine town centre.
(AQW 36688/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): Coleraine Rural Urban Network project has been awarded funding from the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme for the development of a multi- purpose community hub in Coleraine Town Centre. The completion date for this project currently is estimated to be August 2015.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he has taken to ensure the continuation of neighbourhood renewal programmes beyond their current remit.
(AQW 36773/11-15)

Mr Storey: Under the Reform of Local Government my Department will confer powers and budgets to enable Councils to decide how best to take forward regeneration and community development in their areas. They will have to do that within the community planning process that identifies the long term objectives for improving social, economic and environmental well being of their communities.

My officials are working closely with the Councils to assist them in putting in place effective arrangements to meet the needs of their communities. My Department is in the final stages of evaluating the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and officials are continuing to review all existing contracts. Councils will be provided with the outcome of these reviews to enable them to take informed decisions about the arrangements they wish to put in place.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration is given to the rights and needs of residents of housing developments when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive relocate tenants from one development to another due to anti-social behaviour.
(AQW 37082/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive is statutorily bound by the rules and regulations of the Common Selection Scheme when allocating properties. It must also comply with the provisions of the Data Protection and Freedom of Information regulations and therefore is not in a position to discuss any potential allocations with tenants in an area in which a property is to be allocated.

However, the Housing Executive acknowledges that every individual is entitled to live in peace within their neighbourhood and residents of housing developments are entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their home. They advise that, as part of the General Conditions of Tenancy, all tenants are obliged to refrain from causing annoyance or nuisance to their neighbours. Where this is breached and anti-social behaviour occurs, the Housing Executive will take appropriate action involving the various statutory and non-statutory interventions at its disposal (e.g. mediation, court action etc.).

Should a tenant that has been re-housed have a previous history of anti-social behaviour and causes nuisance at a new address, past incidents will be used to strengthen court proceedings where applicable.

It is unlikely that the Housing Executive would condone the relocation of perpetrators of anti-social behaviour, except where the perpetrator has been subject to a threat and the Housing Executive has a duty of care to them or it becomes apparent the situation would be resolved by separating the two parties involved. It is also important to note that the Housing Executive has no power to transfer such tenants against their will.

It should also be noted that the Housing Executive's procedures for dealing with incidents of anti-social behaviour specify that in the context of re-housing, the Housing Executive will take full account of any anti-social behaviour carried out by the housing applicant or their household, to the extent that is legally permissible.

Where a tenant has engaged in anti-social behaviour they will be placed on a disqualification register which is checked on the receipt of an application for the allocation of a property. Should a perpetrator of anti-social behaviour recorded on the disqualification register apply for housing, they can only be removed from the register where the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to them under the homeless legislation. However, in such circumstances the Housing Executive will check their eligibility for re-housing and where an applicant has been involved in unacceptable behaviour, the Housing Executive has a statutory power to treat the applicant as ineligible for re-housing.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 36460/11-15, whilst his predecessor reached a conclusion, whether he, with ongoing responsibility to ensure the affairs of his Department have been conducted properly, is satisfied that the matter has been dealt with in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Finance and Personnel's fact-finding investigator.
(AQW 37253/11-15)

Mr Storey: As previously advised, this was a matter for my predecessor.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how many people currently reside in social housing; (ii) how many people are currently on the housing waiting list; (iii) how many social houses are currently available; and (iv) how many social houses are currently being built in North Down.
(AQW 37406/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested as neither the Housing Executive nor Housing Associations collate data on the number of people residing in their properties.

However, in relation to (i) the Housing Executive has advised that at 31 March 2014* they had 2,649 properties and Housing Associations have reported that they have 1,436 properties respectively in their ownership in North Down. In relation to (ii) the Housing Executive advises that at 30 September 2014* there were 2,057 applicants on the waiting list for North Down of which 1,179 were in housing stress. In relation to (iii) the Housing Executive has advised that at 31 March 2014* there were 34 operational voids and Housing Associations have reported that they currently have 18 voids respectively in North Down.

Finally, in relation to (iv) the table below details the housing schemes currently on site in the North Down Parliamentary constituency at 15 October 2014: -

Scheme	No. of units	Scheme type
Bloomfield Road/South Circular Road, Bangor	37	New Build, General needs (Transfer scheme)
South Circular Road extension	4	New Build, General needs (Transfer scheme)
Bangor ESPs	4	Existing Satisfactory Purchase, General Needs
Total	**45**	

* These are the most up to date figures available.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will introduce individual support pathways for people experiencing homelessness who apply to the Housing Executive.
(AQW 37418/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has in place a range of individual support pathways to both prevent homelessness and reduce the length of time people experience homelessness. The following measures focus on an individual's needs and provide solutions and pathways to address these needs:

- Through the Supporting People programme the Housing Executive funds a range of support providers to assist households who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness.
- A Housing Options approach was introduced to focus on the specific needs of individuals and features early preventative intervention and explores all possible housing options.
- A Private Rented Sector Access Scheme has been introduced to provide a viable accommodation alternative to anyone in housing need by allowing them access to affordable housing of a good standard in the private sector without the need for large upfront deposits.
- A Housing First service is being piloted to tackle serial homelessness amongst the most chronic and entrenched homeless population. The service provides individuals with wrap around support and other services in their own independent accommodation rather than in a room in a homeless hostel.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department will provide to North Down and Ards District Council for Areas at Risk.
(AQW 37469/11-15)

Mr Storey: Funding of £36,000 has been allocated to the North Down and Ards Areas at Risk programme in the current financial year

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of people in hostel accommodation with addiction problems.
(AQW 37689/11-15)

Mr Storey: In the Homelessness Strategy 2012 - 17 the Housing Executive has recognised that increasing numbers of people presenting as homeless have complex needs which require intensive support. In relation to (i) and (ii) a local survey of homeless presenters in Londonderry indicates that around 517 (28%) have underlying needs related to mental health or addiction issues or a combination of both. Strategies are in place to ensure that those who present with these types of complex needs are referred to and provided with the necessary assistance to help them.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 33121/11-15, how this answer 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 37952/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department does not have any regulatory powers in relation to letting agents in Northern Ireland. My answer to AQW 37950/11-15 refers.

I am not in a position to give a view on the interpretation of the Commission on Disposal of Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 provided as the responsibility for this legislation falls to the Department of Finance & Personnel.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the social housing waiting list in Lagan Valley.
(AQW 38012/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at the 30 September 2014 there were 1,772 applicants on the waiting List for the Lagan Valley Parliamentary constituency, of which 932 were in housing stress.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the amount of funding initially allocated to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15; and (ii) whether this amount has been reduced due to budget pressures.
(AQW 38068/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) My Department, through Neighbourhood Renewal, has allocated £42,573 to Gingerbread NI in Londonderry for the year 2014/15.

(ii) This amount of funding has not been reduced due to budget pressures.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development whether Craigowen Lodge in Seahill, Holywood is under the ownership of his Department or Hearth Housing Association.
(AQW 38071/11-15)

Mr Storey: Craigowen Lodge in Seahill is not in the ownership of the Department for Social Development. I understand the property remains in the ownership of the Department for Regional Development.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development how the transfer of £1.2m under Delivering Social Change for Nuture Units and Social Enterprise Units will be allocated.
(AQW 38107/11-15)

Mr Storey: The £1.2m transfer under Delivering Social Change has been allocated as follows:

- £300k for the Nurture Units and
- £900k for the Social Enterprise Units.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development how the 25,000 people who received letters to alert them to the importance of checking their benefit entitlements were selected.
(AQW 38161/11-15)

Mr Storey: The claimants to be contacted about their benefit entitlement were selected by matching a range of benefit data sets, available through the social security benefit payment systems, against filters to indicate low incomes and/or other additional factors, which would indicate potential entitlement to benefit.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed Stock Transfer Scheme of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties at Abbeyville Park, Newtownabbey.
(AQW 38372/11-15)

Mr Storey: As you will be aware a Review of the Stock Transfer Scheme was commissioned in February of this year to determine whether the programme in its current form is the best way to effectively deliver the desired outcomes.

The Review Group, having considered the issues in detail, has concluded that the current model will not deliver the announced programme and therefore a different approach is being proposed. The revised approach was endorsed by the NIHE Board and I have now also approved the proposals.

In broad terms, it is proposed that the programme is reconfigured into a smaller number of schemes with each scheme comprising larger bundles of properties based on locality.

I have written to the NIHE Chairman asking NIHE to begin work on developing revised Stock Transfer schemes as one element of a wider programme to improve and invest in NIHE properties. 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.

In the meantime the Housing Executive will continue to undertake normal response maintenance works where necessary.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission to detail the cost of providing refreshments for Assembly Committee meetings in each of the last two years.
(AQW 37948/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The total amounts spent on refreshments by Committees in each of the last two years are detailed below:

Committee	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015*	Total for Committee
Business Committee	£1,701.55	£1,958.00	£414.54	£4,074.09
Social Development Committee	£2,209.48	£1,062.47	£914.35	£4,186.30
Regional Development Committee	£1,471.70	£958.18	£1,687.29	£4,117.17
Employment & Learning Committee	£548.01	£1,159.83	£635.77	£2,343.61
Enterprise Trade & Investment Committee	£850.55	£2,142.17	£891.20	£3,883.92
Finance & Personnel Committee	£1,895.37	£2,141.89	£777.29	£4,814.55
Agriculture & Rural Development Committee	£1,268.21	£1,598.93	£683.78	£3,550.92
Culture Arts & Leisure Committee	£933.49	£1,696.96	£537.17	£3,167.62
Education Committee	£2,126.31	£2,084.32	£2,093.74	£6,304.37
Environment Committee	£1,170.38	£2,100.95	£698.83	£3,970.16
HSSPS Committee	£1,893.38	£1,987.74	£979.59	£4,860.71
Assembly & Executive Review Committee	£513.62	£538.65	£182.55	£1,234.82
Public Accounts Committee	£1,430.45	£1,497.79	£571.99	£3,500.23
Standards & Privileges Committee	£645.65	£797.63	£603.45	£2,046.73
OFMDFM Committee	£1,404.49	£1,123.74	£841.24	£3,369.47
Justice Committee	£1,773.39	£3,032.73	£1,698.28	£6,504.40
Procedures Committee	£459.68	£594.14	£243.76	£1,297.58
Audit Committee	£40.08	£46.59	£10.26	£96.93
Ad-Hoc Committee	£414.49	£0.00	£0.00	£414.49
Total	**£22,750.28**	**£26,522.71**	**£14,465.08**	**£63,738.07**

* April 2014-October 2014

The expenditure for 2014/15 to date has been included by way of a comparison. The forecast for this year is broadly in line with the previous two years.

Expenditure in this category includes all expenditure incurred by Committees on refreshments whether received internally at Parliament Buildings or externally during visits or external Committee meetings. Expenditure on events or functions organised by Committees is not included as this would be deemed to be hospitality.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 21 November 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the recent decision notices by the Information Commissioner regarding the non-disclosure of information to the public by their Department.
(AQO 5995/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister received four decision notices in March. The first two notices concerned OFMDFM's risk registers and the Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre.

In each case, the Commissioner decided that OFMDFM engaged the appropriate exemptions but disagreed with our public interest test arguments.

Judging what is in the public interest is a difficult balancing exercise and opinions will vary. Given the Commissioner's remit, it is understandable in cases where the balance is fine that he should give precedence to arguments in favour of disclosure.

The other two notices concerned a series of information requests, derived from a list of unanswered Assembly Questions. The Commissioner's decision was that the exemption engaged was not appropriate, and that OFMDFM should disclose the information.

These cases were novel, even in UK terms. The series of requests we received concerned a wide variety of unconnected issues. And, as the only link between them was that they had been tabled as Assembly Questions, we could only conclude that freedom of information legislation was being used inappropriately to obtain information sought by MLAs. We do not believe that the Assembly's processes should be undermined in this way.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to quantify the total budget requested by successful group applicants who have yet to receive funding through the Victims and Survivors Service; and whether their Department has the necessary budget to honour these applications.
(AQW 34516/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The total budget requested by approved group applicants who have yet to receive funding through the Victims and Survivors Service is £469k.

The member will appreciate that available funding is finite. This year's group funding has been fully utilised.

OFMDFM successfully bid for £1.3m for victims in the October Monitoring round. Individual victims and those in greatest need remain a priority.

Efficiencies have been applied across the Department and to its Arms Length Bodies and the Victims and Survivors Service is working with individual groups to maintain front line services to victims.

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the timescale for the cross-departmental internet safety strategy to be brought to the Executive.
(AQW 36409/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In June 2014, agreement in principle was obtained from the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to develop an e-safety strategy and action plan.

In the near future, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will submit a proposal, to commission the SBNI to take this work forward, to the Executive for approval.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Executive is using local Social Enterprise Hubs, as part of the Accelerating Social Enterprise Signature Programme, to actively encourage business start-up within local communities.
(AQW 36611/11-15)

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 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 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.

Mr Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the creation of a further phase of funding under the Social Investment Fund.
(AQO 6746/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding has been allocated to 23 projects to date with a total commitment of £34.4 million.

There are a further 11 projects valued at £14.1 million at final stage approval subject to DFP approval and budgetary pressures.

A residual 22 projects are currently being reviewed as part of a comprehensive appraisal process. The outcome of this should be known shortly.

No decisions have been made on any potential further phases of SIF further to the current £80m fund.

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much Social Investment funding is planned for distribution in the 2014/15 financial year.
(AQO 6748/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding has been allocated to 23 projects to date with a total commitment of £34.4 million.

Details of all projects prioritised within the funding allocation for each of the nine social investment fund zones are available on the OFMDFM website. Lead partners with letters of offer are currently working on profile plans to be submitted to the Department. When these are received we will have a more accurate picture of funding to be distilled in 2014/15 financial year.

Mr Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Disability Strategy will be finalised.
(AQO 6856/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive's Disability Strategy was finalised in early 2013 and was launched by Junior Ministers in February 2013.

A 2013/14 annual report on the delivery of the Disability Strategy will set out the actions that all departments have undertaken under the Strategy in its first year. We hope to publish the report in Autumn 2014.

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the issues which have emerged during the consultation on the Racial Equality Strategy.
(AQO 6857/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In the responses to the Racial Equality Strategy consultation that have been analysed so far one view that emerged time and again was the need to tackle race hate crimes.

We condemn all racist attacks. We are committed to tackling racism and all forms of intolerance and strongly encourage all victims to report any incident.

The 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy, along with the new Racial Equality Strategy, will provide the framework for departments and others to tackle race hate crime.

Our officials recently convened a special sitting of the Good Relations Programme Board in which departments explored what immediate action can be taken to tackle race hate.

A range of actions are at an advanced state of preparation. These include resources that will show how much minority ethnic people contribute to our society and will challenge the dangerous myths that circulate.

We will continue to work with community leaders in the areas where attacks have been most prevalent.

In the interim work continues with our Executive colleagues and external stakeholders to raise awareness, challenge unacceptable behaviour and encourage reporting of all such incidents.

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions their Department has taken to tackle the increase in race hate crimes.
(AQO 6858/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In the responses to the Racial Equality Strategy consultation that have been analysed so far one view that emerged time and again was the need to tackle race hate crimes.

We condemn all racist attacks. We are committed to tackling racism and all forms of intolerance and strongly encourage all victims to report any incident.

The 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy, along with the new Racial Equality Strategy, will provide the framework for departments and others to tackle race hate crime.

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A range of actions are at an advanced state of preparation. These include resources that will show how much minority ethnic people contribute to our society and will challenge the dangerous myths that circulate.

We will continue to work with community leaders in the areas where attacks have been most prevalent.

In the interim work continues with our Executive colleagues and external stakeholders to raise awareness, challenge unacceptable behaviour and encourage reporting of all such incidents.

Mr F McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Community Family Support programme under the Delivering Social Change framework.
(AQO 6864/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Community Family Support Programme is part of the overall 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. The Community Family Support Programme is providing support to 720 families; encouraging them to make life changing decisions, enhancing their prospects and assist in becoming full participants in society. This follows an initial pilot of the Programme which focused on the needs of 44 families, delivered between January and June 2013.

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether work will be considered at the former Army Camp at Ballykelly to more permanently deal with the ongoing potential flooding issue which is costing a considerable sum on an annual basis to contain.
(AQW 38100/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that work has been undertaken to reduce the risk of flooding on the site. This includes:

- regular maintenance of the four industrial pumps and the network of drainage channels that run through the site;
- purchasing a spare pump, which ensures continuity of service, should a pump fail; and
- installation of an early detection flood warning system.

In addition, a maintenance contract for regular servicing of the pumps to reduce unplanned maintenance costs is being introduced.

A soft market testing exercise was completed earlier this year and we are currently considering options for the future development of the site.

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether their Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and; (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38136/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

(i) OFMDFM, along with all departments, operates the NICS Cycle to Work scheme.

(ii) Staff may join the scheme at any time.

The NICS Cycle to work scheme is open to all civil servants. It does not extend to non-NICS staff working in non-departmental public bodies. However the Department of Finance and Personnel provides advice and guidance to non-departmental public bodies on the establishment and operation of similar Cycle to Work Schemes.

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in their Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38150/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Public Sector Reform Division has not completed any efficiency related work for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the proposed timescale for the creation of the Chinese Consulate in Belfast.
(AQW 38250/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The timescale for the establishment of a Chinese Consulate-General in Belfast is a matter for the Chinese Government.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many people their Department sponsored to attend the global summit to end sexual violence in conflict in London in June 2014; and (ii) who comprised the delegation, including those from the Training for Women Network.
(AQW 38329/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM acceded to a request for financial assistance that enabled 6 women to attend the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The delegation included a representative from the Training for Women Network, Women's Aid, Footprints Women's Centre, Falls Women's Centre, Kilcooley Women's Centre, and Irish Street Youth and Community Association.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) when they received a report from the former Victims' Commissioner on the issue of a pension for people severely disabled during the Troubles; (ii) why the report has not yet been published or made available to interested parties; and (iii) whether they will now publish the report.
(AQW 38423/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Proposals put forward by former Commissioner Stone in June 2014 are currently under consideration. Discussions are ongoing between Departmental officials and the Commission for Victims and Survivors regarding the details. The report will be published in due course.

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQT 1626/11-15, to outline the savings that could be made by a Civil Service voluntary redundancy scheme.
(AQO 6969/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following the Executive's agreement on the draft 2015/16 Budget the Finance Minister has been asked to bring forward a range of proposals that would effect a paybill reduction including a voluntary exit scheme.

At this early stage it is not possible to outline precisely the savings that could be made.

It is important to stress that a voluntary exit scheme would only be one of a number of measures to be considered.

Work has begun on establishing the overall size of the pay bill reduction that needs to be delivered by the Civil Service and how this is to be achieved. An exercise has started that will help to secure the necessary information from departments to develop the range of proposals in more detail. The actual scale and scope of the required interventions will only be known once departmental budgets are agreed for 2015-16.

It is important to note that the figures quoted by the First Minister in his response to Topical Question 1626/11-15 related to reductions in public sector employment as a whole rather than the civil service.

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will continue to support the calls for cases, such as Kincora House, to be included in the United Kingdom historical child sexual abuse inquiry.
(AQO 6978/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are disappointed that the Home Secretary has decided not to include allegations of cover up by intelligence services and MI5 relating to abuse in Kincora boys' home in the Westminster independent inquiry panel into institutional failures in respect of child sexual abuse.

However, we have no doubt the Sir Anthony Hart is more than capable of carrying out such investigations as long as there is full co-operation from Westminster and all the evidence he requires is provided to him, given that he does not have the legal authority to compel evidence from Westminster departments and associated bodies.

It is too soon to be sure that the Inquiry will find itself able to deal satisfactorily with allegations of cover up by the Ministry of Defence or the Security Services, but we are heartened to note that consideration can be given at any time to bring it into the remit of the Westminster inquiry panel.

Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Victims and Survivors Service.
(AQO 6979/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We were pleased to be able to confirm recently that through October monitoring the Victims and Survivors Service will receive an additional £1.3 million funding this year. This will allow the Service to expand on the schemes already available to victims and survivors.

The Service will continue to proactively manage its budget to maintain frontline services. It will continue to prioritise the needs of individuals in order to protect those with the greatest needs.

The Service is also progressing its work with the Commission and our Department to improve the services it provides through the implementation of the recommendations from the independent assessment.

Ms P Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent talks with the First Minister of Wales.
(AQO 6983/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We had a very constructive meeting with the First Minister of Wales on 22 October in Wales.

Discussions covered representation of devolved interests at JMC and at European Union level. We also discussed the devolution of fiscal powers which included exchanges on issues such as Corporation Tax, Air Passenger Duty, Landfill Tax, Aggregates Levy, bonds and borrowing and the continuing use of the Barnett formula.

Each administration has different devolved arrangements and powers so the focus for each administration will clearly be different in regard to adopting further fiscal

powers. However there was a will to work together where administrations have common aims and to support each other when we have different areas of focus and interest.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the full cost benefit analysis regarding the proposed relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Headquarters; and when it will be published.
(AQW 38384/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I can advise that a significant amount of analysis has been completed by my Department in determining the location, and costs, to relocate my departmental headquarters to Ballykelly. The costs of the project, as identified in the business case have been shared with Ministers, including the Finance Minister.

On 26th June the Executive agreed to progress with the project and to provide the necessary funding based on the analysis provided. The costs will continue to be refined and scrutinised as we move through the various stages of the project.

The results of the public tender for the new building and the actual staff transition numbers will refine the final business case which is to be completed by November 2015.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in her 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 38558/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) have no employees, on either the Industrial or Non Industrial pay scales, which are paid below £7.20 per hour therefore all DARD staff are paid the proposed living wage of £7.20 per hour.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in her Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38594/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is a total of 4 staff employed in the DARD Equality and Internal Communications Unit, two of whom work on equality matters part-time. The annual cost of employing these staff is £115,551.48 which includes salary, National Insurance contributions and pension costs.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department is taking to assist fisher men and women with a disability.
(AQW 38093/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Over the past three years my Department has provided enhanced facilities for disabled anglers at Public Angling Estate (PAE) fisheries across the North. This includes improved access for disabled anglers by providing dedicated car parking facilities and upgraded pathways. We have also provided sixteen purpose built disabled fishing stands during this period and we will continue to develop a minimum of two new stands each year, My Department is also looking at other ways to improve disabled facilities in partnership with local councils and community organisations.

A wide range of quality, game and coarse fishing is available to disabled anglers across the Public Angling Estate. Almost half of the current 63 waters within the PAE have dedicated disabled facilities, with some large waters, such as Lough Erne, having these at multiple sites. My Department also produces a dedicated disabled angling guide, which provides information on waters with disabled facilities and offers advice on distances and gradients to assist disabled anglers to assess the suitability of particular waters based on their mobility.

In addition, since 2011, I have provided over five thousand concessionary licenses and permits to eligible anglers with disabilities. My officials are also working in partnership with organisations such as Extern, Action Mental Health, Disability Action NI and Erne Disabled Anglers to promote awareness of the value of the sport and in supporting initiatives to encourage greater participation, including organising special angling events and the donations of seized fishing equipment.

My Department also exhibited at this year's Disability Action Show in Belfast and we have regularly featured angling in the media to promote the value of the sport to those with disabilities.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department provides to the Ulster Angling Federation.
(AQW 38097/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster Angling Federation (UAF) is the representative body for game angling clubs in the North. It is one of the recognised stakeholder groups consulted by my Department on angling policy development and legislative changes.

The UAF is also represented on the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum (SIFF), which is my Department's consultative forum for the range of inland fishery interests across the North.

SportNI, an Arms Length Body under the remit of my Department, undertook a Strategic Review of Angling and the UAF was represented on the project Steering Group. The UAF has received funding of £4,900 towards angling training as part of the recommendations identified in the Strategy. Sport NI also provides practical advice and financial support to UAF on a range of angling related development programmes.

Sport NI has recently approved the investment of up to £190,000 in the UAF through its 'Active Clubs' programme. Included in this amount is funding for the provision of an angling development officer to work on behalf of the UAF, the Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation and other angling representative bodies to develop the sport.

SportNI is also planning a series of capacity building engagements with National Governing Bodies, including the UAF.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many staff have been seconded to her Department from the Strategic Investment Board (SIB); (ii) to detail the full cost of this secondment to her Department, including salary and overheads; and (iii) to outline the projects delivered in the past year by seconded SIB staff.
(AQW 38135/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has an Operational Partnership Agreement (OPA) with SIB. The OPA recognises the need for SIB and DCAL to work closely to achieve the delivery of better public services and improved infrastructure whilst demonstrating Best Value for Money.

(i) Four individuals have been engaged by DCAL using this mechanism

(ii) The cost to DCAL, up to 31 October 2014, is £243,453.76.

(iii) The projects delivered in the past year include;

- Work on the Stadium projects at Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park;
- Work on the new Sub-Regional Stadium Programme;
- The management of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games Legacy Activity Programme.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department offers aspiring writers in getting their work published.
(AQW 38146/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council provides grants to aspiring writers through a variety of schemes within the Support for Individual Artists Programme. Through this programme writers may apply for financial support including assistance with travel and research. In addition, funding is made available for publishers towards the commissioning, production and marketing of literary publications.

The Support for the Individual Artist Programme which includes the following schemes, opens twice a year and is due to re-open in February/March 2015.

General Art Awards

Awards of up to £1,500 are available. Writers can apply to "buy time" to complete work or research projects.

Major Individual Award

A £15,000 award is made available for established artists with national or international recognition to develop extended or ambitious work.

Self-arranged Residencies

These awards (up to £5,000 in value) enable individual artists, including writers, to avail of residencies outside the north of Ireland.

Artist Career Enhancement Scheme (ACES)

The ACES scheme makes awards of £5,000 available for artists' development purposes with a targeted package of training, mentoring and support provided for successful applicants.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure under which criteria was the £2.5m earmarked for sports provision in Dungiven granted.
(AQW 38160/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding from my Department for sports provision in Dungiven has not yet been granted.

I can advise that my Department has received a proposal from Limavady Borough Council to develop sports facilities in Dungiven and that Sport NI, an arm's length body of my Department, has been in contact with the Council and is currently reviewing the business case.

I have given my support to the development of the sporting facilities in Dungiven as the proposals fit with my Department's commitment to provide a legacy in the North West from the 2013 City of Culture. The proposals also fit with my Department's priorities to promote social and economic equality, tackle poverty and social exclusion and the promotion of sustainable and social interventions in deprived areas.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37400/11-15, for an update on the investigation.
(AQW 38164/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department commissioned a report from the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to investigate the recent fish kill incident at Portna on the Lower Bann.

My officials are currently considering the report to establish the full circumstances relating to the incident.

I will publish the report when my Department has concluded its consideration of the issues.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee assess whether, and to what extent, a proposal contributes to the status and promotion of the Irish language.
(AQW 38229/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The committee assesses whether the application will meet the minimum language requirement, which is 70% of the spoken word. Other factors which may be taken into account include whether the subject matter pertains to the history, development or promotion of the Irish language and to what degree.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee assess the quality of a proposal; and what factors they take into account.
(AQW 38230/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is not possible to be prescriptive in answering this question. The quality of the proposal can be assessed in several ways including for example: the quality of the written application; the feasibility of the project and the perceived quality of the end product. Factors taken into account can include: the suitability of the proposed contributors and presenters; the appropriateness of the language levels and the experience and competency of the production team.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee assess the audience appeal of a proposal; and what factors they take into account in so doing.
(AQW 38231/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is not possible to be prescriptive in answering this question. Broadly, in considering the audience appeal of a proposal, assessors consider the content from the perspective of beginner learners and/or more fluent Irish speakers. Assessments also consider the educational, informative and entertainment aspects of the content in the context of its appeal to wider audiences or target audiences in terms of, for example, age.

The Irish Language Broadcast Fund undertakes research with the viewing public and works alongside broadcasters in terms of monitoring audience appeal and viewing figures to further inform decisions.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee assess value for money aspects of a proposal; and what factors they take into account.
(AQW 38232/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Budgets for each application are assessed by NI Screen's Head of Finance and the Irish Language Broadcast Fund to ensure that they are in line with industry tariffs. Different genres require different tariffs, for example drama is more expensive than reversioned animation or straightforward documentaries. Factors taken into account include the need to balance awards made amongst the different genres to ensure that the audiences for the different genres can be catered for within the resources available.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, (i) to explain the meaning of maximising audience aspects; (ii) how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee assess maximising audience aspects; and (iii) what factors they take into account in so doing.
(AQW 38269/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maximising audience aspects refers not only to maximising actual audience numbers for the funded content but, within this, also seeking to diversify audience types to ensure the content has a broad appeal where appropriate.

The Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee can take the following factors into account in assessing the potential audience reach of the proposed content: whether the content has a broadcaster attached; whether the proposed slot will allow for maximum audience access; and how the content will be marketed to ensure maximum audience awareness.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, (i) to explain what is meant by additionality aspects and how these relate to, or differ from, value for money aspects; (ii) how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund committee assess additionality aspects; and (iii) what factors they take into account in so doing.
(AQW 38271/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Additionality refers to whether the proposed content is new and additional to existing content already available to viewers. In terms of value for money, additionality would be taken into account in assessing whether the proposed content is over and above programming that the broadcasting organisation might otherwise have produced itself.

In assessing additionality aspects, the committee can take the following factors into account: the number of hours of Irish language programming previously transmitted by the broadcaster; whether the proposed content is new and additional to previously funded content; and whether the proposed content is similar to previously funded or currently broadcast content by the proposed broadcaster.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, to explain what is meant by 'the Irish language independent production sector in the North of Ireland'.
(AQW 38272/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Irish language independent production sector refers to the Irish speaking production companies & Irish speaking personnel working on Irish language content within the independent screen production sector in the north of Ireland.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15 and 37281/11-15, (i) why the criteria for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund refer to 'additionality aspects'; (ii) why the criteria for the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund refer to 'additionality aspects and match funding arrangements'; and (iii) to explain why these are different.
(AQW 38273/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Pursuant to AQW 37820/11-15 and 37821/11-15, I can clarify that additionality aspects and match funding arrangements form part of the assessment criteria for both Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast funds. Both funds have the same requirements in respect of additionality and match funding arrangements.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she expects the hoist for anglers with a disability on Lower Lough Erne to be reinstated and operational.
(AQW 38317/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is envisaged that the disabled hoist facility at Garvary on Lower Lough Erne will be fully operational by the start of the 2015 angling season.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether her Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38325/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) Yes my Department operates a Cycle to work scheme, all NICS Departments are participants in the NICS Cycle to work scheme.

(ii) Yes the scheme is open all year round and staff can join it at any time.

(iii) The scheme is a NICS Cycle to Work Scheme and therefore does not extend to NDPBs for whom the NICS is not their employer. However DFP, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15 and 37281/11-15, to detail (i) why the criteria for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) refers to 'the growth and development of the Irish language independent production sector in the North of Ireland', whereas the criteria for the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) refers to 'the growth and development of the Ulster-Scots independent production sector and infrastructure'; (ii) why the ILBF criteria are geographically specific, whereas the USBF criteria are not; and (iii) why the USBF criteria refers to 'infrastructure', whereas the ILBF criteria do not and what is meant by 'infrastructure' in this context.
(AQW 38337/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) There is an Irish language independent production sector in the south of Ireland making it necessary to specify that it is the Irish language production sector in the north of Ireland which is the strategic interest for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF). Since the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) is also only strategically interested in the development of the sector in the north of Ireland that clarification is unnecessary.

(ii) In practice, both funds are geographically specific with regard to the sector and infrastructure.

(iii) While there may be differences in wording across the various documents relating to the funds, there is no difference in the definition of infrastructure for the ISBF and USBF. Infrastructure is defined as expertise and resources other than the production companies themselves which are important to the production of television programmes.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, whether any production companies from outside Northern Ireland have received support from the Irish Language Broadcast Fund.
(AQW 38338/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Production companies from outside of the north of Ireland have received support from the Irish Language Broadcast Fund, but only as a co-production partner with a production company from the north of Ireland.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37280/11-15, what weighting is given to each of the eight criteria in assessing an application to the Irish Language Broadcast Fund.
(AQW 38339/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No specific weighting is afforded to the eight criteria. Assessment is based on an objective analysis of how an application meets the criteria which are made known to potential applicants in advance.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the number of film production companies in 'the Irish language independent production sector' in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38340/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not made an assessment of the number of film production companies in the Irish language independent production sector in the North of Ireland.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money has been contributed by the Arts in East Antrim, including the amount for the Special Educational Needs and Disability sector, in each of the last five years,
(AQW 38350/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL funding for the Arts is disbursed by the Arts Council NI and NI Screen. The amount of money contributed by them in respect of Arts in East Antrim in each of the last five years is as follows;

Year	Amount
2010/11	15,398
2011/12	19,649
2012/13	41,366
2013/14	71,598
2014/15	30,119

These figures include the amount for the Special Educational Needs and Disability sector.

Please note that DCAL also provides funding to East Antrim through the Community Festivals Fund (CFF) which is administered by the local councils. The total CFF funding from DCAL in each of the last five years to the East Antrim area is detailed below. A number of the festivals funded will have included an arts element.

Year	Amount
2010/11	35,414
2011/12	32,737
2012/13	30,744
2013/14	29,594
2014/15	32,800

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department is working with relevant stakeholders in East Londonderry to advance the aim of developing the North West as a hub for the creative industries and social innovation.
(AQW 38379/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Building on the successful delivery of the 2013 City of Culture year, I am committed to the development of the North West as a regional driver for creativity and innovation.

My officials are continuing to engage with stakeholders across the North West, including a number in Coleraine and Limavady.

As well as supporting a number of projects through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund in these areas, my Department has also supported the Stendhal Festival in Limavady, to assist the organisers with the delivery of the festival.

I secured additional resource and capital funding through the October monitoring round and some of this funding will be allocated to projects within your constituency. Details of the projects which will receive funding are still being finalised and I will be making further announcements in due course.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how Sport Northern Ireland, as an arm's-length body of her Department, are encouraging grass roots soccer programmes to operate on a cross-community basis and demonstrate an active commitment to equality.
(AQW 38380/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI supports governing bodies, including the Irish Football Association, to work towards achieving a required level of the Equality Standard for Sport. Sport NI has encouraged grass roots soccer programmes to operate on a cross-community basis and demonstrate an active commitment to equality as follows:

- Sport NI was instrumental in the creation and support of the Irish Football Association's 'Football For All' advisory panel whose aim is to ensure football in the north of Ireland promotes both equality of opportunity for all persons and good community relations.

- Sport NI's Active Communities programme employs 116 (Full Time Equivalent) coaches across the north of Ireland to encourage participation in sport and physical activity. The coaches deliver soccer programmes at a community level, many of which have a cross community aspect.
- During 2011/12, Sport NI provided funding of £6,596 to the NI Women's Football Association under the Awards for Sport programme. This project increased grass roots soccer participation amongst girls aged 5-11 years of age, with 409 females benefitting from the project. The investment supported cross-community engagement amongst the clubs who benefitted from the funding.
- Since 2013, Sport NI has invested £330,000 in Midnight Street Soccer which is a community football project that involves late night football leagues at nine community facilities for young people aged 14 to 17 years and provides an opportunity for many young people from diverse backgrounds to come together through sport. The project also aims to make young people more aware of pertinent social issues that affect them and their communities and includes good community relations training as part of the programme.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she or departmental officials met the Chief Executive of Limavady Council to discuss progress for the Dungiven sports and community facilities project; and when her Department expects to receive a final draft business case for the project.
(AQW 38381/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can confirm that officials from my Department and I met with Liam Flanagan, Chief Executive of Limavady Council on 12 March 2014 and again on 13 October 2014 to discuss the development of sports and community facilities in Dungiven.

Furthermore, I can advise that Sport NI, an arm's length body of my Department, has been in contact with the Council and is currently reviewing the business case for the project.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the withdrawal of funding from the tourism events fund will impact sports competitions in the North West, specifically the Foyle Cup and Milk Cup youth football tournaments and the North West 200.
(AQW 38382/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for providing funding for events including the Foyle Cup, Milk Cup and North West 200, lies in the first instance with the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The withdrawal of the funding from the tourism events fund has the potential to have a negative impact on the above competitions as well as having an impact on other events that bring visitors and participants to the north of Ireland.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what communication her Department, or associated arm's-length bodies, have received from Coleraine Football Club Academy requesting financial assistance for grass roots soccer programmes; and to outline the nature of the responses provided.
(AQW 38383/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In March 2014, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, received a request for funding through Active Awards for Sport (Round 1) from Coleraine Football Club to support the running costs associated with the Mini Soccer Academy. Sport NI advised Coleraine Football Club that the application scored below the Quality Threshold for the programme and thus failed to secure funding.

Coleraine Football Club has recently submitted an application to Active Awards for Sport (Round 2) which closed on 20 October 2014 for the Mini Soccer Academy. I understand this was towards facility hire, coach education and advertising associated with a proposed project to increase participation in football by increasing the activities it offers to children and young people. Sport NI has advised that responses will be provided to all applicants in December 2014, when they will be notified whether their applications to the programmes have been successful.

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's proposals for the current and future functioning of libraries in North Belfast.
(AQW 38606/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As a result of the need to make in-year budget reductions, Libraries NI is currently implementing a number of savings measures which may impact on the current and future functioning of libraries in North Belfast. These include releasing agency staff who covered staff vacancies, maternity leave, secondments, special projects, annual leave and sickness. In addition, all libraries in the North of Ireland, including those in North Belfast, may be affected by a reduction in expenditure on new stock. Some smaller branches may also be subject to temporary ad hoc closures.

With effect from 3rd November 2014, Libraries NI has also changed or reduced the weekly opening hours, for the time being, of four libraries in North Belfast (ie Belfast Central, Cloughfern, Glengormley and Rathcoole). Weekly opening hours remain unchanged at three other libraries in the area (ie Ardoyne, Chichester and Grove). Details of the changes to weekly opening hours announced by Libraries NI for each library in North Belfast are set out in the Annex attached.

Annex

Library	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Total wkly hrs	Comment
Ardoyne	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-6.00	9.30-2.00	9:30-1:00	37	No change
Belfast Central	9.00-8.00	9.00-5.30	9.00-5.30	9.00-8.00	9.00-5.30	9.00-4.30	55	Reduced by 2 hours - no late night Tues or Wed. Now opening at 9am rather than 9.30 am.
Chichester	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	12.30-8.00	12.30-5.30	9.30-1.00	40	No change.
Cloughfern	Closed	11.00-1.00 2.00-6.00	Closed	10.00-1.00 2.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-1.00 2.00-5.00	18	Same hours - pattern change on Tues. Previous 2-8pm.
Glengormley	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	48	Reduced by 9 hours - no longer late night on Mon, Tues or Wed.
Grove	9.30-5.30	12.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	12.30-8.00	9.30-5.30	9.30-1.00	40	No change.
Rathcoole	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	1.00-5.30	9.30-1.00	40	Same hours – pattern change on Thurs -open all day, no late night.

Mr McCausland asked Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 232/07, whether Foras na Gaeilge posts an English language translation of its minutes on its website.

(AQW 38648/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Foras na Gaeilge publishes full minutes of Board Meetings in Irish on its website. It also publishes decisions taken at Board Meetings in English.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) why the minutes of the meetings of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group for 31 January 2013 and 21 November 2013 have not been posted on the departmental website; and (ii) whether she will ensure that they are placed on the website as soon as possible.
(AQW 38784/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Minutes of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group for 31 January 2013 and 21 November 2013 were not posted on the Departmental website due to an administrative error.

The Minutes of both meetings have now been posted on the Departmental website.

Department of Education

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education when training for teachers in Special Educational Needs was last reviewed; and what changes in provision have been implemented as a result.
(AQW 38073/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Following the review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion, I have provided funding for a number of important capacity-building initiatives to support the proposals under that Review. These include: a SEN course at Masters level focused on support for children with literacy difficulties; an Early Years Pilot in Department of Education-funded statutory and non-statutory early years settings; and an Educational Assessment Pilot in almost 300 primary and post-primary settings.

A comprehensive SEN Resource File and leadership and management training for SEN Coordinators (SENCOs), has been made available to all grant-aided schools. Funding has also been made available for a one-day training course in leadership and management of classroom assistants, which will be offered to all SENCOs and delivered by board staff in this school

year. As an extension to the SEN Resource File, Early Years Handbooks have been developed for staff in all funded pre-school settings.

My Department also funded joint working on SEN between the University of Ulster and Queens University to extend the SEN content of the PGCE. A pilot reading module was developed as part of the PGCE programme for student teachers to allow them to address literacy issues in post primary, and in particular, with pupils who have SEN. This module was mainstreamed in the 2013/14 academic year.

My Department is represented by a member of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in the European Agency for special needs and inclusion and currently participating in a European wide project on raising standards for all learners. Previously the ETI has participated in related projects including early years, ICT, SEN statistics across Europe and teacher education which combine to contribute to the raising of standards through policy information and development in special needs education.

In addition, officials are currently working on a revised strategy for teacher education. This will provide an overarching and coherent framework for teacher education and continuing professional development to strengthen the professionalism and expertise of teachers in all areas.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the amount spent on the Lisanelly campus in each financial year since 2010/11; and what the projected spend is for (i) 2014/15; and (ii) 2015/16.
(AQW 38180/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The amount spent on the Lisanelly campus from 2010/11 and projected to 2015/16 is as follows:

Financial Year	£000's
2010-11	1,335
2011-12	1,186
2012-13	541
2013-14	816
2014-15	4,956
2015-16	11,678

The 2014/15 forecast expenditure will be reviewed in the January Monitoring Round.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education for an update on proposals to amalgamate Listress, Craigbrack and Mullabuoy Primary Schools.
(AQW 38251/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my January 2013 statement to the Assembly on the Major Capital Investment Programme, I identified the amalgamation of Listress, Craigbrack and Mullabuoy Primary Schools' as one of 22 projects to be taken forward in planning.

The current position of this project is a Development Proposal for the amalgamation of the three schools was approved in August 2014. The Council for Catholic Maintained schools (CCMS) has commenced work on the feasibility study for the new build and are working closely with my Department.

Once the feasibility study has been completed, a supporting Business Case will be prepared by the Department prior to the appointment of a multi-disciplinary design team to take forward the detailed design of the new school.

I cannot offer a definitive timescale for the commencement of construction works until the feasibility work is complete and a design team is in place. However it is unlikely to commence on site before the last quarter of the 2015/2016 financial year.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the proposed social clauses that are under consideration for inclusion in the Lisanelly Shared Educational Campus scheme; and (ii) whether his Department will consider including the payment of a living wage to all construction workers on the site as part of the social clauses.
(AQW 38318/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In line with Executive policy, significant and locally targeted social clauses will be used in all contracts let under the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus Programme (LSEC) to ensure maximum return on the Executive's investment.

The tender documentation for the first Phase of the Programme (Arvalee School and Resource Centre) which recently issued on 31 October includes tailored social clauses. Key elements include:

- Social clause delivery, in terms of employment and training opportunities, targeted towards those sectors of society where there is inequality and greatest objective need;
- Expectations that all contractors engaged in the delivery of Arvalee School seek to achieve accreditation under the Living Wage Foundation;

- Local community engagement and a localised 'Meet the Buyer' for full supply chain opportunities.

Work is continuing to prepare the site and develop the overall campus design. Future procurements will build on the approach taken for Arvalee School and social clauses will continue to be developed to ensure significant social return on the investment in the LSEC.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the costs associated with the Middletown Centre for Autism; and (ii) the number of people trained by the centre, in the current budgetary period.
(AQW 38347/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Executive of the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) has advised that the costs associated with MCA, as documented in their 2013/14 annual accounts, were £1,489,582.

In the same period the number of people trained by MCA was 14,762.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline his guidance on how he expects his Department to approach decisions with regard to his Department's duty under Article 64 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989.[R]
(AQW 38360/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring that my Department continues to have a rigorous approach to its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education when making decisions.

As I explained in my answer to AQW 33963/11-15, the recent Drumragh court judgement provided clarity as to whom the Article 64 (1) duty of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 is owed. I have already instructed my officials to ensure that the application of the duty placed on the Department to encourage and facilitate integrated education takes account of that clarity.

Additional guidance has now been provided to all senior staff within the Department via internal workshops that have presented an opportunity to make clear my expectations that the statutory duties to encourage and facilitate both integrated and Irish-medium education are discharged fully, positively and proactively and to explain the implications of both statutory duties, including in the context of the Drumragh Judgement. The use of the workshop approach has proved a very effective means of communication and this approach will be rolled out to other relevant staff in the months ahead.

At the same time, I have been considering what additional guidance is needed for the executive non-departmental bodies which are accountable to my Department and which must play their part in supporting us in discharging these important duties. I expect to see much greater prominence given by our non-departmental public bodies to supporting the Department in encouraging and facilitating both integrated and Irish-medium education and I shall be signalling this to the appropriate bodies, including the new Education Authority, as we move forward into a new business planning period.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail how the role of the new Education Authority will differ from the work completed by each Education and Library Board.[R]
(AQW 38362/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Authority will carry out all of the duties, roles and responsibilities of the education and library boards, with the exception that the Assembly has placed additional duties on the Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education and the community use of school premises.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education for his Department's assessment of the extent and current level of support available to pupils who are deaf or suffering hearing loss and attend post-primary schools in the Western Education and Library Board.
(AQW 38387/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Western Education and Library Board provides a very comprehensive level of support for pupils with a hearing loss in post-primary schools across the Board area.

A Service for Children and Young People with a Hearing Impairment is available from diagnosis to school leaving age and is available to pupils, their families and staff in early years, nursery, primary and post-primary school settings.

Support provided in post-primary settings includes:

1. Whole school training

Training is offered to all school staff to advise them of the nature of the individual pupil's hearing loss and impact on their learning, and to inform staff of ways in which they can address the pupil's needs within the school setting to enable the young person to access the curriculum at an appropriate pace and level, ultimately achieving his/her full potential.

2. Advisory support

Advisory support is available on an agreed frequency to relevant school staff including 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 maximizing linguistic opportunity;
- strategies for improving memory skills;
- strategies to assist the pupil access the curriculum;
- strategies to develop social skills and self-esteem.

The frequency of advisory support is dependent on a number of factors including:

- type and level of the pupils hearing loss;
- amplification systems used;
- communication skills;
- educational progress;
- personal & social development.

The level of support is reviewed on a termly basis to ensure that the needs of the pupils are addressed appropriately.

The Service has also produced a post-primary booklet containing further detail on all of the above areas and is available to all post-primary schools within the Board area with pupils who have a hearing loss.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the voting membership vacancies currently within each controlled integrated school Board of Governors.
(AQW 38391/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following information is provided in relation to controlled integrated schools:

School	Governor Vacancies
All Children's Integrated Primary	2 DE 2 ELB
Annsborough Primary	2 DE 1 ELB 1 Parent
Ballycastle Integrated Primary	2 Trustees 1 Parent
Ballymoney Model Integrated Primary	nil
Bangor Central Integrated Primary	nil
Brownlow Integrated College	3 Transferors
Carhill Integrated Primary	1 ELB 2 Teachers 1 Parent
Carnlough Integrated Primary	2 ELB 2 Trustees 1 Teacher
Cliftonville Integrated Primary	3 ELB 2 Parents
Crumlin Integrated Primary	2 Trustees
Crumlin Integrated College	3 ELB 1 Trustee 4 Parents 2 Transferors
Forge Integrated Primary	3 ELB
Ford Hill Integrated College	nil
Ford Hill Integrated Primary	1 Transferor 2 Teachers
Glencraig Integrated Primary	nil
Glengromley Integrated Primary	1 ELB 2 Trustees
Groarty Integrated Primary	1 ELB

School	Governor Vacancies
Kilbroney Integrated Primary	nil
Kircubbin Integrated Primary	1 ELB
Parkhall Integrated College	3 Trustees 4 Parents 2 Teachers 2 Transferors
Portaferry Integrated Primary	nil
Priory Integrated College	3 Parents
Rathenraw Integrated Primary	2 ELB 2 Trustees 4 Parents 2 Teachers
Round Tower Integrated Primary	1 ELB

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 36855/11-15, to detail the organisations and number of posts impacted by the current Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team staffing arrangements.
(AQW 38392/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Nine staff members are currently seconded from across six education organisations; BELB, NEELB, SEELB, WELB, CCEA and CCMS.

My Department does not hold specific information on the number of posts within their organisations that are impacted by these arrangements.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the school closures in each Education and Library Board in each of the last 5 years; and to outline the financial situation in each school at the time of closure.
(AQW 38393/11-15)

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

Belfast Education and Library Board

DE Ref No.	School Name	Date of Closure	Closing Surplus/ (Deficit)
2014 Closures			
121-0266	Orangefield High School, Belfast	31/08/2014	N/A
2013 Closures			
101-0296	Ballygolan Primary School, Newtownabbey	31/08/2013	£15,377
103-0329	Edmund Rice Primary School	31/08/2013	(£53,942)
103-0316	St Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary	31/08/2013	(£51,870)
103-0317	St Bernadette's Primary School	31/08/2013	£37,427
123-0173	St Gemma's High School, Belfast	31/08/2013	(£13,940)
103-6464	Star of the Sea Girls' Primary School	31/08/2013	(£33,648)
2011 Closures			
103-6092	St John the Baptist Boys' Primary School	28/02/2011	(£165,617)
103-6091	St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School	28/02/2011	(£146,618)
113-6302	St Paul's Nursery School, Belfast	31/08/2011	£12,917
101-0321	Vere Foster PS, Belfast	31/08/2011	(£433,364)
2010 Closures			
101-0271	Beechfield Primary School, Belfast	30/09/2010	£6,878
101-0283	Grove Primary School, Belfast	15/10/2010	(£261,384)

North Eastern Education and Library Board

DE Ref No.	School Name	Date of Closure	Closing Surplus/ (Deficit)
2014 Closures			
321-0233	Ballee Community High School	31/08/2014	N/A
2013 Closures			
301-2224	Cullycapple Primary School, Coleraine	31/08/2013	£1,412
301-2255	Drumard Primary School, Maghera	31/08/2013	(£122)
321-0013	Garvagh High School	31/08/2013	(£352,734)
2012 Closures			
303-0713	Carlane Primary School, Toomebridge	31/08/2012	(£32,001)
2011 Closures			
303-0836	Braid Primary School, Broughshane	31/08/2011	(£145,537)
303-6093	Lourdes Primary School, Whitehead	31/08/2011	£5,045
2010 Closures			
301-6171	Ballee Primary School Ballymena	31/08/2010	£22,387
323-0019	St Aloysius High School, Cushendall	28/03/2010	(£224,789)
323-0066	St Comgall's High School, Larne	28/03/2010	£63,021

South Eastern Education and Library Board

DE Ref No.	School Name	Date of Closure	Closing Surplus/ (Deficit)
2012 Closures			
401-1647	Ballykeigle Primary School, Comber	31/08/2012	(£46,010)
421-0194	Dunmurry High School	31/08/2012	(£224,828)
401-1688	Redburn Primary School, Holywood	31/08/2012	(£4,158)
2011 Closures			
401-1678	Ballycloughan Primary School, Saintfield	31/08/2011	(£50,564)
403-1384	Convent of Mercy Primary School, Downpatrick	31/08/2011	(£47,317)
401-3309	Derriaghy Primary School	31/08/2011	(£11,802)
403-1644	St Patrick's Boys' Primary School, Downpatrick	31/08/2011	£74,283

Southern Education and Library Board

DE Ref No.	School Name	Date of Closure	Closing Surplus/ (Deficit)
2014 Closures			
503-1213	St Clare's Convent Primary School	31/08/2014	N/A
503-1576	St Colman's Abbey Primary School	31/08/2014	N/A
503-1301	Clontifleece Primary School	31/08/2014	N/A
2012 Closures			
501-1034	Aghavilly Primary School	31/08/2012	(£109,970)
501-6028	Keady Primary School	31/08/2012	(£116,851)
2011 Closures			
501-2659	Clogher Regional Primary School	31/08/2011	(£57,545)

DE Ref No.	School Name	Date of Closure	Closing Surplus/ (Deficit)
2010 Closures			
503-1658	St John's Primary School, Glenn, Newry	31/08/2010	(£84,327)

Western Education and Library Board

DE Ref No.	School Name	Date of Closure	Closing Surplus/ (Deficit)
2014 Closures			
203-2510	Barrack Street Boys Primary School, Strabane	31/08/2014	N/A
203-6389	St Anne's Girls Primary School, Strabane	31/08/2014	N/A
2013 Closures			
211-6333	Ballycolman NS, Strabane	31/08/2013	(£30,041)
201-2674	Bridgehill Primary School, Castlederg	31/08/2013	£96,338
221-0305	Devenish College	31/08/2013	(£328,634)
221-0080	Lisnaskea High School	31/08/2013	(£583,156)
223-0111	St Eugene's High School	31/08/2013	£20,381
203-1888	St Eugene's Primary School, Knocks	31/08/2013	£75,455
223-0181	St Peter's High School	31/08/2013	(£214,308)
2012 Closures			
201-2392	Drumlegagh Primary School Newtownstewart	31/08/2012	£20,719
201-6376	Ardstraw Primary School	31/08/2012	£8,842
203-1886	Corranny Primary School	15/04/2012	£3,994
203-1892	Cornagague Primary School	15/04/2012	£15,281
203-2664	St Davog's Primary School, Scraghey	31/08/2012	(£28,548)
203-2689	St Mary's Boys' Primary School	31/08/2012	(£10,727)
203-3537	Loreto Convent Primary School	31/08/2012	£17,761
203-6053	St Colmcilles Primary School Omagh	31/08/2012	£12,046
203-6096	St Mary's Girl's Primary School, Strabane	31/08/2012	(£6,599)
2011 Closures			
241-0096	Strabane Grammar School	31/08/2011	£6,449
221-0164	Strabane High School	31/08/2011	£31,308
2010 Closures			
203-2681	St Patrick's Primary School, Creggan	31/08/2010	£54,036

Special Schools are not funded through Local Management of Schools arrangements and do not, therefore, have a budget position on closure. Five special schools have closed (including two amalgamations) within the past five years, in the WELB area, as outlined below:

DE Ref No.	Special School	Date of Closure
231-0015	Belmont Special School	31/08/2014
231-6525	Foyle View Special School	31/08/2014
231-6601	Elmbrook School	31/08/2012
231-6235	Erne School	31/08/2012
231-0029	Altnagelvin Special School and Tuition Service	30/09/2012

Notes:

1. The definition of a "closed school" is one with an approved development proposal to discontinue in line with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986. This includes those which have closed to facilitate an amalgamation;
2. Closing surplus/deficit data have been supplied by the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB);
3. Surplus/deficit data are currently only available up to the end of the 2013/14 financial year.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of how many children are not educated in a school environment.
(AQW 38394/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The best place for children and young people to be educated is in school. It is recognised, however, that for some young people a school placement cannot be sustained and education outside the school environment may be necessary to meet their educational and other needs.

This is known as 'Education Otherwise Than At School' (EOTAS) and legal responsibility for this rests with the Education and Library Board (ELB) in which the young person resides. EOTAS encompasses a broad range of ELB funded interventions, allowing for a flexible response based on the assessed needs of the individual young person. While normally delivered in a group setting within specialist centres, EOTAS can include ELB provided tuition services delivering one-to-one teaching, in a home or other setting.

Each year, my Department collects statistics on the number of pupils in EOTAS provision. Data is currently held to 2013. Figures for 2014 are in the process of being collated but are not yet available. The available figures, broken down by board area are in the table below:

Date	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
October 2009	225	155	179	161	146	866
October 2010	236	129	190	128	143	826
October 2011	172	87	192	125	111	687
October 2012	141	103	159	65	116	584
October 2013	164	90	64	134	106	558

* Figures are collated for the first week of October each year and include pupils in any form of ELB delivered EOTAS provision. They do not include children receiving Elective Home Education (EHE).

Under existing legislation a parent may educate his/her child at home. I understand that the ELBs are aware of 254 children who are being home educated. I would note, however, that this is likely to be an under-estimation of the overall figure as the ELBs may not be aware of those children who are currently being home educated if they have not previously been registered at school or brought to the attention of the ELB by any other individual or agency.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how will the new Education Authority and controlled body reflect his Department's need to be 'alive to Article 64 duty at all levels, including the strategic level'.[R]
(AQW 38417/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new Education Authority will be accountable to, and operate within the strategic framework set by, the Department. This will include assisting the Department, as appropriate, in discharging its statutory duty to integrated education. In addition, the Department will hold the Authority to account through the Management Statement/Financial Memorandum (MSFM), as it does with the existing five Education and Library Boards.

The controlled sector body, when established, will be expected to assist the Department (appropriate to the body's own role) in discharging its duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education how he is currently engaging with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to achieving adequate and timely diagnosis of autism in children within the primary education setting.
(AQW 38447/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I acknowledge the importance of close collaboration between the Education and Health sectors in supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN), including autism.

While the responsibility for adequate and timely diagnosis of autism in children rests with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), addressing the individual SEN of a child with autism is not 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 the procedures outlined in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

My Department will continue to cooperate with DHSSPS and other Departments, to support those pupils diagnosed with autism.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education what procedures are in place to ensure the proper referral and diagnosis of primary school children with autism, in order to receive any additional help and support that they require.
(AQW 38449/11-15)

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.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) parent groups; and (ii) parent organisations which have made representations in relation to formal consultations by his Department, in the last five years.
(AQW 38557/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The details of the parents groups and parent organisation which have made representations to formal consultations by the Department of Education are detailed in the table below.

Year	Consultation	Parents Groups / Parent Organisations
2009	Draft Food in Schools Policy	■ Academy Primary School, Saintfield Parent Teacher Association ■ Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor Parents ■ Hazelwood Integrated Primary School Parent Teacher Association ■ St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry Parents' Association ■ Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey Parent Teacher Association
2010	Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy	Parents Advice Centre
2012	Learning to Learn – A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning	Parents Out Loud Parenting NI

The Department has also commissioned parent organisations to carryout consultations with parents on its behalf. The details of these consultations are provided in the table below.

Year	Consultation	Parent Organisations
2009	Preparation of a leaflet for parents advising on the post-primary transfer process	Parenting Forum
2013	Review of the Common Funding Scheme	Parenting NI
2013	Fundamental Review of GCSEs and A Levels	Parenting Forum

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38560/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No Department of Education employee is paid below £7.20 per hour.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education to detail the change in the estimated numbers of primary school age children who have been home schooled between 2003 and 2013.
(AQW 38567/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the number of primary school age children educated at home of whom they are aware for 2003 and 2013 are as follows:

YEAR	BELB	SELB	NEELB	WELB	SEELB	Total*
2003	4	58	29	5	1	97
2013	11	21	38	13	20	103

* The data reflects the position at October of each year.

This is likely to be an under-estimation of the overall figures as the ELBs may not be aware of those children being electively home educated if they had not previously been registered at school or brought to the attention of the ELB by any other individual or agency.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in North Down currently have a school bus pass.
(AQW 38622/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has informed me that 980 pupils in the North Down area, comprising post codes (i) BT18, 164 pupils; (ii) BT19, 520 pupils; (iii) BT20, 228 pupils; and (iv) BT23, 68 pupils have a sessional ticket ('bus pass') for the current school year.

The sessional ticket is not a 'smart card' system that records when the ticket was used. Information on ticket usage is therefore not available.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on the timetable for the amalgamation of the two maintained primary schools in Glenravel.
(AQW 38628/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my January 2013 statement to the Assembly on the Major Capital Investment Programme I identified the amalgamation of Glenravel Primary School and St Mary's Primary School as one of 22 projects to be taken forward in planning.

A Development Proposal for the amalgamation of these schools was approved in February 2014.

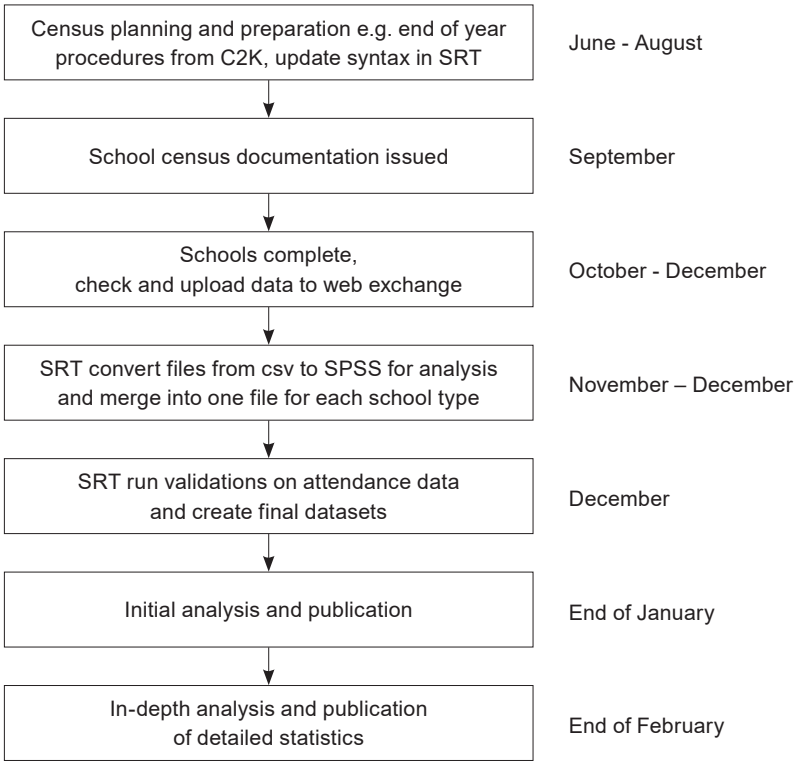
The Project Manager has commenced work on the feasibility study for the new build and is working closely with my Department. The feasibility study and supporting business case will be prepared and a design team appointed to take forward the detailed design of the new school.

It is currently anticipated that the design will commence in early 2015 with construction works starting in late 2015.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 38044/11-15, given that school attendance is recorded electronically, why it takes a further ten months to provide a breakdown of levels of absenteeism by ward.[R]
(AQW 38651/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Attendance data are collected via the annual School Census, which is conducted on the Friday of the first full week of October each year. This means that attendance data for the school year 2013/14 were collected via the 2014/2015 school Census (10 October 2014). Due to the nature of the Census exercise, it is often the end of November before all Census returns have been made. The following few weeks are taken up by validation of the data and creation of the final datasets.

Publication of initial analysis occurs at the end of January, while publication of detailed statistics occurs at the end of February. Both of these publications are National Statistics, and as such are subject to the Code of Practise for Official Statistics – it is not possible to provide any statistical breakdown of the attendance data until these reports have been published. Therefore a breakdown of absenteeism by ward for school year 2013/14 is not possible until March 2015 at the earliest. See below processes and timescales:



Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail the school buildings in the controlled sector in Belfast that have listed status.
(AQW 38662/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) has advised that there are currently 16 school sites in the controlled sector in Belfast that have listed status; however, the extent of the listing varies between schools.

Details of these sites and the extent of their listing are provided below.

School/Building	Address	Original (Survey 1) Listing	Survey 2 Listing	Extent of listing
Avoniel Primary School	Avoniel Road, Belfast, BT5 4SF	B1	A (31/3/2011)	School, gate pillars & railings
Nettlefield Primary School	Radnor Street, Belfast, BT6 8BG	B1	B+ (18/4/2011)	School and caretaker's house
Elmgrove Primary School	Beersbridge Road, Belfast, BT5 4RS	B+	A (30/1/2014)	School Caretaker's house, walling, gate and railing
Sydenham Primary School	Strandburn Street, Belfast, BT4 1LX	B1	B+ (17/12/2003)	NOTE: Approval to demolish granted on the basis of incorporating a portion of the listed building within the new build for Victoria Park Primary School. Building has been demolished and a portion carefully dismantled and stored (under Northern Ireland Environment Agency [NIEA] supervision).
Strandtown Primary School	North Road, Belfast, BT4 3DJ	B+ B+	B+ (30/1/2014) B1 (9/4/2014)	Main school building House/pavilion, wall and railings, pillars and gates
Botanic Primary School	Agincourt Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1QY	B1		Includes original gate piers, gates and railings to front boundary
Fane Street Primary School	Fane Street, Belfast, BT9 7BW	B1	-	Includes four main entrance gate piers and three gates
Blythefield Primary School	Blythe Street, Belfast, BT12 5HX	B1	B+ (09/05/2011)	School and walling
Belfast School of Music	99 Donegall Pass, Belfast, BT7 1DR	B1	B1 (10/5/2011)	School
Glenwood Primary School	4-22 Upper Riga Street, Belfast, BT13 3GW	B1	B1 (19/9/2012)	School, walling and railings
Edenbrooke Primary School	Tennent Street, Belfast, BT13 3GG	B2	B2 (9/10/2012)	School, walls and railings
Cliftonville Primary School	93 Cliftonville Road, BT14 6JQ	B1		
Seaview Primary School	Seaview Drive, Belfast, BT15 3NB	B2		Includes sets of gate piers, gates, railings and caretaker's house
Lancaster Street School (former ladies industrial school)	Lancaster Street, Belfast	B2		
Currie Primary School	111-113 Limestone Road, Belfast, BT15 3AB	B1	B1 (2/5/2014)	School, including front entrance gate piers, entrance screen, gates and railings

School/Building	Address	Original (Survey 1) Listing	Survey 2 Listing	Extent of listing
Harding Memorial Primary School	105 Cregagh Road, Belfast, BT6 8PZ	Not listed	B1	School, gates and railings
	Willowfield Parish Hall, Cregagh Road, Belfast BT6 8PZ	Not listed	B2	Hall, gates and railings

Notes on table:

1. The original (First) survey of buildings ended in 1994. It was then decided to bring the earliest records up to the standard of the later records and to confirm that all the buildings on the list were of special architectural interest. This is known as the Second Survey and, where appropriate, the outcome of this more recent survey, together with the survey date, is also recorded in the table.

2. Where there are two separate listings for the same site in the "Northern Ireland Buildings Database", these are identified by (a) and (b) inserts in the above table.

3. The listings are described as follows:

   Grade A: Special buildings of national importance including both outstanding grand buildings and the fine, little altered examples of some important style or date.

   Grade B+: Special buildings that might have merited A status but for relatively minor detracting features such as impurities of design, or lower quality additions or alterations. Also buildings that stand out above the general mass of grade B1 buildings because of exceptional interiors or some other features.

   Grade B1 and B2: Special buildings of more local importance or good examples of some period of style. Some degree of alteration or imperfection may be acceptable.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) his Department; and (ii) each of his Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38702/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The full time equivalent (FTE) number of staff in (i) my Department; and (ii) each of my Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years is as follows:

	As at 31/3/10	As at 31/3/11	As at 31/3/12	As at 31/3/13	As at 31/3/14
DE	610.66	578.38	567.78	579.11	610.91
BELB	436.47	427.56	379.83	376.81	390.56
WELB	693.76	639.91	583.46	566.18	576.06
NEELB	550	529	465	448	432
SEELB	491.73	492.17	471.98	470.46	466.60
SELB	714.84	692.91	634.41	634.70	628.74
SCELB	6	6	5	4	4
CCMS	81.8	76.8	61.4	52.6	54
CCEA	422.38	391.95	400.36	418.46	401.95
CnaG	12.5	13.5	14.5	14	13
GTCNI	16.6	13.6	14.6	15.6	15.1
NICIE	11.55	9.55	9.55	10.98	11.55
YCNI	14.57	15.57	14.57	14.57	14.57
Middletown Centre	19.4	23.4	23.4	19	25.4

The FTE figures in the table above include:

- Headquarter staff and out centre staff; and
- Permanent staff and temporary staff who may be covering permanent posts.

School based staff are not included in these FTE figures, and figures can fluctuate during the year due to leavers and new starts.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education, in light of the revelations of the BBC Spotlight programme which revealed that photographs of schools girls appeared on pornographic websites, to detail what support (i) his Department; and (ii) each Education and Library Board have provided, and intends to provide, to the schools involved.
(AQW 38704/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The BBC Spotlight programme did not contact the Department directly either about the making of this programme or in relation to its findings but did email the schools directly affected.

The Department contacted the programme makers for information about the content of the programme on being approached for advice from some of the schools concerned and from the 5 ELB Child Protection Support Services for Schools (CPSSS).

The main concern of schools, and the Department, was to ensure that pupil identities were protected and that pupils and their families were not distressed by the information revealed. The Department therefore liaised closely with the CPSSS to provide advice on how schools might respond to the issues highlighted.

The Department has not received any further calls subsequent to the programme airing and has no intention at this time of issuing any further specific advice on this issue. Any school that requires additional support and advice may contact the relevant ELB CPSSS.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many complaints have been received in each of the last five years referencing dissatisfaction with how pupils suffering from diabetes have been provided for; and what lessons have been learned from these complaints.
(AQW 38747/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of items of correspondence received by Special Education Team in the Department of Education regarding diabetes in each of the last five calendar years is as follows:

2010	2
2011	11
2012	1
2013	1
2014 (to date)	0

I am fully aware of the importance of addressing pupils' medication needs in the school setting. The joint Department of Education/Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety publication "Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs" provides guidance for use in all schools and has a section dedicated specifically to diabetes.

Furthermore, in 2012, I wrote to all school principals to highlight some of their responsibilities within the existing guidance and to reflect recommended practice for pupils with type 1 diabetes.

The Education and Library Boards and Public Health Agency have also recently launched a joint booklet for parents outlining the support that children with diabetes can expect within their school and providing advice and contact details should parents wish to discuss any of the issues.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education what provision his Department makes for pupils from the Western Education and Library Board who suffer from Cerebral Palsy and other motor disorders, including provision for pupils whose parents want conductive education for their children and believe that this is best provided at The Buddy Bear School in Dungannon.
(AQW 38772/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has advised that children with cerebral palsy or other motor disorders who have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) will receive an appropriate level of adult support and access to physiotherapy and/or occupational therapy as provided by the Health Care Trust. In special schools these children will also be taught in small class settings again with appropriate adult support.

Children with cerebral palsy or other motor disorders in mainstream schools who do not have a statement of SEN will have access to physiotherapy and/or occupational therapy as provided by the Health Care Trust. If the child also has a learning need they will also receive support from the relevant learning support service within the Board and each child will have an Individual Education Plan and an individual Health Care Plan.

Education and Library Boards can place a child in Buddy Bear School if they consider it appropriate to meet the child's SEN and this decision will be informed by parental choice.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail the current number of pupils in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary education.
(AQW 38787/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information provided relates to the 2013/14 school census, the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will be available in December, finalised figures in February.

Total enrolments are: (i) 171,548 in primary; and (ii) 143,973 in post-primary.

Source: NI school census

Notes: Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Education to detail the names of all ministerial appointees to each Board of Governors in post-primary schools in Belfast.
(AQW 38854/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the Ministerial or public appointments to the Boards of Governors of voluntary grammar schools and grant maintained integrated post primary schools are set out below.

The appointments process is ongoing as Boards of Governors are currently being reconstituted. The DE website will have information about future DE governor Ministerial appointments shortly after they are made.

The DE governors who are nominated to the Boards of Governors of other post primary schools are not classified as Ministerial or public appointments.

Voluntary Grammar Schools	**Name of DE governor**
Aquinas Grammar School	Mrs Joan Mary Cronin Mrs Geraldine Mary Goodall Mr Brian Jamison
Belfast High School	Mrs Carole Ann Adair Mr Michael John Glover Mrs Rose Marian Handley Mr Keith Robert Kilpatrick Dr Richard James Millar Mr Brian Wilson Roden
Belfast Royal Academy	Ms Angila Chada Mr Roy Connolly Miss Caroline Rosemary Dillon Professor David Simon Jones Mrs Helen Siberry-Hay
Dominican College	Ms Siobhan Rose Donnelly Mr Stephen Reid
Hunterhouse College	Lady Ann Christine Eames Mr Richard William Holley Mr Marcus Scott McCollum Dr Martina Murphy
Methodist College	Mrs Patricia Anne Arneill Mrs Rosalind Black Mrs Susanne Patricia Dorrity Ms Rotha Johnston Mrs Edith Mabel Shaw Mr Thomas Henry Neill Jackson
Our Lady and St Patrick's College	Ms Anne Marie Duffy Mr Robert Gerard Sinclair Mrs Christine Swail
Rathmore Grammar School	Mr Gerard Keenan Mr James Michael Matthews
St Dominic's High School	Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan Miss Imelda Bridget McDaid Mr Brendan Patrick O'Reilly
St Malachy's College	Mr Gerard McGinn Mr Anthony Houston
St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	Mr Anthony Bell Mr Caoimhín Mac Giolla Mhín Mr Kieron Magee

Voluntary Grammar Schools	Name of DE governor
Strathearn School	Mrs Rosemary Bailie Dr Kenneth Samuel Gibson Mrs Lynsey Mallon Mr Robin Charles Masefield Ms Ann O'Dwyer Mrs Evelyn Elizabeth Rodgers
Victoria College	Mr Morgan Charles Haylett Mrs Carmel McKinney Mr Arnold Stewart Compton Wylie Dr Margaret Anne Rosemary Clarke Mr Seamus McKillop

Grant Maintained Integrated Schools	Name of DE governor
Hazelwood Integrated College	Mr Robert Eoin McCrea Mrs Valerie Owens
Lagan College	Mrs Georgina Elizabeth Campbell Mr Francis Paul Martin Mr Arthur Savage Ms Kyriakoulla Yiasouma
Malone College	Miss Maria Siobhan Coppard Mrs Ruth McCalmont Mr Brian McCargo Ms Dorothee Wagner

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many formal meetings have been held between the Chief Inspector and the Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland in the last two years.
(AQW 38874/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been two formal meetings held between the Chief Inspector and the Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council in the last two years.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education how the Ulster diaspora, from the 17th century onwards, can be explored within the school curriculum; and to detail the resources available to teachers.
(AQW 38964/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The curriculum provides scope for the teaching of the Ulster-Scots language, literature, culture and history at both primary and post-primary level. These can be delivered through areas such as Language & Literacy, Environment & Society and Learning for Life and Work / Local and Global Citizenship, where young people are able to explore their own and others' cultural identity, heritage and diversity.

CCEA has engaged with the Ulster Scots Education Project which is currently developing fifteen units of work for post-primary, to be available in 2015. To date, this engagement has taken the form of provision of curriculum advice and templates for the development of the units. There are also specific units within A level and GCSE History which enable students to learn about the origins of the Ulster Scots, the actions of Ulster Scots in the 18th century and the contributions of Ulster Scots men and women in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many foreign national students in each Regional College are taking additional English language lessons; and what additional costs are incurred by each college as a result.
(AQW 38047/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): During 2012/13, the most recent year for which figures are available, there were 3,207 individuals studying English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses at further education colleges. However, of the 3,207 figure, 2,753 individuals were funded through the further education funding formula, which provided colleges with approximately £2m to support the delivery of ESOL courses. In addition, colleges also have their own fees policies, and can charge students a fee for ESOL provision, depending on the level and duration of the course. Colleges are funded by the Department to deliver ESOL provision in recognition of the benefits that ESOL provision brings to individuals, the economy and society.

The table provides a breakdown, by college, of the 2,753 individuals who were enrolled on DEL funded ESOL provision in 2012/13, and the amount of funding provided to each college.

Therefore, there are no "additional costs".

Further Education Colleges Funded Provision - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) 2012-2013

FE College	Individuals	Value
Belfast Metropolitan College	852	£ 1,034,704.47
Northern Regional College	348	£ 169,548.60
North West Regional College	53	£ 18,900.31
South Eastern Regional College	187	£ 173,779.29
Southern Regional College	743	£ 336,210.38
South West College	570	£ 270,750.25
Total	**2,753**	**£ 2,003,893.30**

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38149/11-15)

Dr Farry: There have been no efficiencies realised in my Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the progress made with his Dublin counterparts on a cross border learning zone in the North West.
(AQW 38159/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department and I are engaged with relevant Government Ministers in the Republic of Ireland on a range of activities designed to increase cross border co-operation for mutual benefit. My response to the previous question on this subject, AQW 33040/11-15, provides an overview of these activities, which are ongoing.

My officials are continuing to work with counterparts from the Department of Education and Skills in preparing the joint paper on cross border further education issues, to which I referred in my previous response. Officials from both Departments, along with the Higher Education Academy, met in September and are planning to submit a joint report to the next high level Permanent Secretary group meeting planned for December 2014.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38239/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The Department for Employment and Learning participates in the NICS Cycle to Work scheme.

(ii) The NICS Cycle to Work scheme is open to all NICS staff all year round.

(iii) The NICS Cycle to Work scheme does not extend to Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) for which the NICS is not their employer. However DFP, as the lead department for the NICS, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what communication his Department has had with universities on the current freeze on student fees, in light of departmental budgetary pressures.
(AQW 38284/11-15)

Dr Farry: Executive policy is to keep tuition fees at their current levels rising only in line with inflation for Northern Ireland domiciled full time undergraduate students studying in Northern Ireland. I have met with the Vice Chancellors of Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster University to discuss the implications of the significant budgetary pressures being faced by my Department and the resultant impact that this will have on their institutions.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the financial support available through his Department, and other bodies, for students from Northern Ireland who relocate to other areas of the UK for university education.
(AQW 38285/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the current academic year 2014/2015, a Maintenance Loan of up to £6,780 is available for Northern Ireland domiciled students living and attending college in London. If the course is anywhere else in Great Britain, the loan available is up to £4,840. Twenty-five percent of the loan is means tested.

Maintenance Grant (non repayable)

The maximum maintenance grant is £3,475 and is means tested. Students from households with an income of £19,203 or less should receive the maximum grant. Students from households with an income between £19,204 and £41,065 will receive a partial grant on a sliding scale basis.

Special Support Grant (non repayable)

A special support grant rather than a maintenance grant is payable to students who may be eligible to claim means-tested benefits such as Income Support and Housing Benefit. This will generally be lone parents, other student parents if they have a partner who is a student, and students with disabilities. The amount of the special support grant is £3,475 and is calculated in the same way as the maintenance grant. Unlike the maintenance grant, the special support grant will not affect the amount of maintenance loan the student may be entitled to.

Tuition fees (repayable)

The tuition fee loan is not means tested. However, it is restricted to the actual fee being charged up to a maximum of £9,000 in Great Britain.

Supplementary Grants (non repayable)

A range of other means tested grants are available to some students in certain circumstances (i.e. Parent Learning Allowance, Childcare Grant and Adult Dependants Grant). Non means tested Disabled Students Allowances are also available.

In addition, Universities in Great Britain offer Hardship Funds to provide help for students on lower income who may need extra financial support in order to remain in higher education. The funds can be used to meet course and living costs which are not already being met from other grants.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration the University of Ulster has given to changing the name of the Magee campus.
(AQW 38314/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides funding to the Higher Education Institutions for teaching and learning and research purposes. The Universities are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including those relating to branding.

Departmental officials contacted the University of Ulster and have been advised that the University has recently conducted brand research with prospective students but no decision has been taken with respect to changing the name of the Magee campus.

The University plans to discuss any considerations with civic and community leaders, staff and students.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the level of reserves held by (i) the University of Ulster; and (ii) Queen's University Belfast in (a) 2004; (b) 2009; and (c) 2014.
(AQW 38355/11-15)

Dr Farry: The information requested is detailed in the table below and relates to the position reported as at 31 July in each year. The information relating to 2014 will not be available until after the financial statements are audited and released by the institutions in early December. Therefore, the 2013 figures have been added in their place.

	University of Ulster	**Queen's University Belfast**
	£m	£m
2004	143.7	58.7
2009	115.5	75.6
2013	165.2	105.3

The universities are not-for-profit institutions and are expected to earn surpluses of around 3% to 5% per annum. The surpluses add to the institutions' reserves and these are mainly used for investing in their infrastructure and to ensure their ongoing financial sustainability. The reserves held by the two universities will be used to support their currently planned capital developments. The use of reserves is also a key source of funding from which the universities can lever additional resources from public, private and philanthropic sources. In the absence of this leverage it is unlikely that the levels of capital required by the universities could be obtained. A final point to keep in mind is that reserves are not cash and are, therefore, not a recurrent source of funding. Reserves should not be used to cover either recurrent operating costs or recurrent reductions in funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how undergraduate fees compare with those in (i) England; (ii) Wales; (iii) Scotland, for non-Scottish students; and (iv) the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 38357/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise in the current academic year 2014/2015 Northern Ireland domiciled students attending a higher education institution in Northern Ireland are liable for tuition fees of up to £3,685. Students from Great Britain can be charged up to £9,000 for attending a higher education institution in Northern Ireland. In England, Scotland (for non-Scottish students) and Wales all students are charged tuition fees of up to £9,000.

The tuition fee policy exceptions are that Scottish domiciled students do not pay tuition fees for attending Scottish higher education institutions. Welsh domiciled students are able to take a tuition fee loan for the first £3,685 of the tuition fees charged. If the tuition fees are more, the Welsh student can avail of a non repayable Welsh National Assembly fee grant of up to £5,315 to assist with tuition fees up to £9,000, wherever they study in the United Kingdom.

Students attending a higher education institute in the Republic of Ireland pay an annual Student Contribution Fee, formerly known as a Registration Fee, instead of a tuition fee. The maximum amount for academic year 2014/2015 is €2,750. Northern Ireland domiciled students can avail of a Student Contribution Fee Loan to cover this cost.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff work at the South Eastern Regional College.
(AQW 38398/11-15)

Dr Farry: The last audited accounts for South Eastern Regional College show that, for the year ending 31 July 2013, 746 full time equivalent staff were employed by the college.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what new capital build plans his Department has for the next three financial years.
(AQW 38399/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has four capital build projects which have Department of Finance and Personnel approval and are planned to be delivered, subject to funding availability, in the period April 2015 to March 2018.

A Performing Arts and Technology Innovation Centre is currently under construction in Bangor for the South Eastern Regional College and is due to be completed by July 2015.

The other three projects are planned for the Southern Regional College at Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. The completion date for these projects is planned for March 2018.

In addition to this, business cases are currently being prepared for capital build projects at the Northern Regional College to provide services for the Coleraine, Ballymoney and Ballymena areas and by the South West College to deliver services in Enniskillen.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the deadline for applications to the European Social Fund.
(AQW 38578/11-15)

Dr Farry: Launch of Call for Applications to the European Social Fund

Planning work is underway within my Department to launch the call for applications to the new Programme on the Department's website on 28th November 2014. The closing date for receipt of applications is anticipated to be 9th January 2015.

A series of road shows to publicise the opening of the call for applications and detailing the application and assessment process for the new ESF Programme took place during October and November throughout Northern Ireland in each of the 11 new Council areas.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what financial support is available for students from Northern Ireland studying at universities in England.
(AQW 38646/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the current academic year 2014/2015, a Maintenance Loan of up to £6,780 is available for Northern Ireland domiciled students living and attending college in London. If the course is anywhere else in England, the loan available is up to £4,840. Twenty-five percent of the loan is means tested.

Maintenance Grant (non repayable)

The maximum maintenance grant is £3,475 and is means tested. Students from households with an income of £19,203 or less should receive the maximum grant. Students from households with an income between £19,204 and £41,065 will receive a partial grant on a sliding scale basis.

Special Support Grant (non repayable)

A special support grant rather than a maintenance grant is payable to students who may be eligible to claim means-tested benefits such as Income Support and Housing Benefit. This will generally be lone parents, other student parents if they have a partner who is a student, and students with disabilities. The amount of the special support grant is £3,475 and is calculated in

the same way as the maintenance grant. Unlike the maintenance grant, the special support grant will not affect the amount of maintenance loan the student may be entitled to.

Tuition fees (repayable)

The tuition fee loan is not means tested. However, it is restricted to the actual fee being charged up to a maximum of £9,000 in England.

Supplementary Grants (non repayable)

A range of other means tested grants are available to some students in certain circumstances (i.e. Parent Learning Allowance, Childcare Grant and Adult Dependants Grant). Non means tested Disabled Students Allowances are also available.

In addition, Universities in England offer Hardship Funds to provide help for students on lower income who may need extra financial support in order to remain in higher education. The funds can be used to meet course and living costs which are not already being met from other grants.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given Tamboran's decision to judicially review her decision not to extend its licence, whether the local community will be afforded the opportunity to participate in any proceedings.
(AQW 37517/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Tamboran have now lodged judicial review proceedings in the High Court. The participation of third parties at any subsequent hearing is a matter to be determined by the Court and not the proposed Respondents.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) who will pay for the required repairs to the Moyle Interconnector; (ii) how much the repairs are estimated to cost; and (iii) will such result in an increase on the average household bill.
(AQW 37668/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The interim repair to the Moyle Interconnector is expected to cost up to £4million. The cost of the permanent repair involving the laying of new low voltage cables is subject to the completion of tendering arrangements by owners Mutual Energy. When contract details for the permanent repair of the Moyle interconnector are finalised, Mutual Energy and the Utility regulator plan to publish details.

The Moyle repair costs will be funded from company reserves, and operational revenue, with the remainder being passed through to consumers. The Utility Regulator therefore expects some impact on electricity bills during the 2015/16 electricity tariff year to fund the capital investment required, however the scale of this is still to be confirmed.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 36881/11-15, to detail the level of funding which had been pledged by InvestNI and at which her Department was not in a position to pay.
(AQW 37865/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's inescapable pressures pledged under contracts will be funded.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to encourage the development of large scale wind turbine farms.
(AQW 38045/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Large scale wind farms are incentivised under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO). The NIRO will close to new generation in 2017 as part of UK-wide Electricity Market Reform. After this time, large scale renewable electricity projects, including wind farms, will be incentivised under a Feed-In Tariff with Contracts for Difference mechanism.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 37635/11-15, what reassurance she can give Armoy Motorcycle Road Racing Club that the lack of this funding will not impact adversely on the Race of Legends.
(AQW 38053/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There is no way to gauge impact on any event at present.

The nature of the National Events Sponsorship Fund is that organisers apply to the fund annually, therefore there is never any guarantee of receiving funding on a recurring basis.

When applicants apply to the scheme, applications are assessed through a competitive process and therefore there can never be any guarantee of funding.

The overall financial position for the Northern Ireland Block for 2015/16 is very difficult and it is on this basis that applications are not being sought for the Events Fund for National Sponsorship Scheme and new International Events in 2015/16.

I am very keen for events to go ahead with funding, but at present the Northern Ireland Tourist Board does not currently have the funds required to open an Events call within their core budget.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the amount of funding initially allocated to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15; and (ii) whether this amount has been reduced due to budget pressures.
(AQW 38070/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has not provided any funding to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether her Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38139/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is a participant in the NICS Cycle to Work scheme.

(ii) The Cycle to Work scheme is open to all staff all year round.

(iii) The scheme is a NICS Cycle to Work Scheme and therefore does not extend to Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) for whom the NICS is not their employer. However the Department of Finance and Personnel, as the lead department on the NICS scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of Cycle to Work Schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) the total grants awarded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in the 2013/14 Tourism Events Funding Programme; and (ii) the total estimated economic impact of the sponsored events.
(AQW 38203/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) A total of 43 events were awarded £1,034,500 funding by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) in the 2013/14 Tourism Events Funding Programme. 10 international events and 33 National Events were supported. A full list of funded events can be found on www.nitb.com/events.

(ii) NITB independently evaluated 8 of the funded events in 2013/14 resulting in a tourism return on NITB investment of £8.00 for every £1.00 invested.

(iii) NITB also supported and independently evaluated 5 events during the Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 year with total funding of £750,000 generating tourism return on investment for NITB of £20.70 for every £1.00 invested.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has taken steps to prepare a bid for Northern Ireland to host a future Commonwealth Games.
(AQW 38224/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Unfortunately, Northern Ireland does not currently have the infrastructure required to host a Commonwealth Games. However, there are other Commonwealth events that we may be in a position to bid for.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), the lead organisation for major events in Northern Ireland, has established a Major Events Bidding Group. This group is set up to consider the feasibility of events such as this. The group is scheduled to meet in November 2014 when it will be discussing a range of events.

NITB, in partnership with the Major Events Bidding Group, will deliberate and debate all events which fit the global event criteria. After due consideration, if an event being considered can be hosted in Northern Ireland and has return for Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to our economic/visitor spend targets, it will then be taken forward through due process.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in her Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38374/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Currently 0.8 FTE (full-time equivalent) staff members are employed in my Department's Equality Unit at a total annual cost of £25,718.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 37863/11-15 and AQW 36881/11-16, to provide a breakdown of each pressure including (i) the full reason; and (ii) the monetary scale of each.
(AQW 38378/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI was allocated £21.5 million Resource funding in monitoring in 2014-15 to meet inescapable pressures in Invest NI and NITB. DETI was also allocated £37.7 million Resource funding in the draft budget for inescapable pressures.

The inescapable pressures arose because of the success of Invest NI in delivering jobs and investment projects and the Tourist Board in delivering a step change in the events Northern Ireland is delivering as advised in AQW 36881/11-16 and AQW 37864/11-15.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the recent draft budget agreement, whether she will consider reinstating the Northern Ireland Events Fund.
(AQW 38389/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Budget allocations for 2015/16 for my Department mean that significant savings will need to be identified. My Department is currently engaging with all its arm's length bodies including the Tourist Board on the savings which will need to be made. The availability of funding support for events is being assessed as part of that work.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide details of the information that her Department has been provided regarding the chemicals and the quantity of these chemicals that Infastrata are proposing to use at their drilling site in Woodburn forest; and whether her Department is aware of an intention by Infastrata to stimulate the rock using fluids as part of this exploratory well.
(AQW 38442/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Information on the chemicals and their quantities has not been provided to DETI. InfraStrata plc has informed DETI in writing that this information will be provided to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in due course and copied to DETI.

InfraStrata plc has informed DETI in writing that there is no intention by the company to stimulate the rocks using fluids.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what efforts InvestNI has made to find a fixed-wing aircraft maintenance tenant for the currently unused airport hanger at St Angelo Airport, Enniskillen; (ii) to detail the number of potential investors they have brought to the site; and (iii) how many jobs could be created and sustained if a suitable tenant was found.
(AQW 38494/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Both Fermanagh District Council and the Airport Management Company have an interest in actively seeking a tenant for the facility at St Angelo Airport where possible.

Staff from Invest NI's Regional Office, Advanced Engineering & Construction team and its Property Solutions team have met with representatives of Fermanagh District Council and Airport Management and have visited St Angelo Airport, Enniskillen.

Invest NI provided Airport Management with a database of aviation related businesses in America and it is their understanding that Airport Management subsequently made contact with those companies to advise them of the availability of the new facility.

Invest NI is proactively marketing the facility to potential investors through its commercial property database which is accessible through the NI Business Information website.

Invest NI has put two potential investors in direct contact with the management team at St Angelo Airport and continues to signpost the facility as appropriate during the course of its ongoing contact with businesses seeking premises.

It is my understanding that should a suitable tenant be found that up to 20 jobs could be accommodated at the facility.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what impact the draft budget for 2015/16 will have on any proposed tourism event funding programmes.
(AQW 38495/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) assumed responsibility for the events function in 2010 there has not been a Budget exercise to allow for an appropriate dedicated budget baseline to be established for events. As a result NITB has always relied on in year monitoring to meet its commitments for events funding. At present the Northern Ireland Tourist Board does not currently have the funds required to open an Events call.

The draft Budget allocations for 2015/16 for my Department mean that significant savings will need to be identified. My Department is currently engaging with all its arm's length bodies including the Tourist Board on the savings which will need to be made. The availability of funding support for events is being assessed as part of that work.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 27979/11-15, whether the costs and benefits analysis of renewable generation has been completed; and when the results will be published.
(AQW 38511/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This work is ongoing and I expect the results to be published in the first half of 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the assertion by the solar Photovoliac (PV) industry that a drop from 4 Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) to 1.6 ROCs for solar PV would lead to a boom followed by a bust.
(AQW 38513/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The proposed reduction in ROCs for small scale solar PV projects is based on an assessment which indicates a reduction in technology costs. The intention of the reduction is to ensure that ROC levels allow deployment at least cost to the consumer.

A large number of responses were received which argued in support of a higher ROC level. These are being considered and I will respond in due course.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the outcome of the investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company will be published.
(AQW 38515/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department appointed inspectors to the Northern Ireland Events Company Limited under Article 425(2) and Article 425(2A) of the Companies (NI) Order 1986. Under the terms of the appointment, and in line with Article 425(2A), any report made in connection with the inspection is not for publication. Accordingly, it is not the intention of my Department to publish the report of the company inspectors.

However, I understand that the Audit Office is investigating the issues relating to the Events Company and will be reporting their findings to the Assembly in due course.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the tourism events fund was not made available on a more sustainable basis than an annual bidding process; and whether she will reinstate the fund on a more sustainable basis.
(AQW 38516/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) assumed responsibility for the events function from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) 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 £1 million 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.

I am fully supportive of the need for an adequate baseline to be put into place to support the events programme for the longer term. The baseline funding will need to be considered in the context of Executive decisions on future Budget allocations to my Department for the coming years.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the effectiveness of local Social Enterprise Hubs in actively encouraging business start ups within local communities.
(AQW 38574/11-15)

Mrs Foster: All eleven Social Enterprise Hub locations are now operational and providing physical workspace, training, events, action planning and mentoring to potential new social enterprises across Northern Ireland. Although it is still early days there are reports of significant activity through the Hubs.

At the end of September 2014, the nine delivery contracts reported the following: 102 community engagement sessions had taken place, 59 participants/groups had progressed to Action Planning around a social enterprise business start, 134 mentoring sessions had been completed with groups, and 68 promotional and information events had taken place to encourage social enterprise start up.

In terms of the incubation space utilisation, 15 potential social enterprises were working within the hub premises, and additional 13 groups had been approved to set up a test trading model in the premises - all of these are potential new start social enterprises.

I think this represents a positive start to this innovative project.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on work to improve and extend rural broadband.
(AQW 38580/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 4th February 2014 my Department entered into a £23.68million project with BT for the delivery of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement project which aims to provide improvements in access to basic and superfast fixed-line broadband services to over 45,000 premises across Northern Ireland by the end of 2015, particularly, in rural areas.

The project is being delivered in eight phases, each of which requires an extensive survey and design process which takes account of technical feasibility, quality of existing infrastructure in the area, reasonable costs, number of anticipated customers etc and seeks to achieve the greatest value for money and the highest number of beneficiaries.

The areas where improvements have already been made under the first two phases of the project have been published on the NI Direct website. In addition consumers can use an online postcode checker to find out when work is scheduled to be carried out in their area. This information can be accessed at: http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project.

By the end of the project it is anticipated that 96% of premises will have a broadband service of at least 2 Megabits per second (Mbps) and 85% of premises will have access to a broadband service of 24 Mbps or better.

Recognising a need to extend access to superfast broadband services even further, my Department has issued an Invitation to Tender for a project aimed at further increasing the coverage of fixed-line broadband services of 24 Mbps by 2017.

The intervention area for this project has been informed by a public consultation which took place over the period 26 August to 26 September 2014. It is anticipated that the contract for this project, which is to be supported by public funding of £14.48million, co-financed by Broadband Delivery UK and DETI, will be in place by the end of February 2015.

Further information will be released once the procurement process has completed.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the process used to plan the roll out of the scheme to improve broadband access in rural areas, including the criteria used to identify the areas which would benefit from the scheme.
(AQW 38587/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has prepared a fact sheet explaining the aims and objectives of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project. This includes a section which sets out the design process from consultation on the proposed intervention area, to establishing maximum benefit for the funding available. The fact sheet is available on the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/northern_ireland_broadband_improvement_project__nibip__factsheet.pdf and hard copies are being distributed to all Northern Ireland MPs, MEPs and MLAs as well as each of the District Councils.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the involvement her Department had in determining the areas that would benefit from the scheme to improve and extend access to broadband in rural areas.
(AQW 38588/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In September 2012 my Department established and publicly consulted on the proposed intervention area for the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project. The consultation document set out the rationale behind the project and the postcode areas in which the Department had assessed there would be a requirement for public intervention to deliver both basic and superfast fixed-line broadband services. Due to changes in the European State Aid requirements for broadband deployment, the consultation was repeated in June 2013.

The outcomes of the consultations were used to identify the scope of the project in an Invitation to Tender. In bidding for the contract, the winning tenderer, BT detailed how much of the intervention area could be addressed for the available funding.

Subsequently DETI reached agreement with BT that at least 45,000 premises would benefit from the infrastructure improvements.

The project is being delivered in eight phases (0-7) with deployment of services determined by an engineering model which takes account of a number of factors including technical feasibility, quality of existing infrastructure in the area, reasonable costs and number of anticipated customers. This methodology has been adopted across all projects delivered under the UK-wide framework.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the location of the points of presence boxes that have been (i) installed; and (ii) upgraded; as part of (a) phase 1; and (b) phase 2 of the scheme to improve and extend access to broadband in rural areas.
(AQW 38590/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The following cabinets have been installed/upgraded in phases one and two of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project.

Phase 1

Exchange Area	Cabinet Location
Portglenone	Junction of Drumblog/Innishrush Roads
Antrim	Junction of Dunsilly/Ballymena Roads, Antrim Junction of Burnish/Lisnavenagh Roads, Antrim
Baillies Mills	Temple Golf & Country Club, Baillies Mills Junction of Creevytennant/Magheraknock Roads, Baillie Mills

Exchange Area	Cabinet Location
Ballyclare	Junction of Ballymena/Holestone Roads, Ballyclare Opposite the Junction of Brookevale/Springvale Roads, Ballyclare 110 Ballyrobert Road, Newtownabbey
Beragh	124 Altamuskin Road, Sixmilecross
Bready	Ballyheather Road, Bready Derry Road, Bready
Carrickfergus	Opposite Carin Road, Carrickfergus Beltoy Road, Carrickfergus
Carrickmore	1 Loughmacrory Park, Carrickmore
Castlederg	38 Crilly Park, Castlederg
Claudy	Junction of Forglen/Gortilea Roads, Claudy
Crumlin	Opposite Killultagh Walk, Glenavy Opposite 1 Ballyquillan Road, Aldergrove
Drumquin	Omagh Road, Drumquin
Dunamanagh	Junction of Moorlough/Gleneden Roads, Dunamanagh
Dungiven	Junction of Gortnacross/Legavallon Road, Dungiven
Feeny	Junction of Glenshane/Clagan Road, Feeny
Glenarm	Glenarm
Glengormley	Opposite 69 Kings Moss Road, Newtownabbey Ballycraigy Crossroads, Glengormley Carnmoney Road North, Glengormley
Gortin	Crockanboy Road, Omagh
Lisburn	4 Lisnoe Road, Lisburn
Maze	5 Florencecourt, Halftown, Maze
Mountfield	10 Killyclogher Road, Omagh
Stoneyford	7 Steedstown Road, Stoneyford
Templepatrick	Adjacent to 33A Loanends Road, Templepatrick Opposite 45 Loughnamore Road, Parkgate

Phase 2

Exchange Area	Cabinet Location
Aughnacloy	Near 152 Caledon Road, Aughnacloy
Beragh	Drumduff Road, Beragh
Bready	Junction of Donaghheady/Alder Roads, Bready
Caledon	Junction of Monaghan/Derryhaw Roads, Tynan
Carrickfergus	Opposite 84A Paisley Road, Carrickfergus
Carrickmore	31 Camlough Road, Carrickmore
Castlederg	2 Garvetagh Road, Castlederg Eden Park, Strabane Road, Castlederg
Castlereagh	Junction of Lisleen / Manns Roads, Castlereagh
Claudy	Junction of Muldonagh/Foreglen Roads, Claudy

Exchange Area	Cabinet Location
Crossmaglen	Beside 36 Castlerock, Crossmaglen Opposite 40 Glassdrumman Road, Crossmaglen
Crumlin	Junction of Chapel/Lurgan Roads, Crumlin
Donaghadee	1 Manor Street, Donaghadee
Dromore (Co Tyrone)	3 Newpark Road, Dromore 18 Aughadulla Road, Dromore
Drumquin	Dooish Road, Drumquin
Dunamanagh	Gortileck Road, Dunamanagh
Dundrod	Near 36 Ballyhill Lane, Dundrod
Dungiven	Junction of Gortnacross/Gelvin Roads, Dungiven
Eglinton	Junction of Dunlade/Lime Roads, Greysteel
Glenanne	18 Glenanne Road, Armagh Near 37 Aghincurk Road, Newtownhamilton
Helen's Bay	Near 3 Church Road, Helen's Bay
Hillsborough	13 Dromore Road, Hillsborough 2 Kilwarlin Road, Hillsborough 57 Ballygowan Road, Hillsborough 11 Dromara Road, Hillsborough 128 Dromara Road, Hillsborough Drumlough Church Hall, Rafferty Hill, Hillsborough 2 Glenview, Hillsborough 52/54 Windmill Road, Hillsborough
Keady	Outside 71 Upper Darkley Road, Armagh
Lisburn	Kirkwoods Road, Lisburn
Maghera	1 Meeting House Avenue, Maghera
Mayobridge	Near 4 Ryan Road, Edenmore
Mountfield	Near 7 Racolpa road, Omagh 15 Fox park, Drumnakilly
Newtownstewart	Junction of Douglas/Ballymullarty Roads, Newtownstewart 21 Drumlegagh Church Road, Omagh 7 Cloonty Road, Drumquin
Rathfriland	Opposite 39 Ballyroney Road, Rathfriland Junction of Banbridge/Lisnacroppin Road, Rathfriland
Stoneyford	Junction Stoneyford Road/Stonebridge Court
Templepatrick	Outside 156B Seven Mile Straight, Templepatrick Outside Loanends Primary School, 193 Seven Mile Straight Templepatrick 982 Antrim Road, Templepatrick
Whitehead	Outside 124 Larne Road, Whitehead

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's position on Giro Legacy events which will include the Mournes.
(AQW 38595/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) assumed responsibility for the events function in 2010 there has not been a Budget exercise to allow for an appropriate dedicated budget to be established for events. As a result NITB has always relied on in year monitoring to meet its commitments for events funding.

I fully understand the importance of events such as a Giro Legacy event and am thus reviewing the funding position with NITB to assess what is possible.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much investment her Department has earmarked for the development of energy storage to reduce inefficiency and improve affordability, security and sustainability.
(AQW 38612/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Investment in our energy infrastructure is principally a commercial matter for developers subject to scrutiny by the Utility Regulator, which balances the need for investment with the protection of the interests of consumers who, ultimately, pay for the investment.

My Department continues to support three storage projects.

Two of these projects have been designated as European Projects of Common Interest (PCI) - the development of an underground gas storage facility at Islandmagee by developers Infrastrata/ Mutual Energy, and a compressed air energy storage facility in East Antrim to be developed by Gaelectric. Achieving PCI status enables access to EU Connecting Europe Funding under the EU TEN-E Regulation.

I am also supportive of ongoing discussions between AES Corporation and the Utility Regulator concerning the potential for a pilot battery storage proposal at the Kilroot power station site.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's strategy for encouraging the development of large scale and fast response energy storage facilities.
(AQW 38614/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive's Strategic Energy Framework recognises the potential of energy storage to provide additional security of supply and to diversify Northern Ireland's reliance on fossil fuel-generated electricity.

The strategy's actions include encouraging investment in a number of energy storage proposals such as the development of an underground gas storage facility at Islandmagee by developers Infrastrata/ Mutual Energy, and a compressed air energy storage facility in East Antrim to be developed by Gaelectric. My Department has supported both projects, which have been accepted as Projects of Common Interest under the EU TEN-E Regulation, in recent bids for Connecting Europe Funding (CEF).

I am also supportive of ongoing discussions between AES Corporation and the Utility Regulator concerning the potential for a pilot battery storage proposal at the Kilroot power station site.

Department of the Environment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, on how many occasions the Director of Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation has been accompanied by the Driver and Vehicle Agency Chief Enforcement Officer to meetings with or regarding Value Cabs at their offices in Belfast; and to detail the (i) date and time; and (ii) the minutes of each meeting.
(AQW 37736/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): The Director of Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division, accompanied by the Driver and Vehicle Agency Chief Enforcement Officer, met with representatives from Value Cabs on 26 June 2013 at 2.00pm. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss matters connected with the Taxis Act 2008 and its implementation; there are no recorded minutes of this meeting.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment how many joint investigations the Driver and Vehicle Agency has carried out with the PSNI in the last two years in East Londonderry.
(AQW 38084/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There have been no specific joint investigations carried out by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) and PSNI in East Londonderry in the last two years. However, DVA frequently works with the assistance of PSNI and other relevant enforcement bodies throughout Northern Ireland in order to address road safety matters.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average turnaround time when the Northern Ireland Environment Agency have been involved in a planning application.
(AQW 38085/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In the 2013-14 business year, the number of decided applications where the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) was consulted was 2,878. The average processing time (in working days) for these decided applications where the NIEA was consulted was 135 days.

It is important to note that when considering the average processing time for planning applications, consulting with NIEA, where required, will be only one element of the application process. There are many factors involved in the application process including liaising with other consultees, considering other material considerations, and in many cases additional information is required from the applicant, often resulting in the need for further consultation. These factors will all have a bearing on processing times.

It must be noted that these figures are provided from Planning administrative systems and do not form part of published and validated DOE Official Statistics.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans are in place for the introduction of more wind farms.
(AQW 38167/11-15)

Mr Durkan: While my Department will determine planning applications received for wind farms, any plans for the introduction of more wind farms would be a matter for the renewable energy companies. Decisions to build wind farms are a commercial matter for this industry. Such decisions will take into account government policy and network capability.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37924/11-15, whether European Union environmental law has been persistently breached since the designation of Lough Neagh Special Protection Area in 1998.
(AQW 38207/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A number of EU directives apply to activities within Lough Neagh including the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and the Water Famework Directive. As the Department has never been consulted on or granted permission for any extraction activities within the Lough, neither the EIA Directive nor the Habitats Directive have been breached. No breach of the Water Framework Directive has occurred.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38000/11-15, whether his Department has moved to stop all works pending the outcome of the Department's live enforcement investigation, given the close proximity of Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation, the strict requirements of the precautionary principle which underpins Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and the fact that the manner in which this case was handled is currently subject to infringement complaints lodged with the European Commission.
(AQW 38208/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department, having engaged promptly with the developers of the Dalradian site on Camcosy Road, has received a written statement that works have ceased in regard to the alleged breach.

Officials have been monitoring the site and will continue to do so.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment where responsibility lies for covering the costs of any fines imposed by Europe as a result of successful infraction proceedings brought against the UK Member State in relation to environmental failures affecting Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38209/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Infraction proceedings under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union are brought by the European Commission against a member state which the Commission considers has infringed EU law. Consequently, it is against the relevant member state that any EU fine will be levied.

If any penalty were to be imposed against the UK by the European Court of Justice, it would be a matter for the UK Government to determine how the penalty would apply to a devolved administration. The outcome cannot be predicted since the UK has never been the subject of financial sanctions imposed by the European Court of Justice.

Northern Ireland district councils may, under discretionary powers introduced by the Localism Act 2011, be required to pay some or all of a fine where they have caused or contributed to the imposition of the sanction.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has any plans to implement a shared space initiative in order to improve accessibility of urban spaces for the visually impaired.
(AQW 38223/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am committed to ensuring that my Department plays its part, along with other Departments, in the creation and maintenance of shared spaces for all, which includes the visually impaired.

The recent publication of the draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for public consultation in February this year demonstrates this commitment. The draft SPPS consolidates a suite of existing planning policy statements and provides a strategic policy framework which will assist councils as they undertake their planning responsibilities from 1 April 2015. One of SPPS's core planning principles is 'Creating and Enhancing Shared Space'. This core planning principle affirms the aims of the Executive's "Together: Building a United Community" strategy which sets out its commitment to addressing all barriers that prevent or interfere with the creation and maintenance of shared space.

Improving accessibility to all is imperative to our health and well being and is considered to be an important element within the planning environment. Indeed Improving Health and Well-being is also set out in the draft SPPS as a core planning principle in its own right.

Improving accessibility and creating and enhancing shared space are also fundamental themes which are representative of my Department's 'Living Places' An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland, which was published in September 2014.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38236/11-15)

Mr Durkan: No efficiencies have been realised in my department as a direct result of the work of the Department of Finance and Personnel's Public Sector Reform Division.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many Fixed Penalties have been issued by the Driver and Vehicle Agency to drivers of company vehicles whose company does not hold a hauliers licence; (ii) the Fixed Penalty charge; (iii) the offence/breach; (iv) the number of Fixed Penalties issued that were paid; and (v) how many Fixed Penalties were marked/sent for prosecution for non-payment; and of these how many were withdrawn before reaching court or without proceeding with prosecution, in each of the last two years.
(AQW 38244/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2014 there have been no Fixed Penalty Notices issued to drivers of company vehicles whose company does not hold a hauliers licence.

There were however sixteen Fixed Penalty Notices issued to drivers who owned and were using their vehicle without a Goods Vehicle Operator's Licence in force.

The Fixed Penalty charge for such an offence is presently set at £200 and the offence breach is defined as using a vehicle on a road contrary to Section 1 (6) of the Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act 2010.

The PSNI Fixed Penalty Office is responsible for the administration of the Fixed Penalty Scheme and does not inform the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) whether a Fixed Penalty Notice has been paid or is being pursued through the courts for non payment.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what research has been undertaken to measure the effect on the construction industry of the consultation on 'Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing'.
(AQW 38247/11-15)

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.

Officials are currently considering the 53 responses received through the public consultation and are liaising further with DSD officials in relation to the responses received to their consultation. Along with the Minister for Social Development, I intend to take account of all the views received before considering how to move forward with the proposals for affordable housing.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the plans in place for refurbishment or maintenance works on the Ballycopeland Windmill, Millisle.
(AQW 38253/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Ballycopeland windmill is a unique historic monument in Northern Ireland, and of considerable historical interest in terms of mills and mill technology in Ireland and beyond. It was originally built in the late 18th century and continued in use as a working mill until 1915. The mill, along with the miller's house, was brought into State Care in 1935.

Since 1935 there have been periodic repairs and maintenance works conducted at Ballycopeland windmill, as and when such works have been required. However, in recent years the windmill has been adversely affected by high winds and bad weather. High winds have partially dislodged the cap of the mill, and it is now jammed in a fixed position, which prevents the turning of the sails and mill stones. I am also advised that the main sails and fantail are also in need of repair and maintenance.

My Department, through its Conservation Works Team, has sought to carry out the necessary repairs to the sails, but there have been difficulties in achieving safe access for plant and machinery to the site. The works required to free-up the cap of the mill are specialised, and advice on this aspect must be sought from a suitably qualified millwright.

Longer-term plans for refurbishment and maintenance of this site are currently being reviewed by senior management within my Department, to see what can be realistically achieved in the current financial climate and the challenges my Department faces at the present time. I will keep you updated of proposals and works in due course.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37541/11-14, why Belfast Public Hire (BPH) would require information and advice on business start-up when they are already operating in business; and, (ii) whether this advice and information was sought with the intention to have BPH set up alternative businesses from that which they currently operate.
(AQW 38264/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The advice was sought to allow Belfast Public Hire operators, who currently largely operate as one vehicle operator, to determine if there were benefits to working together and forming companies to take advantage of any economies of scale available to larger taxi operators.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has considered the research compiled by the Pedestrian Accessibility and Movement Environment Laboratory when dealing with planning applications for town regeneration schemes.
(AQW 38288/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Research, including that undertaken and published by the Pedestrian Accessibility and Movement Environment Laboratory (PAMELA), is not planning policy or supplementary planning guidance.

However research, where relevant, can act as a source of advice and guidance and can inform the approach taken by architects and urban planners when designing pedestrian environments for individual development proposals. If any such information or research were therefore to be submitted to the Department in association with a planning application it would be considered in terms of its materiality and relevance to the development proposal under consideration and weight, if any, would be attached as appropriate.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether a decision by his Department not to initiate formal enforcement action against unauthorised development can, in terms of the law, be construed as constituting a development consent.
(AQW 38305/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The answer to this question depends on the circumstances of the particular case. However the general issue of immunity is set out below.

Under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 planning permission is required for the development of land. Where development is carried out without the required planning permission, or without complying with any condition or limitation subject to which the planning permission was granted, that is a breach of planning control. Where it appears to the Department that there has been a breach of planning control and it is expedient to do so, having regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations, then it may issue an enforcement notice. It the Department does not take enforcement action against a breach of planning control then on the expiry of the period 5 years from the date of the breach of planning control that breach becomes immune from enforcement action. Where a breach of planning control has become immune from enforcement action a person may then apply to the Department for a Certificate of Lawfulness of existing Use or Development ("CLUD"). Where a CLUD is issued the lawfulness of any use or operation in respect of which a CLUD is in force is conclusively presumed.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37576/11-15, whether his Department relied on pre-1972 onshore operations to justify the granting of Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS) certificates for sand extraction from Lough Neagh Special Protection Area; and if so, how his Department claims not to have any records of these operations, given that this information must have been available at the time ALCS certificates for Lough Neagh were granted between 2004 and 2007.
(AQW 38306/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My responses to AQW 37576/11-15 and AQW 33055/11-15 refer. In my response to the former question I have previously advised that my Department does not hold records of pre 1972 operations. The then Planning Service's response to the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme appears to have taken account of planning permissions associated to the onshore operations of the respective companies.

In response to the latter question, you were advised my Department has granted a number of onshore planning permissions associated with sand extraction from Lough Neagh.

The permissions include plant, stockpiles, buildings, car parks, settlement ponds and weighbridges. The permissions (nine in total) date from 1982 until 2005 and relate to four sites.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37818/11-15, particularly that he "does not consider 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", to detail (i) why a formal report based on the content was not compiled in light of the issues which have followed and which is normally required for proper consideration when legal advice is sought; (ii) his Department's procedures or protocol when moving to obtain legal advice on any issue, including what is required

by the legal advisers in order to study the issue; and (iii) whether full statutory procedures or protocols were followed by departmental staff and the Driver and Vehicle Agency.
(AQW 38319/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In response to each of the member's questions:

(i) Officials sought and received legal advice regarding the provision of taxi services at Ravenhill rugby ground;

(ii) This is consistent with normal procedures; and

(iii) There are no statutory procedures or protocols in this regard.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment whether there has been (i) an evaluation of the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; and (ii) and assessment of feedback from the public on their experiences of using the legislation.
(AQW 38353/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The High Hedges Act became operational on 31 March 2012 with responsibility for its implementation transferred to district councils from that date. As a result of the reorganisation of councils, the Department is deferring a review of this legislation until after sufficient time has been given to allow its full implementation within the new council structures.

As the Department is not responsible for the implementation of this legislation it does not hold information on feedback from the public on use of the legislation. However my Department did liaise with councils during 2013 and acquired initial figures that indicated that around 800 queries about high hedges had been received but only 8 per cent (approximately 60) of those became formal complaints, with 67 per cent of those resulting in the issue of a remediation notice. We would anticipate that the public experience will be part of the future review.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38376/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Currently there are two staff working in my Department's Equality Unit. The annual cost of these staff is £90k.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37877/11-15, whether he plans to revise his answer taking into account Section D1, Planning and Accounts, and the printed warning.
(AQW 38413/11-15)

Mr Durkan: An application was made by Fonacab to have an operating centre at Ravenhill Rugby ground included in their taxi operator licence. The application included all the required declarations including the Planning Declaration. Consequently, the application was granted correctly and in line with procedures.

I have no plans to revise the previous answer.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what communication he has had with companies that supply taxi meters in the last three months.
(AQW 38419/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is continuing to develop procedures within the context of the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 to ensure that compliant taximeters are installed, calibrated and tested in all licensed taxis in Northern Ireland. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed, in sufficient time to allow the industry to meet the timetable set out in my Statement to the Assembly in June 2014, that compliant taximeters will be installed by September 2015.

I have had no communication with taximeter suppliers during the last three months.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what further steps are required to establish approved taxi meter centres; and to outline a timescale for these steps.
(AQW 38420/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is continuing to develop procedures within the context of the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 to ensure that compliant taximeters are installed, calibrated and tested in all licensed taxis in Northern Ireland. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed, in sufficient time to allow the industry to meet the timetable set out in my Statement to the Assembly in June 2014, that compliant taximeters will be installed by September 2015.

I have had no communication with taximeter suppliers during the last three months.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons for the delay in establishing approved taxi meter centres.
(AQW 38421/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department is continuing to develop procedures within the context of the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 to ensure that compliant taximeters are installed, calibrated and tested in all licensed taxis in Northern Ireland. I will provide detailed

information on the arrangements when this process has been completed, in sufficient time to allow the industry to meet the timetable set out in my Statement to the Assembly in June 2014, that compliant taximeters will be installed by September 2015.

I have had no communication with taximeter suppliers during the last three months.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to a fine imposed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) for (a) receiving; (b) processing; and (c) storing waste, to detail the percentage of the fine retained by the NIEA.
(AQW 38444/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency does not impose fines; rather, it prepares prosecution files that are taken forward by the Public Prosecution Service on the basis of sufficient evidence and the public interest test. Any fines imposed from associated legal proceedings are passed directly to the Exchequer and the NIEA does not receive any money back.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment how the Northern Ireland Environment Agency accounts for monies raised through fines in their financial returns and reports.
(AQW 38445/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency provides evidence files to the Public Prosecution Service, who on the basis of sufficient evidence and the public interest test may decide to escalate these cases to court proceedings. The Court imposes fines to act as a deterrent to future offending and these fines are passed directly to the Exchequer. Therefore the NIEA does not receive any of these monies and consequently it does not report them in its financial returns or reports.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the money realised by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency through fines in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 38446/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency does not gain financially from any of the fines imposed in the prosecution cases it oversees as they are passed directly to the Exchequer. The total of these fines (for the last three full financial years) is set out below.

	Total fines
2011-12	£137,450
2012-13	£142,250
2013-14	£114,593
Total	**£394,293**

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the locations of the discovery of waste products from illegal fuel smuggling in each of the last five years, including the extent of waste that was identified at each site and the cost of the clean up.
(AQW 38457/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Illegal fuel smuggling is dealt with by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The investigation of illegal fuel laundering is led by HMRC, who deal with the disposal of any fuel laundered waste (FLW) that is discovered in association with illegal fuel laundering plant.

However the majority of FLW is dumped indiscriminately in the countryside throughout Northern Ireland and this is dealt with by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

NIEA is currently operating a Flytipping Partnership with 21 Councils. The first Council, Newry and Mourne joined the partnership in June 2012. Before June 2012, local Councils dealt with the disposal of this FLW that had been dumped in their respective areas.

Under this partnership Councils can refer cases of Flytipping of under 20m3 of non hazardous waste and certain hazardous wastes including FLW for investigation and or clean up to NIEA.

NIEA does not hold data in respect of FLW before June 2012. From June 2012 until the end of October 2014, 328 separate incidents have been referred to and resolved by NIEA. This has involved NIEA removing a total weight of 2609.85 tonnes of FLW at a total cost of £931,916.37.

Due to the numbers involved and the detail requested I have placed a copy of the information in the Assembly Library. NIEA does not have the cost and weight for each individual case in a readily accessible form, therefore the detailed information has been broken down into a list of addresses, total weight and cost per council area per calendar year.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the operation of the Environmental Crime Unit in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency; and to detail (i) the number of staff working in the unit; (ii) the operating costs of

the unit; (iii) the number and nature of cases investigated by the unit; and (iv) the number of successful prosecutions the unit assisted in securing.
(AQW 38460/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The work of the Environmental Crime Unit (ECU) is designed to complement all the other work in the Department to achieve compliance outcomes. This includes clear guidance and support to businesses and efficient regulatory oversight. ECU has a key role in this system in carrying out investigations into some of the most serious environmental offences.

The officers in the ECU have been doing, and continue to do, good work in testing circumstances. In one recent example, the ECU was responsible for securing the highest confiscation order secured to date in Northern Ireland for environmental offending, £500,000 against a Ballymena scrap metal dealer. This builds on a further almost £1.6 million of confiscations achieved since the Unit was established and confiscation powers enacted.

At 1 November 2014, the staff complement of the ECU was 34.4 full time equivalent and its budget for the current financial year is £1.691 m.

Since the start of 2013, ECU has undertaken 137 enforcement cases into a range of waste criminality, which includes the serious and persistent, commercial-scale environmental offending that the Unit was established to deter and disrupt. These cases include unauthorised land-filling, scrap metal and end-of- life vehicles, fuel laundering wastes and waste tyre disposal.

In the same period, the team has secured 43 successful convictions against environmental criminals.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37818/11-15, particularly his response "I do 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 he has seen the email; and if so, for his assessment of the impact that the email would have on the Driver and Vehicle Agency and his Department should it become discoverable.
(AQW 38468/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have not seen nor do I intend to request sight of the email summarising the observations of enforcement officers at Ravenhill on 23 August 2013.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37647/11-15, why there were three visits in 2013 and none in 2014, particularly given continued, repeated and ongoing concerns as to operational activities and alleged regulation breaches; and to confirm if this venue is now considered off limits by the Driver and Vehicle Agency.
(AQW 38550/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There were three visits during 2013 for the purposes of assessing compliance with Taxi Operator Licensing requirements. Following which the Department determined that the provision of taxi services at Ravenhill complied with the requirements of the Taxi Act (NI) 2008. There are no areas or venues which the DVA considers off limits.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department plans to reduce the cost of driving licences for motorists, following the announcement by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency that fees will be reduced from October 2014.
(AQW 38577/11-15)

Mr Durkan: 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. These costs include salaries, maintenance, support and development of the IT system, production of the licence, postage and the payment of fees for certain medical assessments. The licence fees are varied according to the complexity of individual transactions.

Following a public consultation, driving licence fees were increased on 18 October 2012 which resulted in a gap across a range of transactions between the fees charged in NI compared to those charged in GB. This gap exists largely due the lack of economies of scale for recovering the costs of processing driver licences locally. I am also aware that DVLA recently introduced a reduction in their fees that has further widened the gap between NI and GB. I understand that the DVLA have indicated that they have been able to reduce their fees through developments in technology, with the ability to offer online transactions.

However, I can advise that the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) is currently developing a new driver licensing IT system to be delivered by April 2016. This system will improve the customer experience, deliver service efficiencies and will enable online processing. This will provide an opportunity to review the fees currently charged for the processing of driver licences.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the effectiveness of the High Hedges legislation.
(AQO 7005/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The High Hedges Act became operational on 31 March 2012 with responsibility for its implementation transferred to district councils from that date.

My Department liaised with councils last year and acquired initial figures that indicated that around 800 queries about high hedges had been received but only 8 per cent (approximately 60) of those became formal complaints, with 67 per cent of those resulting in the issue of a remediation notice.

I believe that introducing this legislation has provided a mechanism for people to use when they feel they have nowhere else to go. It has, by its very existence, brought about actions for individuals, who had previously not been able to address these problems directly. This has resulted in many high hedges being removed or reduced in such a way as to remove the nuisance.

However, I am aware from my constituency work and reports from colleagues that the legislation has its limitations in relation to dealing with trees for example.

While the legislation was introduced by my Department responsibility for its implementation rests with councils.

It is my intention to imitate a review of the legislation following reorganisation of councils. This will provide an opportunity to explore if the legislation is working effectively and if it is dealing with the concerns that people are raising.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of the Environment, given the rise in road fatalities this year, for his assessment of the success of the current road safety message.
(AQO 7008/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am extremely concerned by the number of road deaths this year. My sincere sympathy is with all of the families and communities affected by those tragedies.

Even though the overall picture shows that fewer lives are being lost than in the past, indeed, over the last five years (2009 to 2013) the number of people killed on our roads has halved; it is disheartening that so far thirteen more people have lost their lives in 2014 than last year in total.

My Department continues to address high risk behaviours through various activities, including the road safety information campaigns. In addition to the existing media programme, I launched two new campaigns in 2014, addressing cyclist safety and inappropriate speed. Both of these have been identified as priority issues.

The campaigns consistently achieve awareness levels of over 90%. The average awareness level for TV advertising is 50%. The campaigns also achieve levels of influence ranging between 72% and 93%, indicating that road safety advertising has been very influential in improving road user attitudes and in producing positive change in behaviours. The industry norm for achieving levels of ‘fairly influenced’ is 30%.

It is difficult to measure the sole contribution that any specific road safety intervention, including advertising, makes towards reducing casualties. However, work by Oxford Economics isolated the importance of the role of DOE advertising and calculated that from 1995 to 2011, some 21,977 men, women and children in Northern Ireland were saved from death and serious injury on our roads.

I recognise that some of our campaigns can make uncomfortable viewing, but research and tracking evidence has consistently confirmed that they are effective, and that our ‘tell it as it is’ approach is a key reason for that.

I cannot emphasise enough, however, that the vast majority of casualties on our roads are caused by human error and ultimately each of us as individuals has to take personal responsibility for our attitudes and behaviours as road users.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department’s responsibility for addressing coastal erosion.
(AQW 38624/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has no statutory responsibility for carrying out the construction, maintenance or repair of coastal defences; and no role in inspecting incidents of coastal erosion.

My Department does have a regulatory role as the marine licensing authority for construction/development proposals below the high water mark; and planning permission may be required for construction above the low water mark.

The long-standing position on which department is responsible for coastal protection work is determined by the “Bateman Formula”. In effect, this means that departments only have a responsibility to construct, maintain and repair coastal defences in their possession, or which are protecting assets for which they have responsibility.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 36780/11-15, how many operators have received a £200 Fixed Penalty Notice for using an unlicensed vehicle in these circumstances.
(AQW 38630/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There have been no operators issued with a £200 Fixed Penalty Notice where a driver of a licensed private hire taxi has picked up passengers without a pre-booking within Belfast City limit.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of noise complaints received by each council in the last three years.
(AQW 38720/11-15)

Mr Durkan: District councils collect information about noise complaints and send these details to the Department each year where they are collated for the annual report on Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland. The most recent information is for the 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 years. The report for the 2013-14 year will be published online on 28 November 2014.

District Council	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Antrim BC	173	181	192
Ards BC	270	315	315
Armagh City & DC	256	228	186
Ballymena BC	228	164	216
Ballymoney BC	99	104	94
Banbridge DC	187	215	190
Belfast CC	5928	6836	6885
Carrickfergus BC	173	158	134
Castlereagh BC	168	196	174
Coleraine BC	502	419	412
Cookstown DC	131	128	116
Craigavon BC	342	335	425
Derry CC	384	332	283
Down DC	254	262	228
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	165	173	175
Fermanagh DC	174	131	144
Larne BC	88	99	75
Limavady BC	122	108	115
Lisburn CC	522	492	424
Magherafelt DC	112	104	82
Moyle DC	42	58	62
Newry & Mourne DC	297	247	294
Newtownabbey BC	302	295	345
North Down BC	317	271	224
Omagh DC	176	203	148
Strabane DC	173	139	204
Total	**11585**	**12193**	**12142**

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of people prosecuted for excessive noise in each council in the last three years.
(AQW 38721/11-15)

Mr Durkan: District councils collect information about noise complaints and send these details to the Department each year where they are collated for the annual report on Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland. The most recent information is for the 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 years. The report for the 2013-14 year will be published online on 28 November 2014.

The number of prosecutions was as follows:-

District Council	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Antrim BC	0	0	0
Ards BC	0	0	0
Armagh City & DC	0	0	0
Ballymena BC	1	0	0
Ballymoney BC	0	0	0
Banbridge DC	0	0	0

District Council	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Belfast CC	9	8	5
Carrickfergus BC	0	0	0
Castlereagh BC	0	0	0
Coleraine BC	0	0	0
Cookstown DC	0	0	0
Craigavon BC	0	0	0
Derry CC	0	0	0
Down DC	0	0	0
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	0	0	0
Fermanagh DC	1	0	0
Larne BC	0	0	0
Limavady BC	1	0	1
Lisburn CC	0	0	0
Magherafelt DC	0	0	0
Moyle DC	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne DC	12	4	0
Newtownabbey BC	0	0	0
North Down BC	1	0	0
Omagh DC	0	0	0
Strabane DC	0	0	1
Total	**25**	**12**	**7**

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have used the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 since its introduction.
(AQW 38722/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The High Hedges Act became operational on 31 March 2012 with responsibility for its implementation transferred to district councils from that date.

As my Department is not responsible for the implementation of this legislation it does not hold information on use of the legislation. However my Department did liaise with councils during 2013 and acquired initial figures that indicated that around 800 queries about high hedges had been received but only 8 per cent (approximately 60) of those became formal complaints, with 67 per cent of those resulting in the issue of a remediation notice.

As a result of the reorganisation of councils, my Department is deferring a review of this legislation until after sufficient time has been given to allow its full implementation within the new council structures. We would anticipate that the public usage of the legislation will be an integral part of the future review.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been fined under the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
(AQW 38723/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not hold the information you are seeking as responsibility for implementing the High Hedges Act rests with district councils.

However, under the legislation, an individual would only be liable to a fine if they were convicted by the courts for committing an offence of failing to action a remedial notice issued by the council. When my Department carried out an informal liaison with councils during 2013, initial figures indicated that around 40 of some 800 queries, about high hedges, resulted in the issue of a remediation notice. The Department is unaware of any court action relating to these remediation notices.

As a result of the reorganisation of councils, my Department is deferring a review of this legislation until after sufficient time has been given to allow its full implementation within the new council structures. How the councils enforced the legislation and ensured compliance will form an integral part of the future review.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is any legal requirement for children to wear helmets whilst cycling on public roads or any plans to introduce such a requirement.
(AQW 38894/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is no legal requirement for cyclists, either adults or children, to wear helmets whilst cycling on public roads in Northern Ireland or any other part of the United Kingdom.

The topic of cycle helmets has been a controversial one for many years. Although a good deal of research has been done in this area, no consensus has been reached on whether the wearing of helmets should be made compulsory. Taking this into account, along with the practicalities of enforcement, the possible impact on levels of cycling and the potential loss of wider environmental and health benefits, I am not persuaded that making helmets mandatory is the right option. I therefore have no current plans to introduce such a requirement.

My Department does however view the wearing of helmets as best practice when cycling, and promotes this in a number of key ways.

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) is offered to all primary schools in Northern Ireland and is very popular. The objectives of CPS are to teach children in years 5, 6 and 7 how to ride their bicycles safely, to learn the basics of the Highway Code and help them become safer road users. In 2013 CPS was delivered in 538 schools with 8,365 children being trained. All children are encouraged to wear helmets during this training and many schools include the wearing of helmets in their school policy.

In order to further promote road safety amongst cyclists, and in particular children, my Department is developing a new Education Pack on cycling for use in primary and post primary schools. The pack, due for release early next year, is intended to initiate discussions about road safety and the choices that cyclists make on the road.

In April this year, I launched a cyclist safety campaign aimed at reducing road deaths and serious injuries involving cyclists by positively influencing the relationship between cyclists and drivers. The campaign is supported by the message “Respect Everyone’s Journey”. The message encourages drivers to look out for cyclists and encourages cyclists to take steps to increase their own safety. As such, the cyclists depicted in the advert are all wearing the correct helmet, as advised in the Official Highway Code for Northern Ireland.

My Department’s policy on the use of cycle helmets is clear. All cyclists are encouraged to wear an approved helmet – one that conforms to current regulations, is the correct size and fits properly.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, given the recent heavy rainfall, whether there has been any pollution, or risk of pollution, to the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation due to the unauthorised depositing of waste at the site of planning approval K/2013/0072/F.
(AQW 38950/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) issued a consent under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, (consent number 068/12/2), for the discharge of drainage arising from the proposed development, on 6 February 2014. This consent contains conditions formulated to ensure that water quality objectives set for the Owenkillew will not be at risk of adverse impact by the proposed discharge.

The NIEA is closely monitoring this site, and officials have met with representatives of Dalradian Gold Ltd. on site on a number of occasions in recent weeks to discuss pollution prevention measures during both the construction and operational phases of the proposed development, and to assess the potential for impact on the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Dalradian Gold Ltd. has provided the NIEA with copies of Pollution Prevention Management Plans which include details of mitigation measures proposed/ being taken to ensure protection of the Owenkillew SAC, during the proposed works at the site.

There has been no evidence of polluting impact as a result of the operations on site detected by the NIEA on any of the occasions that officers visited the site. The most recent inspection took place on Tuesday, 18 November 2014 and no evidence of pollution was observed.

An incident of alleged infilling in the proximity of the Owenkillew has been raised previously and my Planning officials are currently investigating.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will provide compensation to ratepayers affected by the difference between the legacy council rate and the new council rate.
(AQW 37560/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The support provided by the Executive is not intended to compensate ratepayers for the difference between the legacy council rate for 2014/15 and the new council rate for 2015/16.

The support provided to ratepayers under the District Rate Convergence Scheme will take the form of a pre-determined discount applied to the district rate poundage. This discount is confined only to the effects that convergence will have on district rates.

The Scheme will reduce the immediate impact on ratepayers and will also allow the new councils time to make efficiencies through this major reorganisation which should moderate district rates in the medium term.

Councils, of course, must also play their part in managing their affairs and act responsibly when striking their district rates.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are plans to utilise funds in dormant bank accounts.
(AQW 37852/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Under Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act (2008), the devolved administration in Northern Ireland (NI) receives a proportion of the dormant account funding, apportioned according to the Barnett formula.

The legislation allows the funds to be used for social or environmental purposes and provisions are included which enables the devolved administrations to set their own spending priorities.

In Northern Ireland this responsibility rests with my Department and my officials are currently developing plans on how to best utilise this funding.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average space allocation per workplace in the Central Government Office Accommodation Estate in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 38452/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The average space allocation per workstation in the central government benchmarked office estate is:

- 2010/2011 - 15.54 m^2 per workstation;
- 2011/2012 - 15.42 m^2 per workstation;
- 2012/2013 - 15.25 m^2 per workstation.

The information requested is not available prior to 2011 as workstation data was not collected at that time.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the payment arrangements under the Property Management Pan Government Collaborative Framework Agreement 2014.
(AQW 38472/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The form of Contract upon which the Property Management Pan Government Collaborative Framework Agreement 2014 has been awarded is the NEC3 Term Service Contract. The payment clause within the Term Service Contract (Clause 51.2) states that 'each certified payment is made within three weeks of the assessment date'.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the capital spend in each of the last four financial years; (ii) the planned capital spend for 2014/15; and (ii) a real terms spending figure, taking into account Treasure Gross Domestic Product defaltors.
(AQW 38482/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below shows Final Outturn reported for 2010-11 to 2012-13, Provisional Outturn for 2013-14 and Forecast Outturn for 2014-15 for Capital DEL. Capital DEL adjusted to 2014-15 prices using GDP deflators is detailed in the table below.

£m	2010-11 Final Outturn	2011-12 Final Outturn	2012-13 Final Outturn	2013-14 Provisional Outturn	2014-15 Forecast Outturn
Total Capital DEL	1,193.0	1,000.4	968.9	930.8	1,078.0
Real Terms Capital DEL*	1,285.0	1,058.6	1,008.5	951.2	1,078.0

*2014-15 prices

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the level of (a) domestic; and (b) business rates arrears, in the last three years.
(AQW 38610/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The level of (a) domestic; and (b) non-domestic debt outstanding at the end of each of the last three financial years is provided in the table below.

Year	Domestic Debt	Non-Domestic Debt
31st March 2012	£70,657,475	£90,764,179

Year	Domestic Debt	Non-Domestic Debt
31st March 2013	£78,805,756	£89,755,558
31st March 2014*	£80,097,027	£82,664,895

*2013/14 figures subject to audit assurance.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people have been taken to court for rates arrears in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38613/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The number of people taken to Court for rates arrears in each of the last three years is not available. The number of occupancies that have been listed for Court action and issued with a Court process in each of the last three years, for which information is available, is given in the table below. An occupancy represents a liable ratepayer in a property at a given time.

Rating Year	Number of Occupancies Issued with Court Processes
2011/12	41,311
2012/13	42,607
2013/14	43,851

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the review of social clauses.
(AQW 38680/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Programme for Government contains a commitment to "include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction". Targets in respect of this commitment are included in the Procurement Board's Strategic Plan.

Officials are currently liaising with DEL and other stakeholders on the implications of the end of the Steps to Work Scheme and implementation of Steps to Success for social clauses.

At its last meeting on 5 November 2014 the Procurement Board agreed to look at options for conducting a review of the impact of social clauses. Officials are currently considering options for commissioning this review.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration his Department has given to reforming procurement legislation.
(AQW 38681/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Public procurement in Northern Ireland is regulated by The Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended), The Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) and the overarching EU Treaty principles.

A new EU Procurement Directive came into force on 17 April 2014 and will be transposed into implementing Regulations next year.

My officials are working closely with colleagues in Cabinet Office to ensure the Northern Ireland view is reflected in the Regulations.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel 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 38689/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Approximately 45% of my Department's DEL expenditure relates to salaries.

My Department has already taken steps to minimise spend in this area by only filling vacancies that would otherwise have had a disproportionate affect on delivering our priorities and those that are funded through charging.

Any further staff reductions required to enable the Department to live within its 2015-16 budget will be managed in line with NICS policies, including the voluntary exit scheme announced by the Executive.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how each non ring-fenced Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits baselines were constructed in the 2015/16 draft budget.
(AQW 38715/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In terms of Resource DEL, the approach to constructing a one year Resource DEL Budget has favoured an incremental approach. This has been reinforced by comments from pre-consultation stakeholders. Therefore, rather than seeking to establish departmental resource budgets from a zero base, the 2015-16 Budget was established based on a substantive roll forward from the 2014-15 Opening Monitoring position but removing time-bound allocations.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the realisable value of all assets currently available for disposal by Departments.
(AQW 38719/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Individual departments are best placed to advise on the detail of the realisable value of all assets currently available for disposal.

Whilst Land and Property Services (LPS) hold detail of land and property assets declared surplus by departments, valuations may not reflect the current realisable value. LPS do not hold information relating to other asset types.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money allocated to each Department in the draft budget for 2015/16, is restated money from the previous budget allocation.
(AQW 38831/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No funding has been re-stated from 2014-15 allocations. 2015-16 Budgets were provisionally set as part of the draft Budget.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the Barnett consequentials of HM Government's announcement of additional healthcare spend in England and Wales.
(AQW 38855/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At this stage the UK Government has not outlined how the recently announced additional funding for 'NHS winter pressures' has been funded.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement on 3 December 2014 will detail in full the Barnett consequentials due to Northern Ireland as a consequence of UK Government spending decisions.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the administrative costs incurred by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37973/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Administrative costs incurred by each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years, are set out in the table below. Costs include total administrative and clerical costs of HSC Trusts, including staff supporting the delivery of front line services to patients and clients.

	2013/14 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2011/12 £'000
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	99,750	99,104	99,921
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	48,907	50,296	48,955
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	49,330	49,376	45,448
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	36,655	36,004	36,649
Western Health and Social Care Trust	41,693	42,180	38,926
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSCT	4,085	3,907	3,792

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the administrative costs incurred by the Health and Social Care Board in each of the last three years.
(AQW 37974/11-15)

Mr Wells: Administrative costs incurred by the Health and Social Care Board in each of the last three years are set out in the table below. This includes goods and services, running costs and salaries costs.

2013/14 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2011/12 £'000
30,456	28,630	27,557

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37401/11-15, to detail (i) the number of managers that have progressed through the pay range based on the evaluated level of the post on the basis of

delivering satisfactory performance over the last five years in each Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the number of managers on the maximum salary; and (iii) the (a) minimum and (b) maximum salary range.
(AQW 38018/11-15)

Mr Wells: In keeping with AQW 37401/11-15, the term 'managers' has been interpreted as senior executive staff i.e. Director level and above (including Chief Executive).

The numbers and personnel in the senior executive pay scheme have not been a constant over previous years and comparisons would consequently be unreliable. The collation of 5 years' figures could also only be carried out at a disproportionate cost.

Progression through the pay range is based on performance over the previous year. The most up to date figures currently available are for the year 2012/13.

(i) The table below shows the number of managers in each Health and Social Care Trust that have progressed through the pay range based on the evaluated level of the post and on the basis of delivering satisfactory performance.

	2012/13
Belfast HSC Trust	11
Southern HSC Trust	8
South Eastern HSC Trust	8
Northern HSC Trust	10
Western HSC Trust	11
NIAS HSC Trust	4

(ii) The table below shows the number of managers on the maximum salary at 1 April 2012

	2012/13
Belfast HSC Trust	2
Southern HSC Trust	1
South Eastern HSC Trust	1
Northern HSC Trust	0
Western HSC Trust	3
NIAS HSC Trust	0

(iii) The table below shows the current (2013/14) (a) minimum and (b) maximum senior executives salary range

Level	**Minimum(£)**	**Maximum(£)**
1	110,801	147,732
2	96,949	129,264
3	83,098	110,801
4	72,712	96,949
5	62,323	83,098
6	54,532	72,712
7	46,745	62,323
8	40,901	54,532

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the proposed consultation on 'The International Working Group's recommended future model for delivering congenital cardiac services for the population of Northern Ireland' meets the legal standards set for bona fide consultations in R v Brent London Borough Council, ex p Gunning, (1985) 84 LGR 168.
(AQW 38056/11-15)

Mr Wells: The consultation document, which I launched on 3 November 2014, provides patients, their families, clinicians and the public with an opportunity over a twelve week period to give their views on each of the fourteen recommendations, and invites alternative views to the model recommended by the International Working Group (IWG), having considered four possible service configuration options. There will be six public engagement events at locations throughout Northern Ireland

during the consultation period, which will provide further opportunities for views to be shared on how that model might work best. I will await the outcome of the consultation and consider those views thoroughly before making my final decision on whether to implement the IWG's recommended service model.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the amount of funding initially allocated to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15; and (ii) whether this amount has been reduced due to budget pressures.
(AQW 38066/11-15)

Mr Wells: The interim grant letter issued to Gingerbread NI for 2014/15 provided them an allocation of £45,424.67. The letter of offer and terms and conditions of grant stated that the Department was unable to confirm funding beyond the four month period covered in the letter.

Now that we have clarity on the financial position of my department in 2014/15 following the October monitoring round, I intend to confirm the final allocation to all community and voluntary organisations this year very shortly.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why an employee would be engaged for five or more years through a recruitment agency; and what plans are in place to prevent such a practice from reoccuring.
(AQW 38087/11-15)

Mr Wells: In the absence of specific information as to which Health and Social Care sector organisation, and to which post the Member is referring, it is difficult to comment on the particular circumstances referred to and what steps, if any, the organisation is taking to prevent such a practice from reoccurring in the future.

Health and Social Care Trusts will only use agency staff when unable to recruit and in situations of urgency. Agency workers have the right to apply for all vacancies within their Trust.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the costs experienced by the families of premature and sick babies; and what assistance his Department can provide to these families.
(AQW 38094/11-15)

Mr Wells: I fully appreciate that there are costs for parents and families associated with having a baby in neonatal care and that this can be an additional worry at an already difficult time. For this reason, our neonatal units offer various support services, which may include free accommodation for parents, free parking, meals, meal vouchers, kitchen facilities, and childcare/crèche facilities. The Health and Social Care Hospital Travel Costs Scheme also provides reimbursement of travel costs to hospital for health service treatment for patients and their dependents falling under certain criteria.

I am aware of the soon to be released report produced by the charities Bliss and TinyLife, which sets out the results of a recent survey on the costs faced by families of premature and sick babies. I will be giving careful consideration to the findings of this report, and my Department will work closely with stakeholders on any issues that are highlighted.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what increases in salary have been received by Northern Health and Social Care Trust staff who currently earn in excess of £60,000 per annum, between 1 January 2009 and 1 January 2014; and how many staff received these increases.
(AQW 38101/11-15)

Mr Wells: HSC staff who earn in excess of £60,000 include a wide range of disciplines that are subject to different pay agreements. The information requested is not readily available and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost

In general terms, increases in salary between 1 January 2009 and 1 January 2014 would have been given as the result of annual pay awards. All HSC staff, subject to satisfactory performance, would have received a cost of living increase for that particular financial year and where appropriate incremental progression. It should be noted, however, that a Government pay freeze was in place during 2011/12 and 2012/13, when no cost of living increases were made.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the £31m for unscheduled care and the £4m for nursing staff levels from the October Monitoring round will be allocated.
(AQW 38106/11-15)

Mr Wells: The £31m allocation for unscheduled care will be aimed at:

- **Unscheduled Care (£5m)**: Some of this allocation will fund unscheduled care initiatives which are already in place such as expansion of the medical workforce at a number of sites; support for 24/7 acute community working and the continuation of Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officers (HALOs) at four Emergency Departments. Funding will also be provided to enhance out of hours capacity in primary and community care and to support winter pressures across the Trusts, including NIAS.
- **Domiciliary Care (£8m)**: This funding will help to address the increasing demands for new packages and the increased costs in this area. It will help to maintain patient flow through the hospital system and ensure that the most vulnerable people in the community are prioritised for support in their homes.

- **Trusts Contingency Plans (£18m)**: This funding will help the trusts to manage some of the pressures in relation to agency/bank/locum medical, nursing and social work staff and to minimise the impact on the delivery of services from contingency plan proposals.

In terms of Safety and Quality (£4m), this will be used to help to meet the ongoing pressures of nursing staffing in medical and surgical inpatient hospital wards. This funding equates to approximately 100 posts, and will:

- Assist in ensuring safe nursing levels on medical and surgical inpatient wards;
- Bring acute in patient wards closer to alignment with the requirements of normative nursing; and
- Reduce the number of additional hours required through bank and agency

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37840/11-15, what action he will take to ensure that the Ulster Hospital's clinical target of 6 months for steroid injection treatment is met; and how he plans to address the current situation whereby a lack of consultants with specific expertise is resulting in some patients having to wait 14 months between injections.
(AQW 38121/11-15)

Mr Wells: The responsibility for arranging treatment for patients including the frequency of steroid injections is both a clinical and an operational matter which, in this case, is the responsibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT).

The SHSCT is currently reforming the way its chronic pain service is delivered in order to manage certain types of patient in a more effective way, thus freeing up more clinic time for the more complex patients. An injection clinic session has also recently commenced to manage the less complex cases allowing a higher number of patients to be seen. In addition, a consultant from the Trust is currently receiving training in chronic pain in Scotland and will be returning to the Trust early next year.

Not all patients require steroid injections every six months and some patients will not need a further injection after 6 months. However, if a patient is in pain and the GP re-refers the patient, they will be given an urgent appointment.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why appointment times for post-transplant patients are being extended in each Health and Social Care Trust; and what impact this decision will have on vulnerable patients who are susceptible to infection.
(AQW 38147/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is assumed this question refers to renal transplant recipients. The review interval for post-transplant patients steadily increases as the time from transplantation increases and is set by the responsible clinician in line with individual patients' clinical need. Health and Social Care Trusts have not reported any issues regarding the extension of post-transplant review intervals beyond that which is clinically appropriate.

To minimise the risk of infection, post-transplant patients are provided with appropriate advice on behaviour, on regular immunisations and pharmaco-prophylaxis in line with standard clinical practice and national clinical guidelines. All patients are encouraged to seek medical advice at an early stage should they feel they are developing an infection.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether TomoTherapy is available as a means of treatment for cancer patients.
(AQW 38153/11-15)

Mr Wells: Tomotherapy is not available in Northern Ireland as a means to deliver external beam radiotherapy treatment for cancer patients.

Tomotherapy machines have been installed in a small number of UK sites; however, the vast majority of cancer centres have chosen linear accelerator based solutions in view of their superior versatility and accuracy of their image guided technology.

The linear accelerators currently installed at the Belfast Cancer Centre can deliver all of the equivalent functionality and clinically effective treatment options of tomotherapy. There is little research evidence to suggest that tomotherapy is superior to conventional radiotherapy. The linear accelerators in the Cancer Centre are capable of much more precise, accurate, efficient and versatile therapy than tomotherapy. This view is supported by a number of published studies comparing the possible treatment and dosimetric advantages of a range of radiotherapy treatment modalities.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of the availablity of TomoTherapy treatment in Britain.
(AQW 38154/11-15)

Mr Wells: Tomotherapy is not available in Northern Ireland as a means to deliver external beam radiotherapy treatment for cancer patients.

Tomotherapy machines have been installed in a small number of UK sites; however, the vast majority of cancer centres have chosen linear accelerator based solutions in view of their superior versatility and accuracy of their image guided technology.

The linear accelerators currently installed at the Belfast Cancer Centre can deliver all of the equivalent functionality and clinically effective treatment options of tomotherapy. There is little research evidence to suggest that tomotherapy is superior to conventional radiotherapy. The linear accelerators in the Cancer Centre are capable of much more precise, accurate, efficient and versatile therapy than tomotherapy. This view is supported by a number of published studies comparing the possible treatment and dosimetric advantages of a range of radiotherapy treatment modalities.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has assessed the benefit of utilising TomoTherapy as a means of treatment for cancer patients.
(AQW 38155/11-15)

Mr Wells: Tomotherapy is not available in Northern Ireland as a means to deliver external beam radiotherapy treatment for cancer patients.

Tomotherapy machines have been installed in a small number of UK sites; however, the vast majority of cancer centres have chosen linear accelerator based solutions in view of their superior versatility and accuracy of their image guided technology.

The linear accelerators currently installed at the Belfast Cancer Centre can deliver all of the equivalent functionality and clinically effective treatment options of tomotherapy. There is little research evidence to suggest that tomotherapy is superior to conventional radiotherapy. The linear accelerators in the Cancer Centre are capable of much more precise, accurate, efficient and versatile therapy than tomotherapy. This view is supported by a number of published studies comparing the possible treatment and dosimetric advantages of a range of radiotherapy treatment modalities.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the spend on the cleaning and hygiene regime of Pinewood Residential Care Home in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38195/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have provided the following figures for cleaning and hygiene spend on Pinewood Residential Home in the past five years:

2008/09 £125,793

2009/10 £140,439

2010/11 £138,329

2011/12 £148,965

2012/13 £146,252

The Trust have also advised me there are additional costs incurred by 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 Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he classifies as frontline health and social care services; and whether such includes the provision of intermediate and respite beds.
(AQW 38196/11-15)

Mr Wells: I classify frontline care as the health and social care services provided directly to patients and clients. This can occur in a range of settings and locations.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail each statutory residential care home, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, including the number of (i) beds; and (ii) residents in each, as of 1 November 2014, for each year since 2011.
(AQW 38248/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not collected centrally and was requested from the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board.

The tables below detail the number of beds and residents in statutory residential homes for the elderly and elderly mentally infirm (EMI) at 1st September, for each year since 2011 in each HSC Trust.

Beds and Residents in Statutory Residential Care Homes (Elderly and Elderly Mentally Infirm) at 1st September

Belfast HSC Trust		**01/09/2011**	**01/09/2012**	**01/09/2013**	**01/09/2014**
Pine Lodge*	Beds	40	40	40	40
	Residents	20	24	36	19
Killynure	Beds	40	40	40	35
	Residents	28	32	21	33

Belfast HSC Trust		01/09/2011	01/09/2012	01/09/2013	01/09/2014
Orchardville	Beds	30	30	30	29
	Residents	27	27	27	26
Brae Valley	Beds	30	30	30	24
	Residents	21	22	20	20
Ballyowen	Beds	26	26	26	26
	Residents	24	26	20	23
Bruce House	Beds	28	28	28	28
	Residents	28	27	20	28
Chestnut Grove*	Beds	44	44	44	44
	Residents	22	28	21	24
Grovetree*	Beds	44	44	44	Closed
	Residents	23	0	0	
Shankill	Beds	40	40	40	Closed
	Residents	23	7	0	

* Belfast HSC Trust ceased permanent admissions to non EMI homes in 2009, therefore, figures for Pine Lodge, Chestnut Grove and Grovetree refer only to remaining permanent residents, temporary residents, i.e. respite or step-down.

Northern HSC Trust		01/09/2011	01/09/2012	01/09/2013	01/09/2014
Roddens	Beds	29	29	29	29
	Residents	26	27	22	20
Rathmoyle	Beds	39	39	39	39
	Residents	30	29	17	6
Pinewood	Beds	36	36	36	36
	Residents	32	27	22	23
Rosedale	Beds	36	36	30	30
	Residents	30	28	23	22
Greenisland	Beds	30	30	0	0
	Residents	28	23	0	0
Clonmore	Beds	40	40	40	40
	Residents	38	35	20	32
Lisgarel	Beds	40	40	40	40
	Residents	39	27	32	38
Westlands	Beds	29	29	29	29
	Residents	28	26	18	23
Joymount	Beds	40	40	40	40
	Residents	39	37	35	35

Please note Rathmoyle and Greenisland are being replaced by new supported living facilities.

South Eastern HSC Trust		01/09/2011	01/09/2012	01/09/2013	01/09/2014
Ardview House	Beds	39	39	39	39
	Residents	36	27	21	24

South Eastern HSC Trust		01/09/2011	01/09/2012	01/09/2013	01/09/2014
Drumlough House	Beds	39	39	39	39
	Residents	33	33	30	31
Laurelhill House	Beds	30	30	30	30
	Residents	30	28	27	28
Loch Cuan	Beds	16	Closed		
	Residents	8			
Mount Alexander	Beds	36	37	37	37
	Residents	32	32	34	34
Newcroft Lodge	Beds	32	32	32	32
	Residents	31	29	24	30
Northfield House	Beds	41	41	41	41
	Residents	18	19	20	18
Ravara	Beds	42	42	Closed	
	Residents	33	23		

Please note Grove House, Seymour House and St. John's House closed prior to 2011.

Southern HSC Trust		01/09/2011	01/09/2012	01/09/2013	01/09/2014
Slieve Roe House	Beds	17	17	17	17
	Residents	14	14	11	12
Cloughreagh house	Beds	23	23	23	23
	Residents	20	21	20	18
Roxborough House	Beds	30	30	30	30
	Residents	24	22	20	23
Skeagh House	Beds	24	24	#	#
	Residents	21	12	#	#
Crozier House	Beds	27	27	27	27
	Residents	20	24	22^	24

Skeagh House was temporarily evacuated in 2013. ^ Includes 8 residents relocated from Skeagh House.

Western HSC Trust		01/09/2011	01/09/2012	01/09/2013	01/09/2014
Thackeray Place	Beds	32	32	32	32
	Residents	30	32	32	24
Rectory Field	Beds	35	35	35	35
	Residents	27	25	24	18
William Street	Beds	27	27	27	27
	Residents	26	22	22	16
Seymour Gardens	Beds	26	26	26	26
	Residents	25	25	25	25
Greenfield	Beds	34	34	34	34
	Residents	32	27	24	28

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential closure of statutory residential care homes in each of Health and Social Care Trust in the next (i) six; and (ii) twelve months.
(AQW 38249/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following a HSC Board- led public consultation on proposed criteria for the evaluation of statutory residential homes for older people, final agreed criteria for evaluation of homes were published in June 2014.

Trusts were required to apply the criteria to relevant residential care homes for older people in their area, and subsequently make proposals for change to the Board for consideration.

It is anticipated that Trust proposals for change will be considered at a HSC Board meeting in early 2015.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail where Multiple Sclerosis respite services will be provided in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust following the closure of services in Dalriada Hospital in November 2014.
(AQW 38295/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that those who access Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Respite Services in the Dalriada Hospital mainly come from the Northern (45 users), Western (currently 10 users), and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust areas (currently 2 users). There are a range of independent sector providers in these areas and the other Health and Social Care Trusts have been providing MS respite care through the independent sector for some time.

For those who require respite services after November 2014, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust will continue to meet their needs and named workers are currently meeting with service users and their carers to discuss those needs and agree suitable alternative arrangements. Respite services to MS patients will still be provided and everyone who requires respite will continue to receive it.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he was first informed by officials from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust of the proposal to close Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle.
(AQW 38296/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust's final contingency plan was submitted to my Department on 23 October 2014.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the current maximum waiting time for a visit from an Occupational Therapist in County Fermanagh; and (ii) what efforts his Department is taking to reduce the waiting time.
(AQW 38315/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT) has advised that the longest wait for occupational therapy at 30 September 2014 was 314 days. The WHSCT has further advised that service demands currently outweigh funded staff capacity. All referrals are screened on the basis of clinical need, risk and appropriateness. Priority is given to those clients who are deemed at highest clinical risk and all other referrals are processed chronologically.

The Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency are currently working closely with the WHSCT to address this waiting time issue. Work is ongoing to establish the level of demand for occupational therapy services and the capacity necessary to meet such demand in line with my challenging 9 week access standard.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department intends to improve the provision of cancer services for people in County Fermanagh.
(AQW 38316/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of cancer services in County Fermanagh. Residents in Fermanagh have access to the full range of local cancer services; including surgery, chemotherapy and specialist palliative care, servicing a total population of approximately 300,000.

People living in County Fermanagh will benefit from the new radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital when it becomes operational in 2016. Currently all radiotherapy is delivered at the Belfast Cancer Centre. The location of the new unit will mean that all cancer patients in Fermanagh will have access to radiotherapy treatments closer to home.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to detail the number of referrals made by each Health and Social Care Trust to the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital, in each of the last three years, broken down by month.
(AQW 38326/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of referrals made by each Health and Social Care Trust to the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital is not collected centrally.

Information is however available on the number of admissions to Dalriada Hospital with a primary diagnosis of respite care by the patient's trust of residence, which is detailed in the table below.

Admissions1 to Dalriada with a primary diagnosis of Respite Care2, 2011/12 - 2013/14

HSC Trust of Residence[3]	Apr 2011	May 2011	Jun 2011	Jul 2011	Aug 2011	Sep 2011	Oct 2011	Nov 2011	Dec 2011	Jan 2012	Feb 2012	Mar 2012
Belfast	<5	0	<5	0	0	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	5	18	9	11	22	7	14	11	<5	<5	0	<5
Western	0	<5	0	<5	5	<5	<5	0	0	0	0	<5

HSC Trust of Residence[3]	Apr 2012	May 2012	Jun 2012	Jul 2012	Aug 2012	Sep 2012	Oct 2012	Nov 2012	Dec 2012	Jan 2013	Feb 2013	Mar 2013
Belfast	0	<5	0	0	0	<5	0	0	0	0	0	<5
Northern	6	21	10	17	12	10	10	<5	5	<5	15	5
Western	0	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	0	0	0	<5	0

HSC Trust of Residence[3]	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	Jul 2013	Aug 2013	Sep 2013	Oct 2013	Nov 2013	Dec 2013	Jan 2014	Feb 2014	Mar 2014
Belfast	0	0	<5	0	0	<5	0	0	0	0	<5	0
Northern	<5	15	<5	10	15	9	12	7	5	<5	15	<5
Western	<5	<5	<5	0	<5	<5	<5	0	<5	0	<5	0

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Notes:

Figures relate to admissions rather than individuals as such an individual may be admitted to hospital more than once during the year and will be counted for each admission.

Cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

1 Admissions are estimated using deaths and discharges.

2 Respite Care has been defined using the International Classification of Disease (revision 10) code Z75.5, in only the primary diagnostic position.

3 HSC Trust of residence refers to the patient's Local Commissioning Group which is based on the patient's postcode.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the services provided at the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre at Dalriada Hospital were promoted or communicated (a) within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and (b) to the other Health and Social Care Trusts in the last two years.
(AQW 38327/11-15)

Mr Wells: In the last two years, within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, when a service user with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) was assessed as requiring respite, the MS Centre at Dalriada Hospital was explored as an option for meeting this need. It would then be the service user's personal choice as to whether this option was progressed or an alternative considered.

In relation to Health and Social Care Trusts, in the last two years
annual contract review meetings were held with the other two Trusts who commission services i.e. the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The commissioned levels of activity have been reducing over the past 10 years.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the £600,000 that the Northern Trust have said would be saved as a result of closing 32 beds at Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 38368/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust expects to make the following savings as a result of the temporary closure of 12 MS Respite beds and 20 Intermediate Care beds in Dalriada Hospital. The savings plan will apply until 31 March 2015.

Cost Savings for Intermediate Care (Inc MS Respite) – Dalriada Hospital

Ward Costs	Cost Savings for 4 months from 01/12/2014 £'000
Nursing Costs	405
Goods & Services Costs of Ward	31
Support Service Costs	79
Utilities	9
Medical Cover	41
Allied Health Professional Costs	57
Total Dalriada Ward Costs	**622**
Less: Gross Reprovision Costs of 6 MS beds	(61)
Totals Net of Reprovision Costs	**561**

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where Multiple Sclerosis patients will be relocated to should Dalriada Hospital close.
(AQW 38369/11-15)

Mr Wells: Any decision regarding the future of the Dalriada Hospital rests with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. Following its recent decision to propose a temporary closure of the MS respite beds in the hospital, as part of its financial contingency plans, the Trust has provided public assurance that respite services to MS patients will still be provided and everyone who requires respite will receive it. The Trust is working with everyone involved to ensure that service users' assessed needs are met.

The Trust has confirmed that named workers are currently meeting with service users and their carers to ascertain their specific needs and to identify those providers who would provide the best alternative to that provided at the Dalriada Hospital.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the pressure that would be put on acute services by the closure of intermediate beds at Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 38370/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has a number of services in place within the community to ensure patients are supported in their own home, are only admitted to hospital when absolutely necessary and to facilitate early discharge. The range of services operating across the Trust are: domiciliary care; reablement services; and, a rapid response service. With regard to intermediate care services, the Trust currently operates 106 intermediate care beds with 40% of these in the Causeway locality.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the closure of intermediate care and respite beds is in keeping with Transforming Your Care.
(AQW 38371/11-15)

Mr Wells: The recent announcements of temporary closures of intermediate care and respite beds were due to the need to maintain the integrity of services and make required savings in what is left of the current financial year. At all times, my clear focus is on ensuring that services are safe and effective while seeking to achieve financial balance. Due to the seriousness of the current financial situation, there may be instances where necessary short term actions do not match the Department's long term policy aspirations.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the outpatient specialities for which consultations are currently held at Moyle Hospital, Larne; and the reasons why any specialities have ceased since 2011.
(AQW 38385/11-15)

Mr Wells: The following consultant-led services are provided in the Moyle Hospital: Rheumatology; Diabetic; Ear Nose and Throat (ENT); Surgery; Orthopaedics; Gynaecology; Antenatal; Ophthalmology (which is a visiting speciality from Belfast Trust) and Visual Fields; and Paediatrics.

Four consultant-led services have been relocated from the Moyle Hospital site since 2011.

- The Consultant led Dermatology clinic held on the Moyle Hospital site was re-located to the Antrim site due to job planning requirements in 2013/14, this is a permanent move.
- There is a current staff maternity leave within the respiratory service which is being covered by a Locum Consultant. The job planning for the locum has located the clinic temporarily at Whiteabbey Hospital Outpatients rather than the Moyle Hospital Outpatients.

- Patients currently requiring ultrasound scans during pregnancy have to attend Antrim Area Hospital for this service due to a fault with the equipment. A new scanner has been ordered and it is expected this will be in place by the end of this year at which point the service will resume in the Moyle Hospital.
- The speciality of General Medicine has been reconfigured in the last 3 years with General medicine clinics reconfigured to speciality medical clinics. There was activity for General medicine outpatients in Moyle Hospital in 12/13 which did not continue in 13/14.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of Sapphire Nurses; and (ii) the range of support services available for patients with epilepsy in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38386/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are currently no Sapphire funded Nurses engaged in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The Western Trust has a 0.5 wte epilepsy nurse specialist for Acute Adult medicine who sees patients aged 16 and older. Patients younger than this are seen within the paediatric epilepsy service.

Support services for epilepsy patients within the Western Trust include:

- Consultant outpatient clinics;
- Epilepsy Nurse Specialist Outpatient clinics;
- Epilepsy Nurse Specialist transition clinics – paediatric to adult service;
- Telephone advice from Epilepsy Nurse Specialist;
- Referral to Occupational Therapy and Social Services;
- Signposting to voluntary sector – Epilepsy Action Group.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the measures contained in the Western Health and Social Care Trust's savings plan for 2014/15, particularly measures which threaten to reduce essential health services at the Tyrone County Hospital and in the Omagh area.
(AQW 38388/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust, like other Trusts is currently implementing a number of contingency measures which are necessary to address a range of competing pressures and priorities across health and social care, as it is simply not possible to maintain current levels of service provision from within existing budget allocations. In developing these measures, paramount consideration has been given to patient safety, whilst also seeking to achieve financial balance for DHSSPS.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37334/11-15, for an update on his consideration of these recommendations; and when a decision about the viability of an air ambulance service will be made.
(AQW 38406/11-15)

Mr Wells: I discussed the Republic of Ireland's (ROI) Emergency Aeromedical Support service group's review with the ROI's Minister of Health, Leo Varadkar TD, at a North South Ministerial Council meeting on 12 November 2014. I expect to receive the group's report in the near future and will consider the recommendations in this report and the Health and Social Care Board's Helicopter Emergency Medical Service study before making a decision about an air ambulance service.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the full time equivalent staff allocation of the Emergency Department in (i) the South West Acute Hospital; and (ii) Erne Hospital at the time of its closure.
(AQW 38407/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western HSC Trust have provided the figures shown in the table below, showing whole-time equivalent (WTE) staff allocations (funded establishment posts) for the Emergency Departments at Erne Hospital, at the time of its closure in June 2012, and at the South-West Acute Hospital in November 2014.

	Erne Hospital, June 2012	**South-West Acute Hospital, November 2014**
Grade	**WTE**	**WTE**
Band 7 Nurse	4.83	4.83
Band 6 Nurse	2.00	2.00
Band 5 Nurse	13.24	13.24
Band 3 Nurse Support	0.77	4.27
Band 2 Nurse Support	3.00	0.00
Consultant	7.50	7.50
Total	**31.34**	**31.84**

Source: Western HSC Trust

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all Health and Social Care Trusts have a specific universal threshold in respect of care packages; and if so, to detail how they are calculated for senior citizens requiring domiciliary care, including the range of packages; and if each Health and Social Care Trust sets their own threshold, to detail their respective ranges of care packages and expenditure.
(AQW 38412/11-15)

Mr Wells: All the Health and Social Care Trusts assess the needs of older people using the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT). The Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care (Circular HSS (ECCU) 2/2008) is used to determine eligibility and fair access to domiciliary care services, to ensure resources are targeted to those most in need.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the decision was taken to merge a palliative care ward and a rehabilitation ward at Tyrone County Hospital, given that the palliative care ward cares for terminally ill patients and the rehabilitation ward cares for patients that are recovering.
(AQW 38415/11-15)

Mr Wells: My priorities are to ensure the services provided by Health and Social Care are safe and effective and also 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 achieve financial break even. Each Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain safe and effective and has taken steps to protect frontline services.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust decided on 11th November 2014 that it will keep the palliative care and rehabilitation wards at Tyrone County Hospital separate.

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 38422/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Chief Medical Officer is leading on this work; a project board has been formed and has met. Consultation work to consider the views of patients, the industry and other key stakeholders is being taken forward. I have requested initial findings by the end of November and the evaluation will be completed by the end of the year.

I empathise entirely with patients undergoing treatment for cancer and other serious conditions and want to assure them that my aim is to ensure they receive the most effective treatment possible.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the repercussions for staff of Dalriada Hospital following its temporary closure.
(AQW 38428/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am advised that there are just under 120 employees associated with the Dalriada Hospital site, and it is anticipated that 61 employees will be affected by the service change.

Permanent staff will be redeployed to support acute, community and emergency services. No staff will lose their jobs and the hours they work will remain as per their contract.

There are a number of posts in the Causeway locality (ie Ballymoney, Coleraine and Ballycastle) and Human Resources staff and service managers, in partnership with Trade Unions, are currently working with staff to match their skills to posts available and to ensure that, as far as possible, individual circumstances are taken into account.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to alleviate the length of waiting times in relation to primary school children being referred for autism diagnosis.
(AQW 38448/11-15)

Mr Wells: Over the last few years demand for Autism Spectrum Disorder specific services has continued to rise. This increase is due in part to improvements in the early identification of children for assessment by General Practitioners, Health Visitors, and Educational Services. As a direct result of this sustained and continuing pattern of increased demand on autism services, the waiting times for assessment and support continue to lengthen. It is recognised that there is a shortfall in resources and this area has been identified as a core pressure requiring additional investment.

To help alleviate the length of waiting times, the HSC Board is reviewing the current operating models across all Trusts with a view to remodelling the assessment and diagnostic process. This should maximise the current capacity of the system. A new template to record waiting times in excess of 13 weeks will enable the Board to monitor average waiting times for commencement of assessment.

As an interim measure, the Board are working with Trusts to agree, based on their respective capacity, a maximum waiting time. Once agreed, families will be made aware of the maximum time that they can expect to wait to commence the assessment process.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he supports the Alzheimer's Society's new Right to Know campaign; and what steps he will take to improve early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and support patients following diagnosis.
(AQW 38471/11-15)

Mr Wells: A key objective for the regional Dementia Strategy Implementation Group is to raise diagnosis rates across NI to 75% and above. The most recently available figures show that NI has a diagnosis rate of 63.2% which is well above the UK average (46%). The rate for Belfast is 75.1%, which is the highest in the UK.

Over the next 3 years, the Implementation Group will focus on the key target areas of (i) awareness raising, information and support, (ii) training; and (iii) short-breaks, respite and support to carers.

The Delivering Social Change Programme will be contributing £6.2m to support this work over the next three years, and this will aim to deliver a significant improvement in the quality of dementia care and the support people living with dementia need to maintain their independence and live well with the condition for as long as possible.

I have no doubt that these objectives, alongside the work of Alzheimer's Society; will make a significant contribution to the quality of life, care and treatment of people with dementia and their carers.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much will be saved as a result of the temporary closure of the GP Ward in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38485/11-15)

Mr Wells: The cost savings which are expected to be made as a result of the temporary closure of the GP Ward (planned from 1 December 2014) are approximately £207k.

They form part of the Trust's overall plan to achieve financial break even while maximising patient safety.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can provide a reassurance to staff currently working in the Minor Injuries Unit and GP Ward in Bangor Community Hospital that their jobs will be protected.
(AQW 38486/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has given an assurance that all permanent staff in both the Bangor GP Ward and Bangor Minor Injuries Unit will have their jobs protected.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the proposed changes for short break services for children with a disability at Willowgrove House in Banbridge; and what consideration has been given to incorporating parental views on these changes, including whether the potential impact on the health and wellbeing of parents and their children is being considered.
(AQW 38489/11-15)

Mr Wells: In keeping with Transforming Your Care, the Southern Trust is currently reviewing the short break provision it offers to children with disabilities with the aim of providing a more flexible, responsive, quality service, and a wider range of family oriented services in the community. This will provide an alternative option to the existing traditional residential short breaks units, such as Willowgrove House.

Family based carers may include childminders and short break foster carers, offering a service which is more flexible than a facility providing for a large number of children. It also allows carers and their children/family to develop a supportive relationship with another family. The Trust's aim is for all children with disabilities, under 12 years old, and assessed as requiring an overnight short break, to be able to avail of this in a family setting, wherever possible.

As the number and range of support services and options increases, it is anticipated that the numbers of children and young people using Willowgrove will decrease. In the meantime there will be no reduction in the service being offered by Willowgrove or the other residential short breaks units within the Trust. The children and young people currently using the facilities will be able to continue to do so at a level that meets their assessed needs.

The Trust has arranged a number of meetings with parents over recent months to discuss potential developments in short breaks' provision, and the consultation process is ongoing. Parents' views and assessments regarding the impact of being a carer are also considered on an individual case basis for every child and family availing of overnight breaks. Parents will continue to be involved in discussions in relation to the development of the Trust's range of short breaks services.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current waiting time for access to the Meals on Wheels service in County Fermanagh.
(AQW 38490/11-15)

Mr Wells: This information is not held centrally by the Department and was therefore requested from the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response can be found below.

The Western HSC Trust does not record this information.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) current full time equivalent (FTE) complement; and (ii) allocated FTE of community occupational therapists in County Fermanagh.
(AQW 38491/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust advises that there are currently 4.5 WTE (whole-time equivalent) Community Occupational Therapists, and 1.0 WTE Technical Instructor in post in County Fermanagh. This corresponds to the allocated WTE.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to quantify the number of patients from across the border accessing services in (i) Erne Hospital; and (ii) South West Acute Hospital, broken down by clinical area, in each quarter since January 2010.
(AQW 38492/11-15)

Mr Wells: Due to the small numbers of patients accessing services at Erne and South West Acute hospital information requested has been presented by calendar year rather than quarter.

The number of patients, resident in the Republic of Ireland1 that attended an outpatient appointment in the Erne or South West Acute hospitals, since January 2010, is contained in the table below.

	Erne[2]			South West Acute[3]		
Specialty	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
General Surgery	42	48	19	10	24	32
Trauma & Orthopaedics	44	16	<5	0	26	5
ENT	5	49	38	19	12	<5
Ophthalmology	0	<5	0	0	6	<5
Oral Surgery	<5	7	<5	<5	<5	<5
General Medicine	<5	<5	<5	<5	5	<5
Palliative Medicine	0	<5	0	0	0	0
Cardiology	<5	<5	0	0	<5	0
Dermatology	411	274	187	178	484	433
Nephrology	0	0	0	<5	6	5
Neurology	<5	0	<5	0	0	0
Rheumatology	<5	<5	0	<5	<5	<5
Paediatrics	5	<5	0	<5	0	<5
Geriatric Medicine	<5	0	0	0	<5	0
Obs & Gyn (Gynaecology)	6	8	7	10	30	29
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics)	63	47	20	8	49	19
Chemical Pathology	0	0	0	0	0	<5

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1 These data do not include patients resident in the Republic of Ireland who are registered at an address in Northern Ireland.

2 Erne Hospital closed on 21st June 2012.

3 South West Acute Hospital opened on 21st June 2012.

Figures less than 5 have been masked to provide patient confidentiality.

The number of patients, resident in the Republic of Ireland1 admitted to the Erne or South West Acute hospitals, since January 2010, is contained in the table below.

	Erne[2]			South West Acute[3]		
Specialty	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
General Surgery	36	48	11	19	45	27
Oral Surgery	24	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	Erne[2]			South West Acute[3]		
	2010	2011	2012	2012	2013	2014
Anaesthetics	0	0	0	0	<5	<5
Pain Management	0	<5	0	0	0	0
General Medicine	9	14	4	17	29	14
Cardiology	<5	<5	1	4	7	5
Paediatrics	9	7	0	6	19	6
Sick Babies	0	<5	0	2	0	0
Geriatric Medicine	<5	<5	0	1	<5	<5
Obstetrics	13	19	6	13	17	6
Gynaecology	7	7	4	7	11	16
Well Babies - Paed	11	10	5	10	6	<5
General Practice Other	21	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1 These data do not include patients resident in the Republic of Ireland who are registered at an address in Northern Ireland.

2 Erne Hospital closed on 21st June 2012.

3 South West Acute Hospital opened on 21st June 2012.

Figures less than 5 have been masked to provide patient confidentiality.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) location; and (ii) number of 'alternative nurse' assisted intermediate facilities in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, includiing the percentage occupancy from 2009 to date.
(AQW 38498/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not held centrally therefore it was requested from the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response can be found in Table 1 below. Note that information is not available for 2009/10.

Table 1. Number and occupancy rates of nursing intermediate care beds in the Northern HSC Trust (2010/11 - 2014/15)

Unit	Beds	Occupancy %				
		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	YTD 2014-15
Robinson Hospital	21-25	82.5	84.9	88.1	87.8	91
Inver Hospital	16-18	78.4	86.9	82	89.7	90.2
Mid Ulster Hospital	min 3*	N/A	N/A	91.3	92.2	91.1
Whiteabbey Hospital	min 4*	N/A	N/A	94.3	89.1	89.6
Dalriada Hospital	20	87	86.8	86.8	86.3	92

* The intermediate care beds in Mid Ulster Hospital and Whiteabbey Hospital are in the Sub-Acute Rehab Wards which allow for some flexibility at times to increase numbers. Occupancy figures are therefore in relation to the whole ward as these beds are not monitored separately.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of the projected net savings for 2014/15 for the temporary closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38503/11-15)

Mr Wells: As both these questions relate to projected cost savings in Bangor Community Hospital, a combined response has been provided

The savings which are expected to be made as a result of proposed closures at Bangor Community Hospital are as follows:

- The temporary closure of the Bangor MIU (planned from 1 December 2014) will deliver cash releasing savings of approximately £65k.

- The temporary closure of the twenty beds (planned from 1 December 2014) will save approximately £207k.

They form part of the Trust's overall plan to achieve financial break even while maximising patient safety.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the staff complement of Northfield House Residential Home in Donaghadee.
(AQW 38529/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Trust have provided the current staffing position at Northfield House by headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE). This is shown in the table below.

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Residential Home Manager (Band 7)	1	1.00
Senior Care Assistants (Band 5)	2	1.85
Acting Senior Care Assistant (Band 5)	1	0.80
Care Assistants (Band 2)	8	6.32
Temporary Care Assistants (Band 2)	2	1.6
Cook (Band 3)	2	1.33
Catering Assistants (Band 1)	9	4.72
Total	**25**	**17.62**

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of residents of Northfield House Residential Home in Donaghadee.
(AQW 38530/11-15)

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 Northfield House is registered for 41 beds. At 13 November 2014 there were 4 permanent residents, 3 respite residents, 8 intermediate care residents and 26 vacant beds.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the staff complement of the Minor Injury Unit in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38532/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Trust have provided the current staffing position at the Bangor Minor Injury Unit (MIU) by headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE). This is shown in the table below. The Trust note that all staff work across both Bangor and Ards MIUs, and that they have excluded members of staff on sick leave for reasons of confidentiality.

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Band 7 Nurse	4	3.49
Band 4 Admin & Clerical	1	0.82
Band 3 Admin & Clerical	2	1.61

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the staff complement of the GP Ward in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38533/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Trust have provided the current staffing position at the Bangor Community Hospital's GP ward by headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE). This is shown in the table below.

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Band 2 Admin & Clerical	1	1.00
Band 2 Nurse Support	7	5.28
Band 3 Nurse Support	2	1.48
Band 5 Nurse	13	11.34

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Band 6 Nurse	1	0.80
Band 7 Nurse	1	1.00
Total	**25**	**20.90**

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on addiction service provision in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust of the decision by the Department of Justice to cease funding the Railway Street Addiction Service in Ballymena from 31 January 2015.
(AQW 38536/11-15)

Mr Wells: Railway Street Community Addiction Service has been a successful partnership between the Community Safety Unit of the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) for over 14 years. The service works in partnership with the local community and criminal justice agencies to reduce the harm caused to individuals, their families and the wider community by drug misuse.

The Railway Street service has been independently assessed as a model of best practice in harm reduction services for injecting drug users across the UK and I am extremely disappointed by the DoJ's decision to remove funding from this effective example of cross-Departmental working.

The NHSCT 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 they are currently reviewing the way in which a significantly reduced service can be provided in the future. It should be clarified that, following a meeting between the NHSCT and DoJ, funding has been provide to extend the service until the end of February 2014 to facilitate the work with staff and service users in managing this change.

Since that meeting, the NHSCT has had a number of meetings with staff at Railway Street to advise them of the decision and to discuss the implications for staff and service users. A working group has been established to draw up options to ensure that those engaged in the service continue to be supported, albeit in a different way. As part of this process, NHSCT will also meet with other stakeholders including local GPs and pharmacists.

NHSCT is also meeting with officials from the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency on 24 November 2014 to discuss and review further the implications of the 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. However, the withdrawal of funding will undoubtedly have implications for the total level of community (i.e. Tier 3) alcohol and drug services provided the area.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the actual or planned discussions with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on the future provision of addiction services provided by Railway Street Addiction Services in Ballymena in light of the decision by the Department of Justice to cease funding from January 2015, which represents a 66 per cent cut in funding in an area with the largest number of drug related deaths outside of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38537/11-15)

Mr Wells: Railway Street Community Addiction Service has been a successful partnership between the Community Safety Unit of the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) for over 14 years. The service works in partnership with the local community and criminal justice agencies to reduce the harm caused to individuals, their families and the wider community by drug misuse.

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Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the decision by the Department of Justice to withdraw funding from the Railway Street Addiction Service in Ballymena will result in job losses.
(AQW 38538/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) has advised that those posts funded by the Department of Justice will, regrettably, be lost. During the four month period before which funding is withdrawn, however, the Trust will support permanent staff in securing alternative employment in either the remodeled service or other Trust services. The Trust will also explore opportunities to enable temporary staff to be employed within Trust services as part of the management of change process.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide a breakdown of the number of intermediate beds available in each Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) how many of these beds are (a) nurse; and (b) carer assisted; and (iii) what are the specific limitations in a carer assisted compared to nurse assisted beds, with regard to the services offered to and types of patients which can be accepted.
(AQW 38546/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on intermediate care beds is not collected centrally and was requested from the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts.

(i) Information on the number of intermediate care beds available in each Trust is detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Intermediate Care Beds, by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Intermediate Care Beds
Belfast	35
Northern	88*
South Eastern	113
Southern	25
Western	78

* The number provided by the Northern HSC Trust indicates the minimum intermediate care beds that are available. It does not include intermediate care beds in Dalriada Hospital.

(ii) Information on the number of nurse and carer assisted intermediate care beds in each Trust is detailed in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Intermediate Care Beds, by Type and HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Nurse Assisted	Carer Assisted
Belfast	0	35
Northern#	44	44
South Eastern	76	37
Southern	20	5
Western^	-	-

\# Note this table does not include 20 nurse assisted intermediate care beds in Dalriada Hospital.

^ Patients admitted to intermediate care beds in the Western HSC Trust receive care and treatment from a multi-professional team including medical consultants, GPs, specialty doctors, nurses and AHPs.

(iii) Patients assessed as having a requirement for 24 hour nursing care are placed in intermediate care nursing beds whilst those who do not require 24 hour nursing care are placed in carer assisted beds. Patients are placed in the most appropriate setting based on their assessed need. This would include patients' access to the services of medical, nursing and allied health professionals in accordance with their health and social care need.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the closure of Dalriada Hospital will affect ambulance cover.
(AQW 38562/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has advised my Department that the temporary closure of MS respite and intermediate care beds in Dalriada Hospital will not affect ambulance service cover in the area.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Alcohol and Drug Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-16 will be published, given that the consultation period closed on 18 April 2013.
(AQW 38568/11-15)

Mr Wells: Under the cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to substance misuse, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2, 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.

52 organisations responded to the subsequent public consultation on the draft Framework which closed in April 2013. Following this, 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 McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can provide a guarantee that the temporary reduction of services imposed on Downe Hospital as a result of the recent budget will not become permanent.
(AQW 38579/11-15)

Mr Wells: This is a temporary reduction in beds, in line with other temporary changes in services taking place across Northern Ireland due to the ongoing financial pressures. If the Trust were to propose to close these beds on a permanent basis a full consultation process, including equality screening, would have to be undertaken.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has been advised to prepare for a fifteen per cent budget cut in 2015/16; and what risk assessment vis-à-vis the public's safety has been conducted relating to such a cut.
(AQW 38585/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has been asked to develop savings proposals for 5,10 and 15% in 2015/16. NIFRS will be required to risk assess proposals to ensure the continued delivery of all statutory requirements.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the development of a new health and wellbeing centre in Bangor.
(AQW 38598/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board's high level Strategic Implementation Plan for future investment in primary care infrastructure, which includes a proposal for Bangor, is currently under consideration. This wider investment programme cannot be progressed until the pilot Lisburn and Newry projects are evaluated.

This Plan will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on the outcome of future budget exercises and confirmation of value for money and affordability.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to monitor and respond to the demand for social care support when the Independent Living Fund closes in June 2015.
(AQW 38601/11-15)

Mr Wells: The UK Government decided to close the Independent Living Fund (ILF) to new users in June 2010 and in Northern Ireland it continues to be the case that social care support is provided on the basis of assessed need. There will be no change to this position following the closure of the Independent Living Fund in 2015.

In addition, as I have previously made clear, I endorse and support fully my predecessor Edwin Poots' undertaking that DHSSPS would do all it could to ensure that those disabled people in Northern Ireland who are most in need of care and attention are not disadvantaged by the Department of Work and Pension's decision to close the ILF.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the system to replace the Independent Living Fund promotes independent living, as required under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
(AQW 38602/11-15)

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 Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans their Department has to monitor and address the impact of the decision to close the Independent Living Fund in June 2015 on the inclusion of people with a learning disability in local community activities.
(AQW 38603/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department's comprehensive public consultation on this issue ends on 30 November 2014. Following the closure of this exercise, I will carefully consider how best to support Independent Living Fund users in Northern Ireland on the basis of all the responses received. This will include the important matters the member has raised in this question, and indeed on earlier occasions. I plan to announce my decision in early 2015.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.
(AQW 38604/11-15)

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 68 responses.

A Consultation Response Report has been prepared and will be published on the Department's website as soon as is practicable.

I have agreed with the Justice Minister that we will aim to publish the strategy by March 2015.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department provided to The Addiction Service on Railway Street, Ballymena in each of the last fourteen years.
(AQW 38609/11-15)

Mr Wells: Details of the amount of funding provided in each the last 14 years to the Railway Street Community Addiction Service are not available. Funding provided through the Northern Health and Social Care Trust from 2007 to the present is outlined below:

	£
2007/08	139,000
2008/09	155,627
2009/10	159,362
2010/11	159,362
2011/12	159,365
2012/13	163,518
2013/14	165,153
2014/15	167,398 (full year amount)

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) his plans for the future of mental health services; and (ii) the current (a) facilities; and (b) funding available for mental health services.
(AQW 38616/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Plans for the future of Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland are set out in the Mental Health section of the Bamford Action Plan, the HSC Board Commissioning Plan and the Department's Mental Health Service Framework.

In addition, the following strategies detail plans for specific Mental Health issues and conditions:

- Protect Life-Suicide Prevention Strategy;
- Psychological Therapy Strategy;
- Personality Disorder Strategy;
- New Strategic Direction on Drugs and Alcohol; and
- Mental Health Care Pathway-Promoting Recovery Approaches.

These policies and strategies aim to improve the mental health of people in Northern Ireland; reduce the impact of the condition on people with mental health problems; and reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions.

(ii) Health and Social Care Trusts provide a wide range of mental health services in a wide variety of settings and facilities, according to the individual's particular needs, including:

- Primary Care Talking Therapies Teams – accessed through GP;

- Community Mental Health Services – this involves care provided by one or more professionals such as social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists etc;
- Acute Mental Health Services – these services provide support at a time of crisis and can provide intensive home support and/or admission to hospital; and
- specific services - these usually involve receiving care from a specialist team such as Alcohol/Drug Addiction, Eating Disorders, Psychological Therapies or Trauma, Personality and Forensic Services.

The funding invested by the HSC Board in Mental Health Services in 2013/14 was £247.3million.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what statutory provision is available for people with alcohol and drug dependency in East Londonderry.
(AQW 38629/11-15)

Mr Wells: Through my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two, the Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency commission a full range of alcohol and drug services – from education and prevention through to treatment and support.

Details of the full range of alcohol and drug services available to people living in East Londonderry and currently provided by Statutory and Voluntary/Community sectors across both the Northern and Western areas can be found by accessing the following links:

- http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/DrugsAlcohol_Directory_Northern_12_12.pdf
- http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/DrugsAlcohol_Directory_Western_12_12.pdf

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the average waiting time for an Asperger Syndrome assessment in the Western Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the provision in place to address the needs of people with Asperger Syndrome whilst awaiting assessment.
(AQW 38632/11-15)

Mr Wells: The waiting time for an Asperger Syndrome assessment within the Children's Autism Services in the Western Trust was 22 weeks as on 31 October 2014. Within adult services the waiting time is approximately 14 months. This is a historic anomaly as the Trust has only had capacity to undertake adult Autism assessments over the last year. It is hoped that all people on the waiting list will be seen within 13 weeks by March 2016.

Following referral of a child or young person for assessment, the Trust will issue the parent/carer with an acknowledgement letter which includes information regarding the assessment process and a link to the Trust's web-site containing information on the Autism Service and a video clip of the assessment process. Whilst awaiting assessment, contact can be maintained with the referring agent for advice and guidance and access can be continued with other services, including those within the Trust, Education and the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Those on the adult waiting list can access a range of support services for advice, for example, their general practitioner services and the Trust's Autism Coordinator/Team. If they have a co-existing mental health issue or learning disability they can access those services. There are also a range of voluntary specialist Autism voluntary providers, for example, Autism Initiatives, National Autistic Society and Autism NI who each offer support, advice and advocacy.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessments or assumptions have been made of the additional cost, particularly to the Ulster Hospital, as a result of the displacement of patients arising from the temporary closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38661/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the period October 2013 to September 2014 there was an average of 41 attendances per day at Bangor Community Hospital minor injuries unit. Patients from the North Down area who require treatment for minor injuries can access the minor injuries service at Ards Hospital or contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust anticipate that there will be a minimal increase in minor injuries attendances at the Ulster Hospital and will keep the position under review.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether pain clinics will be provided at the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen.
(AQW 38677/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has been developing a 'hub-and-spoke' model for chronic pain management within the Trust, aiming to centre pain activity and resources in Tyrone County Hospital with satellite activity and resources in the South West Acute Hospital and Altnagelvin Hospital.

The expansion of clinics to the South West Acute Hospital has been delayed due to difficulties in providing medical staff with expertise in pain management.

In the interim, the pain management team continues to ensure patients are being seen as quickly as possible, although regrettably, this means a small number have to travel to use this service.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the expected annual savings that will result from the closure of the (i) Minor Injuries Unit; and (ii) GP Ward in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38682/11-15)

Mr Wells: The savings which are expected to be made in 2014/15 as a result of proposed closures at Bangor Community Hospital are as follows:

The temporary closure of the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit (planned from 1 December 2014) will have cash releasing savings of approximately £65k.

- The temporary closure of the GP Ward (planned from 1 December 2014) will save approximately £207k.
- They form part of the Trust's overall plan to achieve financial break even while maximising patient safety.

The temporary closures of these two facilities are planned from 1st December 2014 to 31st March 2015, therefore, annual savings are not applicable.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he and his officials were informed of the 2014/15 savings in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38695/11-15)

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. South Eastern 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 South Eastern 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 decisions taken by the South Eastern Trust reflect what is achievable in maintaining safety and minimising costs between now and the end of the financial year.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of General Practice care in Bangor.
(AQW 38725/11-15)

Mr Wells: I fully recognise the very important role that GPs play in the delivery of high quality healthcare to their patients right across NI, including Bangor.

Currently there are 9 GP Practices in Bangor serving a population of approximately 55,000 patients.

The Quality and Outcomes Framework is an annual reward element of the General Medical Services Contract designed to remunerate General Practice for providing quality care to their patients and it is intended to reward good practice. All of the GP Practices in Bangor have signed up to provide the Quality and Outcomes Framework within the GMS Contract and have a high level of achievement at 98%+. The GP practices also provide a wide range of enhanced services for their patients.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the current position of statutory residential care homes in the Southern Heath and Social Care Trust, including Roxborough House, Moy.
(AQW 38734/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Stage One consultation report on the future of statutory residential care homes was approved by the Health and Social Care Board on 12 June 2014. The report provided a thorough analysis of views shared during consultation and sets out the final agreed criteria for evaluating statutory residential home provision for older people.

The Health and Social Care Trusts have been asked by the Health and Social Care Board to review their statutory residential care homes using the new criteria, and then to review their positions on admissions once they have made proposals for the future of each home.

It is anticipated that all Trust proposals for change will be considered at a HSC Board meeting in early 2015.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current provision of hospice care.
(AQO 7031/11-15)

Mr Wells: Translink I am aware of the very valuable work that is being done by hospices in Northern Ireland to deliver high quality specialist palliative and end of life care, and the expertise, dedication and compassion in caring that hospices provide.

I am committed to improving palliative and end of life care across all care sectors and, in line with the vision of my Department's Living Matters:Dying Matters Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy, ensuring that any person with an advanced, incurable condition lives well and dies well irrespective of their condition or care setting.

Hospices play an important role in this through providing a range of specialist services including inpatient care; day hospice services; hospice at home care for people in their own homes; support for carers and families; and bereavement counselling services.

They also provide education services and specialist advice and support to health and social care professionals who deliver generalist palliative care in hospitals, care homes and the community helping to improve the awareness and quality of palliative and end of life care.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessments or assumptions have been made of the additional number of patients who will use the Ulster Hospital, as a result of the temporary closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38741/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the period October 2013 to September 2014 there was an average of 41 attendances per day at Bangor Community Hospital minor injuries unit. Patients from the North Down area who require treatment for minor injuries can access the minor injuries service at Ards Hospital or contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust anticipate that there will be a minimal increase in minor injuries attendances at the Ulster Hospital and will keep the position under review.

Mr Allister asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why petitions opposing the closure of Dalriada Hospital have been confiscated by an administrator in the Causeway Hospital; and whether he will direct that they are returned.
(AQW 38746/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social CareTrust was originally not aware of the intention to display the petitions and make them available to the public. They were therefore forwarded to the Trade Union Office in Causeway Hospital.

Having been made aware of this intention, the Trust has now provided an area inside the main hospital entrance where people can sign the petitions.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why petitions relating to the proposal to close beds at Dalriada Hospital were ordered to be removed from Causeway Hospital; and what was subsequently done with the petitions.
(AQW 38759/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust was originally not aware of the intention to display the petitions and make them available to the public. They were therefore forwarded to the Trade Union Office in Causeway Hospital.

Having been made aware of this intention, the Trust has now provided an area inside the main hospital entrance where people can sign the petitions.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the recent statistics that 1,300 children are waiting on autism diagnosis, what action is being taken to address this as a matter of urgency.
(AQW 38760/11-15)

Mr Wells: It should be stressed that diagnosis, as to whether or not a child has autism, only occurs after a thorough process of assessment, involving a number of professionals over a period of time which may last a number of months. It is therefore inevitable that there will be a period when children are awaiting diagnosis, as the assessment is not yet completed.

It is however, the case that a number of children are also awaiting a first assessment. This is due to the increase in the number of referrals from eg GPs, Health Visitors and Educational Services, which have doubled since 2010/11, resulting in waiting times for assessment and support also lengthening. It is recognised that there is a shortfall in resources and this area has been identified as a core pressure requiring additional investment.

To help alleviate the length of waiting times, the HSC Board is reviewing the current operating models across all Trusts with a view to remodelling the assessment and diagnostic process. This should maximise the current capacity of the system. A new template to record waiting times in excess of 13 weeks will enable the Board to monitor average waiting times for commencement of assessment. As an interim measure, the Board are working with Trusts to agree, based on their respective capacity, a maximum waiting time. Once agreed, families will be made aware of the maximum time that they can expect to wait to commence the assessment process.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many extra patients would he anticipate will attend the Emergency Department at the Ulster Hospital as a result of the closure of the Minor Injuries Unit at Bangor Community Hospital; and what effect he anticipates this will have on waiting times at the Emergency Department.
(AQW 38767/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the period (October 2013 to September 2014) there was an average of 41 attendances per day at Bangor Community Hospital minor injuries unit. Patients from the North Down area who require treatment for minor injuries can access the minor injuries service at Ards Hospital or contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust anticipate that there will be a minimal increase in minor injuries attendances at the Ulster Hospital and will keep the position under review.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the decision to close (i) the Minor Injuries Unit; and (ii) GP Ward at Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38818/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care Trusts are carrying out equality screenings on the individual local decisions within their contingency plans. Where the evidence of a screening indicates that an Equality Impact Assessment is necessary it will be completed in accordance with each Trust's Equality Scheme and the Equality Commission's guidance.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the proposals to temporarily close the minor injuries unit and the GP Ward at Bangor Community Hospital up until 31 March 2015 have been subject to equality screenings. The outcome of these screenings was a recommendation for on-going screening for both proposals.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what protective measures are being taken to protect public health following the discovery of a highly contagious strain of bird flu at a poultry farm in the Netherlands.
(AQW 38835/11-15)

Mr Wells: The recent outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry farms in the Netherlands and Yorkshire are thought to be connected to the outbreak in Germany earlier in the month. These outbreaks are believed to be the H5N8 strain. Defra has ruled out the H5N1 strain.

No human infections with H5N8 have ever been reported anywhere in the world. The risk for transmission from animals to humans in the EU/EEA countries is considered to be extremely low.

Public Health England has advised that the threat to the public's health is considered extremely low based on what is currently known about the specific strain of avian flu.

The Food Standards Agency has advised that bird flu does not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

To prevent virus spread, Directive 2005/94/EC requires Member States to have contingency plans detailing measures for the killing and safe disposal of infected poultry, feed and contaminated equipment as well as the procedures and methods for cleaning and disinfection.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the consultation on the Independent Living Fund.
(AQO 7038/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department's public consultation on how best to support Independent Living Fund (ILF) users in Northern Ireland following the closure of the fund on 30 June 2015 was launched on 8 August 2014 and it will close on 30 November 2014.

In developing the consultation, my Department has carefully considered the actions of the other UK jurisdictions in relation to the future support for ILF users. In addition, my officials are in regular close contact with senior representatives from the ILF based in Nottingham. Furthermore, to ensure that a wide range of views are obtained to help inform my final decision, during September and October, my Department recently held two well attended public consultation events.

You can be assured that I will carefully consider all responses received before deciding on the way forward and I plan to announce my final decision in early 2015.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he is ensuring that proposed reductions in frontline services will be subject to adequate Equality Impact Assesments.
(AQO 7033/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is the statutory responsibility of Trusts to undertake equality impact screening of all policy proposals, and to undertake equality impact assessments when indicated.

My Department has been in contact each of the Trusts to seek their assurance that they are meeting all of their equality scheme responsibilities in relation to their contingency plans. Trusts are very clear about their statutory obligations and provide regular assurance to my Department that they are meeting their obligations as part of their governance framework.

Should any of the temporary measures outlined in Trust contingency plans be proposed to be made permanent, I have been explicit that that a full consultation exercise must be carried out.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average turnaround time for ambulances at the Antrim Area Hospital.
(AQO 7034/11-15)

Mr Wells: The average ambulance turnaround time at Antrim Area Hospital from January to October 2014 was 26 minutes and 21 seconds. Our ambulance crews do a superb job delivering vital services to the community. I pay tribute to their professionalism and dedication as they carry out their duties around the clock sometimes working under very difficult conditions.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on the use of Deep Brain Stimulation as a treatment for people diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.
(AQO 7035/11-15)

Mr Wells: Although the main treatment for Parkinson's is medication, there are some types of surgery available to treat the symptoms of the condition. Deep brain stimulation is the main type of surgery used. It is not a cure, but it can give some people better control of their symptoms. It is not suitable for all patients and it will not work for everyone who has the operation.

The treatment is not routinely commissioned within Northern Ireland. However, patients here can access the treatment through the Health and Social Care Board's Extra Contractual Referral process which provides for circumstances where specialised care cannot be provided within Northern Ireland.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what psychiatric support has been identified for soldiers diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder.
(AQO 7036/11-15)

Mr Wells: Armed Forces personnel with mental health problems (including PTSD) have access to outpatient, day-case, and inpatient treatment as necessary from the Defence Medical Services occupational psychiatric service. Support in the field is provided by trained mental health staff. Outpatient services are primarily provided through 15 military Departments of Community Health. Inpatient care is provided by the health service, contracted by the Ministry of Defence. For veterans, the Health and Social Care Board has agreed a care pathway which provides access to the residential treatment service in Scotland provided by Combat Stress.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to address levels of sick absence within the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.
(AQO 7037/11-15)

Mr Wells: For 2014/15 the department has agreed individual targets with each of the trusts for rates of staff absence. The target for the NIAS has been agreed at 7%. These targets are monitored by my Department throughout the year with the Trust required to provide a report on their performance twice a year. Any shortfall in performance against objectives is included on the agenda for discussion at the Mid and End Year Accountability Review Meetings that my Department holds with each of its Arms Length Bodies.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the proposal by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to merge the palliative care ward and a rehabilitation ward at the Tyrone County Hospital.
(AQO 7039/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust decided on 11 November 2014 that it will keep the palliative care and rehabilitation wards at Tyrone County Hospital separate. The number of beds in the palliative care ward will reduce by four and the rehabilitation ward will reduce by six, to reflect current usage.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the current financial situation will have on independent healthcare providers.
(AQO 7040/11-15)

Mr Wells: I indicated in my Statement of 30th October 2014 that I was allocating £14 million of the June and October Monitoring Round funding to elective care. This is much less than the HSC needs to meet the current demand and thus the restrictions on the use of the independent sector will have to continue.

I am disappointed that the HSC has had to take this measure and I understand the impact this will have on patients waiting for assessment and treatment. However, my priorities are to ensure that the services provided by the HSC are safe and effective, and that my Department achieves financial breakeven, as is required of all Ministers.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons for the temporary closure of seven intermediate care and rehabilitation beds in the Mid Ulster Hospital by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQO 7041/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust has to reduce its spend by almost £7m between now and the end of March 2015 to achieve financial breakeven. Frontline and emergency services have, as far as possible, been protected, and by consolidating services across the Trust for a temporary period, including the beds in the
Mid Ulster Hospital, savings can be made. The Trust is confident that the consolidation of beds will provide sufficient capacity in each locality within the Northern area.

I am disappointed that the Trust has had to take this measure and I acknowledge the impact this will have on patients. However, my priorities are to ensure that the services provided by the HSC are safe and effective, and that my Department achieves financial breakeven, as is required of all Ministers.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will ensure that all staff in Oak Villa and Ash Villa at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital will be retained.
(AQW 38918/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised that only staff working in Ash Villa will be affected by the proposed service redesign. The service reform will generate opportunities for staff, as additional nursing posts will be created across both in-patient and community services and also with the development of the therapeutic hub for patients. Details of these developments have been shared with the staff during the consultation process.

If there are insufficient permanent posts available for the redeployment of all affected staff, it may be necessary to redeploy some staff to other Older People's Mental Health facilities temporarily, with a view to permanent redeployment when possible. The Trust's arrangements for organisational change will be implemented for displaced staff. There will be no compulsory redundancies.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what mechanisms are in place to ensure that planned November admissions to the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Unit in Dalriada Hospital are not overlooked, and that these patients receive sufficient care for their specific needs.
(AQW 38941/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) has provided assurance that anyone who has been booked into the respite centre in Dalriada Hospital in November will have no change to their booking. For those who require respite services after the end of November, the NHSCT will continue to meet their assessed needs and the Trust's staff are currently meeting with service users and their carers to discuss those needs and agree suitable alternative arrangements.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make an announcement regarding the future support of Independent Living Fund users in Northern Ireland; and whether he can provide an assurance that current users will see no reduction in the support offered.
(AQW 38944/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer the member to the answer given to AQW 35542/11-15 provided by my predecessor, Edwin Poots MLA.

Department of Justice

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether schedule 17/92 of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Records Management System after 2 December 1999 was subject to negative procedure under section 8(4) Public Records Act Northern Ireland, or did it have permanent effect at the expiry of section 1 of the Temporary Provisions Act, or take effect, before the devolution of Policing and Justice.
(AQW 38166/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Schedule 17/92 was agreed in November 1992 and remained in operation until the devolution of policing and justice in April 2010 when a schedule for the Department of Justice was prepared and subsequently laid before the Assembly in November 2012.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken by his Department to provide input on, and to co-ordinate, a cross departmental action plan to tackle Female Genital Mutilation.
(AQW 38184/11-15)

Mr Ford: The joint DOJ and DHSSPS strategy Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland which is currently being developed recognises that domestic violence and abuse can manifest itself through the perpetration of unlawful activities and practices such as female genital mutilation.

As you will be aware, my Department has been involved from the early stages in assisting in developing Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines on Female Genital Mutilation which were published in July by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

At the most recent meeting of the Regional Strategy Group for Domestic and Sexual Violence it was agreed that a cross-departmental meeting would be held to agree how best to take forward cross-departmental actions to further address the issue of Female Genital Mutilation in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38234/11-15)

Mr Ford: No efficiencies have been realised in the Department of Justice as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of Article 63 Firearm Prohibitions that have been successfully removed within the eight year prohibition term, broken down by constituency; and the reasons for each removal in each of the last two years.
(AQW 38275/11-15)

Mr Ford: Within the last two years I have removed one eight year prohibition. At the time of the application, the individual lived within the Upper Bann Constituency. I consider each case on its merits and was satisfied that the individual presented exceptional circumstances as required by the legislation.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of sick leave among staff in prisons in each of the last five years; and the number of staff off work due to stress, anxiety or other related illnesses.
(AQW 38280/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost of sickness absence for all staff working within the Northern Ireland Prison Service is set out below:

Date	Cost
2010/11	£4.5 million (from 12 April 2010)
2011/12	£4.7 million
2012/13	£4.2 million
2013/14	£3.7 million
2014/15	£1.9 million (up to 30 September 2014)

The number of Northern Ireland Prison Service Staff (all grades) that have been off work due to stress, anxiety or other related illnesses is set out below:

Date	No. of staff
2010/11	155 (from 12 April 2010)
2011/12	164
2012/13	174
2013/14	176
2014/15	123 (up to 30 September 2014)

The figures provided are for the period from the date of the devolution of justice powers, 12 April 2010.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether John McDermott benefitted from 50 per cent remission on his custodial sentence; and whether he was considered rehabilitated on release.
(AQW 38308/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that as John McDermott was not sentenced under the Criminal Justice Order 2008 he was eligible for 50% remission. He will remain under supervision, and on license, for the remainder of his 10 year sentence.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case numbers (a) 14/011704; (b) 14/029601; and (c) 14/011705 at Londonderry Magistrates' Court, to detail (i) whether legal aid been granted; and if so, whether this covers solicitor and counsel; (ii) the costs, or estimated costs, to date, of each defendant; (iv) whether legal aid has been granted for appeal; and (v) the estimated final costs following appeal.
(AQW 38320/11-15)

Mr Ford: Legal aid was granted for representation by solicitor and junior counsel for the magistrates' court proceedings in respect of all three defendants. Following the conviction of all three defendants at the magistrates' court, legal aid was granted for representation by solicitor and junior counsel at the County Court appeal proceedings.

No claims for costs have been received by the Northern Ireland Services Commission in respect of these proceedings.

The fees for representation in the magistrates' court have been estimated at £990 in respect of each defendant.

The fees for representation in the County Court have been estimated at £286 in respect of each defendant.

This gives a total estimated cost of £3,828.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37879/11-15 and as G4S is the contracted service to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service, whether he will communicate with G4S in respect of staff who were disciplined as a result of the faulty palm scanners, to have the matters revisited and disciplinary actions overturned.
(AQW 38402/11-15)

Mr Ford: Disciplinary actions, and any decisions to revisit or overturn such actions, are a matter for G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd (G4S) as the employer.

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) does not have a role in G4S employee investigations. The outcome of G4S investigations is routinely shared with NICTS through the contract management process if they relate to the management of the contract but this does not include details of the investigation as this is regulated by Data Protection legislation.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to tackle low levels of rape convictions despite the increase in sexual crime reporting.
(AQW 38405/11-15)

Mr Ford: Given the evidence that there is significant underreporting of sexual crimes, a great deal of effort has been made across the justice system to improve the confidence of victims in the justice system and encourage them to come forward. I therefore welcome the increase in reporting of these crimes.

However, I also recognise that in the past four years 26% of the rape cases and just over 55% of all sexual offences cases that have gone forward for prosecution have resulted in conviction.

This is an issue of concern for agencies in the justice system. The joint DOJ and DHSSPS strategy Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland which is due to be published in the Spring will reflect the need to strengthen justice for victims and hold perpetrators to account and address their harmful behaviour.

In addition, the five year victim and witness strategy published in June 2013 includes a range of actions to support victims, including the new Victim Charter, and a victim and witness care unit that provides a single point of contact for victims.

The Rowan sexual assault referral centre in Antrim is a significant step forward in supporting all victims of sexual violence. The victim centred services provided by this purpose built facility assist in providing the evidence to help achieve prosecutions, bringing together justice and health and social care agencies.

My Department will continue to work with partner agencies to provide better support to victims and survivors and bring those responsible to justice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) why legal aid was granted in the case of a person at Omagh Magistrates, given the income as stated in court passes the threshold for financial assistance; (ii) what distinguished this case from others of a similar nature where legal aid is not afforded; (iii) whther the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) or Northern Ireland Legal Aid Agency (NILAA) will seek to recoup the fees from the defendant in light of income being known; and (iv) whether he, NILSC or NILAA will issue guidelines to relevant parties, including defence representatives and the judiciary, to ensure qualifying criteria rules are being applied across all jurisdictions.
(AQW 38475/11-15)

Mr Ford: The award of criminal legal aid is a judicial decision. Where a person is charged with any offence in the magistrates' court or is brought before it to be dealt with, the court may grant a criminal aid certificate where it is satisfied that his means are insufficient to obtain legal aid and that it is in the interests of justice that he should have free legal aid. Each district judge, or deputy, must consider these two tests before granting legal aid. Where there is doubt, the legislation requires the judge to exercise discretion to the benefit of the applicant.

Where it comes to the attention of the court that a person to whom a legal aid certificate has been granted 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 court may revoke the certificate and the cost of legal aid incurred to the date of revocation may be recovered.

This is a judicial decision and as I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Office of the Lord Chief Justice it would not be appropriate for me to issue guidelines in this respect.

The criminal legal aid regulations enable the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, in certain circumstances, to seek an order requiring a person in respect of whom a legal aid certificate in the Crown Court to pay some or all of the cost of legal aid incurred under the certificate. These provisions do not apply to certificates granted in respect of the magistrates' courts.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether an appeal has been lodged by the Public Prosecution Service over the six month sentence handed down in cases 14/082943 and 14/082946 at Dungannon Magistrates Court.
(AQW 38476/11-15)

Mr Ford: An appeal has not been lodged by the Public Prosecution Service against the six month sentence in this case.

The power to refer cases to the Court of Appeal under Section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 does not apply to these charges.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether John McDermott been categorised as dangerous under the NI Act 2008 definition; and if not, what consideration is to be given to such a categorisation.
(AQW 38478/11-15)

Mr Ford: The relevant provisions of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 only relate to specified offences committed after 15th May 2008 and do not have retrospective application.

However the public protection arrangements, which provide for the appropriate management of risk of serious harm posed by individuals, apply in this case as they do in any case where there has been a conviction for a relevant sexual offence either before or after the introduction of the 2008 Order.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to detail the change in the annual cost to the public purse of the legal aid bill between 1 January 2009 and 1 January 2014.
(AQW 38545/11-15)

Mr Ford: This information is available by financial year and has been reported on that basis from the date of devolution.

Financial year	Cash expenditure £m
2010/11	93.3
2011/12	101.7
2012/13	95.8
2013/14	105.0
2014/15 Forecast	101.7

Notes:

Figures include expenditure from contributions made by legally assisted persons.

The figures reported for 2013/14 are still to be audited by NIAO.

All figures exclude administration costs.

In cash terms, legal aid expenditure has increased by £11.7m over the four year period since the devolution of the Department of Justice in April 2010. Figures reported for 2014/15 are based on current forecasts from Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers have been medically retired in each of the last 24 months.
(AQW 38552/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been a total of 41 Prison Officers medically retired in the last 24 months.

In the period between 1 November 2012 and 31 October 2014 this is broken down as follows:

Month	No. Prison Officer Grade staff medically retired
November 2012	4
December 2012	0
January 2013	5
February 2013	1
March 2013	0
April 2013	0
May 2013	2
June 2013	1
July 2013	5
August 2013	1
September 2013	3
October 2013	0
November 2013	3
December 2013	2

Month	No. Prison Officer Grade staff medically retired
January 2014	3
February 2014	1
March 2014	3
April 2014	3
May 2014	0
June 2014	0
July 2014	1
August 2014	0
September 2014	1
October 2014	2

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice what impact his Department's decision to cease funding the Railway Street Addiction Service in Ballymena will have on addiction service provision in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 38554/11-15)

Mr Ford: Due to the overall financial climate, my Department's contribution to the total cost of the services provided by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust based at Railway Street in Ballymena will cease within this financial year.

This was a project that was jointly funded by my Department and the Trust. Clearly the Northern Trust will now need to reconfigure service delivery given the cessation of this funding.

I am aware that the Member has met with Trust officials to secure a more detailed assessment of the impact of this decision. However, while regretful, this difficult decision was necessary in the context of the significant financial challenges facing my Department.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice for the timeline for the Northern Ireland Community Safety College Steering Group's two stage review into the development of the joint training college for the police, Prison Service and Fire and Rescue Service at Desertcreat.
(AQW 38564/11-15)

Mr Ford: The first stage of the review will involve examining the extent of changes and the implications for the business case and the current procurement process. The Programme Board has been tasked with completing this work within two weeks and reporting back to the Steering Group on 25 November.

During this period, the Programme Board has also been asked to firm up the scope of the second review. This stage of the review is likely to take several months. However, it is anticipated that a decision will be made within the current Assembly mandate.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice whether a decision will be made on the future of the Northern Ireland Community Safety College within the current Assembly mandate.
(AQW 38566/11-15)

Mr Ford: The first stage of the review will involve examining the extent of changes and the implications for the business case and the current procurement process. The Programme Board has been tasked with completing this work within two weeks and reporting back to the Steering Group on 25 November.

During this period, the Programme Board has also been asked to firm up the scope of the second review. This stage of the review is likely to take several months. However, it is anticipated that a decision will be made within the current Assembly mandate.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how much funding his Department awarded to the Railway Street drug misuse service in Ballymena in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38607/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice provided the Northern Health and Social Care Trust with £329k in 2012/13 and £320k in 2013/14 towards the cost of operating the Railway Street Service. The Department has agreed to provide a sum not exceeding £330k in 2014/15.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether an application has been made for legal aid during 2014 in respect of a judicial review of police investigations into a case brought by the families and relatives of those killed in Londonderry on 30 January 1972.
(AQW 38638/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 24 of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (NI) Order 1981 precludes the release of information in relation to civil cases in which Legal Aid has been granted.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37356/11-15, what measures are in place to ensure that the issue of unpaid fines does not reach the stage which led to these fine default reviews having to be listed at courts.
(AQW 38643/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service continues to operate a Fine Collection Scheme to contact debtors on two occasions to encourage payment of fines which remain unpaid after the payment due date.

I will also be bringing a Fines and Enforcement Bill to the Assembly in early 2015, which will provide for a new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service with a range of new powers including deductions from pay or benefits, seizure of motor vehicles and access to bank accounts to secure payment of unpaid fines.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38667/11-15)

Mr Ford: No employee of DOJ or any of its agencies, paid on either the Industrial or Non-Industrial pay scales, is paid below £7.20.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice what plans there are to simplify the Access NI procedures to avoid the expense and delays involved with people having to make multiple applications for each organisation or charity.[R]
(AQW 38672/11-15)

Mr Ford: AccessNI checks are currently only valid on the day they are printed and issued. There is, at present, no mechanism to update this information. As a result AccessNI recommends that checks are not transferable between jobs.

Provisions to enable changes to the current system are contained in the Justice Bill 2014. If this legislation comes into force as drafted an applicant will, on seeking a new check, have the option to subscribe to the Update Service. Once in the Update Service an applicant's criminal record is updated with any new offences and changes in police or barring information are monitored. This means that a subscriber to the Update Service can present his or her check to an employer or voluntary organisation including when he or she changes jobs. This is known as portable disclosure. In turn that employer or organisation can go on-line free of charge to see if the information on the original check has changed. This means that individuals may not have to re-apply for an AccessNI check, unless the individual is seeking to work with a different category of vulnerable people.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37962/11-15, in relation to the section on emoluments for full time Police Federation for Northern Ireland officials and the required agreements amongst Central Committee, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Chief Constable, whether he will provide a copy or template of the wording of the required agreement.
(AQW 38708/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is not party to any agreement between the central committee of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Chief Constable in respect of pay, pension or allowances to the chairman and secretary of the central committee. I can also confirm that this matter has not been referred to me as Minister in line with the provision of Regulation 18(1).

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to equal pay for Department of Justice and former Northern Ireland Office staff.
(AQW 38769/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Finance Minister and I have not discussed any particular proposal to date.

I welcome the fact that he has submitted a draft paper on this matter for consideration by the Executive and continue to be supportive of a centrally funded and centrally driven resolution.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38144/11-15, whether he will reconsider his answer in the interests of public safety and scrutiny of management mechanisms, given, (i) the concerns of the public caused by the alleged sighting of this individual in the area; (ii) in light of the fact that the person has since been moved and the question does not seek to disclose any current address or residence; (iii) the issue of any alleged place of residence as opposed to actual

address is not protected under Data Protection; and (iv) the high relevance offences for which this person served custody and the lack of accurate information from various departmental agencies after the alleged sighting.
(AQW 38779/11-15)

Mr Ford: As outlined in my previous answer to AQW/38144/11-15, 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. Staff within these agencies are highly trained in the assessment and management of risk to prevent reoffending.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice whether he will take steps to set up a Task Force comprising the PSNI, Immigration Office, Social Security Agency and Inland Revenue to detect illegal immigrants and employers, gang masters and anyone else involved in this `trade`.
(AQW 38824/11-15)

Mr Ford: Immigration and the licensing of gangmasters are not devolved matters, and therefore do not fall within the remit of the Department of Justice.

In respect of organised immigration crime, the Organised Crime Task Force has established a subgroup on immigration and human trafficking, although the main focus of this group is human trafficking, which is a devolved matter.

The subgroup includes representation from relevant statutory bodies including the Police Service of Northern Ireland; United Kingdom Visas and Immigration; Border Force; An Garda Síochána, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority, NSPCC and the Northern Ireland Safeguarding Board.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the outcome of his recent consultation on revised custodial arrangements for children.
(AQO 7051/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the publication of the consultation summary in May 2014, work has been ongoing to identify the necessary changes to legislation, and to draft instructions for the development of the proposed new custodial arrangements, including a new order.

What has become clear through this process is the complex nature of the proposals and the extent of legislative changes required to underpin something which is already working well in practice. Administrative arrangements have meant that no young person under 18 has been held in Hydebank Wood since 2012 and I intend to keep it that way.

Having considered these complexities, alongside comments made during the consultation on issues such as community sentences, I am now proposing to pause the introduction of this proposed legislation and go back to basics.

My Department will examine the entire youth sentencing structure with the aim of simplifying the system and ensuring more focused interventions which meet the individual needs of children and young people. I intend to create a system which is easier for the child to understand so that they are clear about exactly what is expected of them, and to reduce any unnecessary use of custody by maximising the community and restorative justice options that are available.

Overall, we will be working to ensure that the youth justice system is delivered in a way which utilises the available resources to best make Northern Ireland safer, and encourages and supports young people to desist from further offending.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice how he plans to rebuild confidence in the justice system following attacks made on the integrity of the Police Ombudsman by individual MLAs.
(AQO 7052/11-15)

Mr Ford: All parts of the justice system continually strive to maintain confidence in it, none more so than the Office of the Police Ombudsman. The very positive recent report from the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice, confirming the Ombudsman's independence, is a measure of their success in that regard.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice when Section 30 of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 will be implemented.
(AQO 7053/11-15)

Mr Ford: I remain keen to give effect to the will of the Assembly that, under Section 30 of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, police widows remarrying after 1 January 1989 should retain, or have reinstated, their pensions.

My officials are continuing to work to urgently resolve some outstanding matters, including eligibility, financial implications and affordability. While I am not yet in a position to give a definite timescale for resolution, I am working with a view to commencing payments at the very earliest opportunity.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the use of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy.
(AQO 7054/11-15)

Mr Ford: I remain keen to give effect to the will of the Assembly that, under Section 30 of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, police widows remarrying after 1 January 1989 should retain, or have reinstated, their pensions.

My officials are continuing to work to urgently resolve some outstanding matters, including eligibility, financial implications and affordability. While I am not yet in a position to give a definite timescale for resolution, I am working with a view to commencing payments at the very earliest opportunity.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice what is the annual cost of ensuring that criminal justice system processes are compliant with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
(AQO 7055/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 2 of European Convention on Human Rights covers the right to life. It imposes duties on the state to: protect people against the risk of harm from the activities of public authorities: investigate suspicious deaths; protect people against threats to their lives; and provide arrangements to secure legal accountability for those responsible for a death.

Given the wide ranging nature of the duties imposed by Article 2, much of the costs of the police, prison and court services can be attributed, directly or indirectly, to the cost of Article 2 compliance and it is not practical to differentiate between these and other costs.

In the field of legacy of the past issues, the best figure available on costs of Article 2 compliance is provided in Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report: 'A Review of the Cost and impact of Dealing with the Past on Criminal Justice Organisations in Northern Ireland'. This estimated that the annual cost of dealing with legacy matters was £30.6m, or £183.5m over the next following five years.

Department for Regional Development

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how much training are Roads Service engineers receiving on the provision of adequate cycling infrastructure.
(AQW 37742/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): In June 2012, my Department facilitated a short training seminar on cycling for TransportNI engineers, as part of a round of visits to Northern Ireland by the CTC and the Cycling Embassy of Denmark to promote new design concepts. More recently, my Department hosted a very successful conference in Belfast to promote cycling. As part of this conference TransportNI engineers attended a training workshop with Transport for London to discuss and debate new standards for cycling design.

Officials in my Department's Cycling Unit are currently considering the content of the draft London Cycling Design Standards and the Welsh Design Guidance (2014), together with many other design guides, to ensure that appropriate engineering standards are adopted to deliver cycling networks which will encourage more people to adopt cycling as an everyday mode of travel.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average cost of repairing a faulty streetlight.
(AQW 37916/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The average cost of repairing a faulty street light is approximately £40. The actual cost of a repair is dependent upon site-specific factors such as the type and wattage of the faulty light, extent of work required, location and type of road and the type of equipment used.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures he will put in place to encourage shoppers into town centres in the lead up to Christmas.
(AQW 38015/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am presently considering the introduction of a range of temporary measures to assist traders and shoppers in the run-up to Christmas and plan to make an announcement in the near future.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase the resources available to his Department's cycling unit.
(AQW 38019/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I established my Department's Cycling Unit in November 2013 which received its full complement of eight members of staff by February 2014.

The Member will be aware of the current budgetary constraints affecting my Department and in light of that there are no immediate plans to increase Cycling Unit resources at present.

However, work is ongoing to secure European funding through the Interreg V programme. In addition my Department will continue to consider cycling where appropriate as part of its overall objective of creating a cycling culture in Northern Ireland.

This will include design and implementation of schemes by Transport NI, either as specific cycling schemes or as part of overall transport measures.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to introduce (i) cycle lanes; and (ii) bicycle boxes at traffic lights in Ballymena.
(AQW 38021/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to providing safer roads for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists, with considerable investment already targeted at improving the cycling infrastructure, as set out in the Sub Regional Transport Plan 2015.

I can also confirm that the provision of cycling/pedestrian measures is routinely considered in the design process for all road schemes, including traffic schemes. However, due to restricted road space and signal phasing of traffic lights, it is not always possible to provide this type of facility without severely disrupting traffic progression and as such, my Department has no immediate proposals to implement cycle lanes and cycle boxes (advance stop lines) at traffic signals in Ballymena.

However, I can assure you that consideration will be given to this type of measure when any road scheme or upgrade of traffic signals is being programmed in the future.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the issued discussed, and the resulting benefits, from the recent Changing Gear conference.
(AQW 38022/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the Members attendance at and continued interest in the 'Northern Ireland – Changing Gear' seminar. The event took place on 16th October 2014 and was attended by around 180 people. A host of international speakers shared their cycling expertise and experiences at the event including: Klaus Bondam from Danish Cyclists Federation, Brian Deegan from Transport for London, Ola Gustafsson from Gehl Architects, Copenhagen and Sjors van Duren from Arnhem Nijmegen City Region, the Netherlands.

Speakers covered topics including 'Doing it the Danish way …. the importance of political buy in', 'Design & Safety', 'The human dimension' and 'Fast cycling routes – Experiences in the city region'.

All presentations delivered at the seminar are publically available on the Department for Regional website: (http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/sustainable_transport_branch/presentations-from-ni-changing-gear-seminar.htm)

The seminar was one of a series of events organised by my Cycling Unit to raise awareness of and encourage participation in the consultation process for the draft Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland. The event was also intended to harness Northern Ireland's interest in cycling and explore possibilities to transform Northern Ireland into a modern, vibrant, healthy cycling society.

The seminar which promoted understanding of, and buy-in to, the key themes of the draft Bicycle Strategy will enable my Department and our partners to successfully implement the strategy over a 25 year time frame.

Feedback from those who attended the seminar has been very positive with many people commenting on the quality of the presentations and the interesting topics covered. It is important that we build on this momentum and continue to work to create a society where everyday cycling is the norm, where cycling is an attractive, accessible and safe form of transport and that is what I am leading my Department in doing.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total miles of cycle lanes in each constituency.
(AQW 38023/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total amount of grants paid from the Rural Transport Fund to deliver rural transport services, in each of the last four completed financial years.
(AQW 38089/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The total amount of grants paid from the Rural Transport Fund to deliver rural transport services, in each of the last four completed financial years is as follows:

Financial Year	Level of Rural Transport Fund Support
2010-2011	£3.64M
2011-2012	£3.52M
2012-2013	£3.19M
2013-2014	£3.48M

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will review the criteria for the provision of disabled parking spaces in locations where a resident is disabled, but provision has been refused on the grounds that nearby parking is already available, but is normally fully occupied.
(AQW 38102/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The degree of difficulty finding a parking space is one of a number of aspects that my officials examine when considering whether there is a need for an accessible parking bay. My Department needs to be satisfied that applicants have a genuine need for the bay.

Applicants must be a blue badge holder and, if under sixty-five, confirm that they are in receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance. Anyone over sixty-five only needs to be a Blue Badge Holder.

Whereas accessible bays are normally only provided for drivers with a blue badge, bays may be provided for a blue badge holding passenger who cannot be left alone, for example a child under sixteen who lives at the same address as the proposed driver. When the passenger is over sixteen, my Department will require evidence of the need for constant attendance in the form of a letter from a Consultant Doctor.

A bay will only be provided where there are significant parking difficulties outside the applicant's house. As part of the assessment process parking levels will be checked using information provided by the applicant. A bay will not normally be provided where the applicant has access to a driveway, or a garage, or other off-street parking.

Bays will be located as near as possible to the applicant's home or place of work. Bays cannot be located where there are other waiting or parking restrictions or where it could create a road safety problem, but officials will consider a suitable alternative location close to the applicant's home.

When establishing if there is a parking problem officials will survey the location up to five times. If a parking problem is identified in two of the surveys then a bay, subject to other requirements outlined above, may be provided. I consider this to be a reasonable approach and that a further review of the criteria would not be warranted at this time.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.
(AQW 38152/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Public Sector Reform Division, within the Department of Finance and Personnel, was established in October 2013. To date no efficiencies have been realised in my Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current occupancy and usage rates at the Cairnshill Park and Ride facility.
(AQW 38204/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Park and Ride site at Cairnshill has been an outstanding success. With a dedicated 10 minute service running to Belfast's Great Victoria Street bus station during the peak hour and a cost of £3.80 per return journey, or £11.50 for a week, more and more commuters are seeing the benefits of switching to public transport, which is afforded priority over other traffic on the bus lanes on Saintfield Road and Ormeau Road.

The existing site has capacity for 720 vehicles and currently attracts approximately 550 vehicles per day, with usage figures showing steady growth.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Enterprise Refurbishment Programme.
(AQW 38213/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Work is ongoing to finalise all design areas and advance some outstanding procurement issues. The various work streams within the project are working in a co-ordinated way to deliver the project on time against its original completion date of December 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department's policy of priority secondary salting for rural schools will be in operation this winter.
(AQW 38214/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that my Department's winter service policy of priority secondary salting for rural schools will be in operation this winter.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to ensure maximum safety on the roads in the winter months, particularly those with difficult topography.
(AQW 38215/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is well prepared for the coming winter season. Staffing arrangements are in place, pre-season checks on winter service equipment have been undertaken and salt stocks have been replenished. TransportNI has

approximately 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads. Contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snowfall.

TransportNI's winter service policy and procedures, which set out the criteria for the salting of roads, are based on the well-established practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes. TransportNI salts main through routes carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day. In exceptional circumstances, roads with difficult topography carrying between 1,000 and 1,500 vehicles per day will also be salted. The application of this policy ensures that 28% of the total road network, which carries around 80% of traffic, is salted.

In addition, small settlements in rural areas containing 100 dwellings or more also have salted links to roads on the main salted network and, priority "secondary" salting is provided to around 50 rural schools that are most affected by the adverse weather conditions. Salting may also be undertaken in urgent situations such as to provide access for the emergency services, unforeseen occurrences such as funerals or to help get fuel or feed stocks to farmers.

In addition, approximately 4,800 salt bins and almost 50,000 grit piles are provided on public roads for use by the public on a self-help basis.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 25681/11-15, how many additional cycle storage spaces have been provided by Translink over the last twelve months.
(AQW 38218/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that in the last twelve months, additional to the 208 Northern Ireland Railways station cycle storage spaces and 128 bus station cycle storage stations previously reported, Translink has created an additional 27 spaces as below:

- Bangor bus and rail station - 20 additional spaces
- Antrim bus and rail station - 4 additional spaces
- Sydenham rail halt - 3 additional spaces

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cycle hoops or stands have been installed in each council area over the last twelve months.
(AQW 38219/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Over the last twelve months, my Department has installed 181 cycle loops and stands in the following Council areas:

- Belfast – 95;
- Lisburn – 59;
- Newtownabbey – 10;
- North Down – 7;
- Limavady – 7;
- Castlereagh – 2; and
- Carrickfergus - 1

In addition, Councils and the Department for Social Development, as part of public realm works, may have also installed cycle loops or stands during this period, details of which are not maintained by my Department.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any legislative provisions for the regulation of pavement kerb heights.
(AQW 38222/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm there is no legislative provision for the regulation of pavement kerb heights.

The height of a kerb for a pavement will vary depending on its location and purpose. Kerbs may be introduced for a number of reasons, for example, to provide definition in separating the footway from the carriageway, to add structural stability to a carriageway edge, or to address a flooding or drainage problem, and each circumstance requires consideration of the specific characteristics of the site.

The Department's main design guide, the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, therefore 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.

Lower kerb heights are used at pedestrian crossing points where the kerb should ideally be flush with the carriageway but can range from 0mm to +6mm, and a 10mm kerb height may be used in exceptional circumstances where the lack of kerb could present a ponding issue on the footway. A 25mm kerb height is used for vehicular accesses.

I am also aware that kerb heights, which are less than the 'standard' height outlined above, have been used in Public Realm schemes jointly promoted by the relevant local Council and the Department for Social Development.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timescales applicable for streets currently under consideration for parking constraint under the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan.
(AQW 38255/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The principal areas identified within the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 for parking restraint are those lying within Belfast and Lisburn city centres. Both of those areas are largely subject to existing forms of parking control, including controlled parking zones (on-street Pay and Display parking), limited waiting, and single or double yellow line parking restrictions.

The streets within these areas that currently do not have some form of parking restraint are either not routinely used for parking, or lie within residential areas where the most appropriate form of parking restraint is considered to be a residents' parking scheme.

Officials are presently actively engaged in taking forward residents' parking schemes in two areas within Belfast, one of which (the College Park Avenue/Rugby Road area) lies within the area identified for parking restraint. Should the outcome of these consultations be positive, it is envisaged schemes could be implemented on the ground early within the 2015/2016 financial year.

The Plan also proposed that on-street parking controls are introduced in Bangor, and these have already been introduced in the town centre. The town centre has also been identified as an area of Parking Restraint within the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, although not to the same level as Belfast city centre.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the proposed timescale for consideration of residents' parking schemes in areas outside those identified in his Department's first consultation.
(AQW 38256/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently finalising the draft legislation for a residents' parking scheme in the Rossville Street Area of Londonderry, prior to progressing to the public consultation stage. The public consultation period is planned to commence in January 2015.

The timeline for the delivery of the scheme will be dependent upon the outcome of the consultation and nature of any objections. In the absence of significant objections, the scheme should be delivered in spring 2015.

In addition my officials continue to engage with residents and others on the potential for the implementation of residents' parking schemes in a number of areas across Northern Ireland. Progress on scheme development will depend on a number of factors, such as the successful implementation of the first schemes currently being consulted upon.

Therefore I am not currently in a position to outline a timescale for the implementation of Residents' Parking Schemes other than the one noted above.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the proposed timescale for consideration of residents' parking schemes in areas identified in his Department's first consultation.
(AQW 38257/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials are currently engaged in formal consultation on the implementation of residents' parking schemes in the Lower Malone, and College Park Avenue/Rugby Road areas in South Belfast

The consultation period started on 29 October 2014 and runs to 19 November 2014. Following this, officials will consider and deal with any responses or representations received, and assuming no significant objections are received, will complete the remaining part of the legislative process. Officials estimate the very earliest a scheme could be implemented on the ground would be early within the 2015/2016 financial year, although this very much depends on a positive outcome to the consultation process.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timescale for further consideration of streets that could be subject to parking constraint under the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, once the current list of streets have been considered.
(AQW 38258/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials consider the most appropriate means of parking restraint within those remaining areas identified within the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 would largely be through the implementation of residents' parking schemes.

Progress on schemes will depend on a number of factors, such as the successful implementation of the first series of schemes currently progressing through the legislative process. This being the case I am unable to outline a timescale for future development at present.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many street lights in each constituency are in need of repair.
(AQW 38259/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This information is not available in the format requested as my Department does not maintain its street lighting records by constituency boundaries.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location of the NI Water treatment works operating at 80 per cent or more capacity; and what plans are in place to upgrade treatment works.
(AQW 38261/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the wastewater treatment works (WwTWs) that are operating at 80% or greater capacity has been supplied by NI Water and, because it is a lengthy document, is available in the Library for the Member to consult. It does not directly relate to the priority of works planned to be upgraded in any funding period. NI Water notes that the estimate of 80% capacity is based on the design capacity of the works recorded in the NI Water Annual Information Returns (AIR 14 Design PE) compared with estimated population and trade served, termed the population equivalent (PE), (AIR 14 Actual PE).

There is an ongoing capital and operational programme to maintain existing assets. NI Water also has a prioritised capital programme to address quality and growth issues at wastewater treatment works. This prioritisation is based on quality compliance and operational need and is undertaken jointly between NI Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and delivered from within the available budget.

Subject to funding, NI Water plan to commit £84m during the 6 year PC15 period in addressing quality and growth issues through the upgrade of 64 WwTWs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the annual income generated by Department owned car parks in North Down.
(AQW 38267/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently thirteen chargeable car parks owned by my Department in the North Down Council area. The total income generated from these car parks in the financial year 2013/14 was £445,401.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what outstanding land issues are still to be resolved pending a successful upgrade and passing loop on the Belfast-Derry railway.
(AQW 38276/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that the design for a passing loop at Bellarena is complete. The construction contract is ready to be awarded subject to the acquisition of land. It is hoped that a settlement with the relevant landowner can be successfully concluded.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there have been any disciplinary consequences within Translink over Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Londonderry Rail Track Project.
(AQW 38291/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In my statement to the Assembly on 3 November 2014, I expressed my extreme displeasure with the way in which Translink has managed this important project, given the particular importance that I attach to it and its Programme for Government status. I went on to say that I expect the Translink Board and the new Chief Executive to review the organisation's failings comprehensively. I have communicated this directly to the Translink Chair and new Chief Executive who has agreed to produce a comprehensive lessons learned report and follow up actions in the near future.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the A5 Western Transport Corridor project is still a key priority in the Programme for Government 2011-15, given the current budget cuts; and when construction will commence.
(AQW 38298/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government. Both the Executive and the Irish Government remain committed to the scheme.

Work to address the one area of concern identified in the judicial review is well advanced. This relates to undertaking Appropriate Assessments under the Habitats Directive of the impact of the A5 proposals on designated environmentally sensitive sites. Work is also well advanced on the new Environmental Statement and new draft Statutory Orders.

Subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures, construction of this scheme will be dependent upon funding being made available by the Executive and the Irish Government in future budget settlements.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration is given to the assessment of people with fluctuating conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, when applying and being assessed for the Blue Badge parking scheme.
(AQW 38309/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A specific disability, such as Parkinson's disease, does not automatically qualify an applicant for a Blue Badge. All applications for Blue Badges are assessed on an individual basis and a Blue Badge will be awarded if one of the criteria outlined below is met.

- receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance;
- registered blind;
- receipt of a War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement;

- have a permanent and substantial disability which means the applicant cannot walk, or have very considerable difficulty walking - in this case the applicant's doctor may be asked to answer a series of questions to confirm eligibility for a badge;
- drive a vehicle regularly, have a severe disability in both arms and are unable to operate, or have considerable difficulty operating, all or some types of parking meter; and
- children under the age of two, if they have a disability due to a medical condition and need to travel with bulky equipment, or to be close to a vehicle for emergency medical treatment, may be eligible for a badge

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any current proposals to put the Lisburn-Antrim railway line back into use, including a connection to Belfast International Airport.
(AQW 38310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Re-opening the Antrim to Knockmore line is one of two possible solutions identified in the Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy to remove potential longer term bottlenecks to more frequent timetabling and shortening of journey times of services on the Northern Line between Antrim and Belfast. The other option is dualling of the existing single line track between Bleach Green and Antrim. The economic cost and benefit of each of the options will be considered in further work to be undertaken by Translink.

The Strategy also notes that re-opening of the Antrim to Knockmore line could present an opportunity to establish a spur to Belfast International Airport, although such investment is less likely to be economically viable until annual passenger numbers through the airport rise to around 10 million. As passenger throughput in 2013 was just over 4 million, a detailed feasibility study would be expected as passenger numbers grow towards 10 million by 2030 as predicted by the airport operator.

The extent to which these proposed projects can be supported will depend upon the availability of significantly greater amount of railways capital grant from the Executive's budgets over the next 20 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the car parks in North Down owned by his Department that are surplus to requirements.
(AQW 38341/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no car parks in North Down that are surplus to requirements.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has been approached in relation to purchasing departmental controlled car parks in North Down.
(AQW 38342/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not been approached in relation to purchasing departmental controlled car parks in North Down.

Arrangements for the future maintenance and operation of the Park & Ride facilities in Bangor are currently being considered, including the possibility of transferring responsibility for Dufferin Avenue and Abbey Street car parks to Translink.

All other Departmental car parks in the North Down area will be transferred to the new North Down and Ards Council on 1 April 2015 by virtue of Transfer Schemes, provided for by Section 122 of the Local Government Act 2014.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the road projects cancelled in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 38344/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that no road projects have been cancelled in the last three financial years.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38375/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Equality Unit currently employs two staff, both of whom also carry out duties in areas other than Equality. The proportion of staff resources devoted to Equality issues equates to 1.35 full-time staff.

In the 2013/14 financial year, the cost of the Unit's staffing resources allocated to Equality issues amounted to £59,717.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether footpath reconstruction is planned for Springhill Avenue, Bangor.
(AQW 38397/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to advise the Member that work is currently underway on the reconstruction of footways in Springhill Avenue, Bangor.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed new sewage pumping station for Millisle, including when the works will begin.
(AQW 38401/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The site required for the new wastewater pumping station is presently split between two owners - Ards Borough Council and the Crown Estate. Before NIW can acquire the entire site, Ards Borough Council must first acquire a strip of land from the Crown Estate. Matters in relation to this initial acquisition are still ongoing and outside NIW's direct control. NIW's legal department have sought regular updates from the external parties and we understand legal processes are progressing.

I understand that an agreement has now been reached between the land owners. The project will be brought to construction as soon as possible following completion of the necessary land acquisitions.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cut in the 2014/15 budget allocation for the replacement of street lights; and what the cut will be in 2015/16.
(AQW 38433/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's budget allocation for the replacement of street lights in 2014/15 has not been cut. Replacement of street lights is funded from capital expenditure whereas the repair of street lights is funded from resource expenditure. The initial 2014/15 allocation for replacement of street lights was £5 million.

Budget allocations for 2015/16 have still to be agreed.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what streets in North Down are under consideration for parking constraint under the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan.
(AQW 38434/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The main streets identified within the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 for parking restraint in the North Down area are those lying within Bangor town centre. This area is already largely subject to existing forms of parking control, including limited waiting, and single- or double-yellow line parking restrictions.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether cyclists are required to use cycle lanes where available, particularly during rush hours.
(AQW 38477/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Highway Code for Northern Ireland contains a specific section entitled 'Rules for Cyclists' and these rules are in addition to subsequent sections of the code, which apply to all vehicles.

It advises cyclists to use facilities such as cycle lanes, cycle tracks and cycle routes where provided but states that their use by cyclists is not compulsory.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the total tonnage throughput in the last financial year for (i) Belfast; (ii) Warrenpoint; and (iii) Londonderry ports.
(AQW 38549/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Belfast Harbour Commission reported tonnage throughput of 22.7m tonnes in their Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2013.

Both Warrenpoint Harbour Authority and Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners Annual Reports cover the year ending 31 March 2014. Their tonnage figures are 3,021,444 and 1,879,684 respectively.

This information is drawn from the organisations' Annual Reports which are published online.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department will take to improve driver safety on the A29 Armagh to Keady road.
(AQW 38591/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A number of improvement schemes have been completed in recent years along the Armagh to Keady Road, most notably at the Bachelors Walk junction and from the Dundrum Road to Girvan's Bridge. Further sites at Ballyards Crossroads and at Ballyards Lodge have benefitted from the provision of additional warning signs and road markings.

However, my officials are aware of recent collisions occurring along the A29 and officials will be assessing the reports from the PSNI in respect of these collisions. Officials will be carrying out additional technical assessments and a review of the current signing, to determine if further road safety improvements are required along this route.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current condition of Donaghadee Harbour.
(AQW 38596/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department received its bi-annual underwater survey, commissioned on its behalf by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in May 2014. This report, which also examined the harbour structure above the water line, did not highlight

any significant defects but did make some recommendations for work to be done in relation to weed killing, joint filling and the need to continue to monitor movements in the harbour wall. All the recommendations made in the report have now been carried out.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people hold blue badges.
(AQW 38636/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As at 31 October 2014, the total number of badge holders in Northern Ireland was 110,574. This number changes on a daily basis as new badges are issued and others expire.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria used to ensure that public safety is not compromised when deciding not to repair malfunctioning street lights.
(AQO 7065/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I readily acknowledge that, since street lighting is provided as a road safety measure, delays in the repair of malfunctioning street lights have the potential to lead to safety issues for road users during the hours of darkness.

In order to deal with the public safety implications, I have set priorities for dealing with street lighting faults with contractors still being employed to deal with faults that present an electrical or structural hazard to members of the public despite the prevailing funding pressures.

For other street lighting defects, where there is no electrical or structural hazard, my Department's Operations and Maintenance staff are able to provide around twenty five per cent of the usual resource required to fix street lighting faults, and they will endeavour to repair as many lights as possible, with large groups of lights which are out being dealt with first followed by individual lights that have failed. In present circumstances it will take longer to fix individual outages.

Regrettably, the impact of the cuts will mean that, in all likelihood, a large number of street lights will be out over the winter months. Currently, almost 15,000 lights are out across Northern Ireland. This is not the service that I would like to provide, but is the inevitable consequence of the budgetary pressures my Department is facing.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development what assurances he can give that he will uphold the commitment that no water charges will be introduced during this Programme for Government period.
(AQW 38857/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Decisions on water funding are cross-cutting, because of their significant public expenditure implications and the Executive has given a commitment that for householders it will ensure no additional water charges during this Programme for Government.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timescale and the financing of the upgrade of the Derry/Londonderry - Belfast railway line.
(AQO 7062/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In my Statement to the Assembly on 3 November I confirmed that I remain fully committed to the completion of Phase 2 of the upgrade of Londonderry to Belfast Railway Line.

As outlined in my Statement, the detailed design work now suggests that overall costs could be of the order of £40m, with the additional cost of Phase 2 being in the region of £15-£20 million. This estimate is subject to the completion of the procurement process for the signalling element of Phase 2. Final procurement is expected in the early part of next year. I will be making this a priority in the deployment of my capital budget over the next two years.

My Department is working at present to secure approval to a revised Business Case. Assuming this happens soon the overall project timetable may be only marginally delayed. The signalling procurement process has already begun, with the issue of a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire, which does not commit Translink to expenditure. As set out last year in my communication on this issue a timetable of the end of 2016 is in place. This remains the case.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development what instruction or guidance his Department has provided to Transport NI staff, particularly in the Newry and South Down offices, regarding employing private contractors to empty gullies and drains in circumstances where heavy rainfall is expected and localised flooding is inevitable.
(AQO 7063/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Despite starting the year with a significant funding shortfall and submitting bids for additional funding as part of the June and October monitoring rounds process, my Department's Resource budget, used to fund the day to day maintenance operations, is under significant pressure.

As a result, I have had no option other than to stop issuing new work instructions to our external contractors who would have undertaken around one quarter of our essential work, in the following areas: footway and carriageway patching including potholes, grass cutting/environmental maintenance, gully emptying, road marking maintenance/renewal and traffic sign maintenance/replacement.

My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff are endeavouring to keep the road network in as safe a condition as possible. However, as they only have resources to complete around three quarters of the total workload, they will not be able to provide the service the public would expect in normal circumstances.

In circumstances where heavy rainfall, is expected such as when a weather warning has been issued, TransportNI staff have been instructed to prioritise the available resource in areas of known flooding. I can assure you that our staff will endeavour to carry out works, including out of hours cover, to ensure that the road network continues to be fully available and safe throughout all areas including Newry and Mourne and South Down.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Regional Development, further to his statement to the Assembly on 21 October 2014, to outline the prioritisation of car parking facilities due to be handed over to local councils in 2015.
(AQO 7064/11-15)

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 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.

There is no prioritisation of car parks transferring to the new councils. The aim is that any off-street car park that is owned by my Department will transfer, by way of formal transfer schemes, to each new council, with effect from 1 April 2015. A number of car parks are already owned by the councils and my Department's leases for these car parks will simply be terminated by the relevant council on 31 March 2015.

The Member may be interested to know that, at this stage, it is my intention to transfer 39 free and charged car parks to the new Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development why Translink has not made any comment on Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Londonderry track improvements.
(AQO 7066/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is free to make comment on this project. I am aware also that last Wednesday Translink representatives gave evidence to the Committee for Regional Development.

The new Translink Group Chief Executive has commenced a lessons learned review and will share this with me in due course.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what resources are in place to address recurring flooding concerns on the A2 dual carriageway at Hollywood and Craigdarragh Road, Helen's Bay.
(AQO 7067/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Despite starting the year with a significant funding shortfall and submitting bids for additional funding as part of the June and October monitoring rounds process, my Department's Resource budget, used to fund the day to day maintenance operations, is under significant pressure.

My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff are endeavouring to keep the road network in as safe a condition as possible. However, as they only have resources to complete around three quarters of the total workload, they will not be able to provide the service the public would expect in normal circumstances.

The flooding on A2 dual carriageway at Hollywood and Craigdarragh Road, Helen's Bay, on the 6 November, was caused by leaves covering some of the gully tops. The period of heavy rain at this time consequently caused flooding over one lane of the carriageway. In addition, it was also reported that a lorry had broken down on the road adding to the problems. These two issues quickly caused a build up of traffic. My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff attended the location and removed the leaves from the gully tops, which allowed the flood water to clear rapidly.

In circumstances where heavy rainfall is expected such as when a weather warning has been issued, my Department has been instructed to prioritise the available resource in areas of known flooding. I can assure you that our staff will endeavour to carry out works, including out of hours cover, to ensure that the road network continues to be fully available and safe throughout all areas including the A2 dual carriageway at Hollywood and Craigdarragh Road, Helen's Bay.

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development how he will ensure that the 60 plus smartpass will not be affected by departmental cuts.
(AQO 7069/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Concessionary Fares is an Executive commitment and I have already made public my view that Concessionary fares should be fully funded by the Executive. I hope it will not be necessary to make this the subject of monitoring bids.

I have received £9.5m for concessions this year which has helped maintain the scheme in this financial year. We are still considering the implication of the budget settlement for 2015/16 currently. I continue to prioritise Concessionary Fares going forward and I have no plans to change existing entitlement.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment has been made of public safety issues resulting from his decision to reduce maintenance of grass verges and street lighting.
(AQO 7070/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Despite starting the year with a significant funding shortfall and submitting bids for additional funding as part of the June and October monitoring rounds process, my Department's Resource budget, used to fund the day to day maintenance operations, is under significant pressure.

As a result, I had no option but to suspend the issuing of new works to external contractors for a range of activities including grass cutting and street lighting. There is no doubt this reduction in service has the potential to impact on road safety.

I can assure you that public safety concerns are not disregarded by my Department. In order to deal with the health and safety implications, I have established priorities which take account of the budgets I have available.

My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff have the resources to complete around three quarters of routine maintenance activities and one quarter of the street lighting work, normally completed by external contractors. Officials are prioritising this work to keep the network in as safe a condition as possible, for example, street lighting faults that present an electrical or structural risk to the public continue to be fixed.

This is not the level of service that the public would expect in normal circumstances. However, I have had to take some difficult decisions and I simply cannot spend money that I do not have.

I can also confirm that my Department has received legal advice on how to meet its statutory duty under Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

In this regard, my Department will continue to inspect roads and footways in accordance with its established inspection regime and all defects will be recorded as normal. My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff will continue to carry out repairs to keep the network as safe as possible, however, due to the current financial constraints, defects may not be repaired as quickly as normal, but all repairs will be prioritised on the basis of safety.

My Department will continue to actively investigate and defend public liability claims with every case turning on its own facts. However, it will ultimately be up to the courts to decide if the reduced standards comply with my Department's statutory duty.

Department for Social Development

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any planned environmental improvement schemes in North Down.
(AQW 37620/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): My Department is currently undertaking two major environmental improvement schemes in Bangor and Holywood in North Down in partnership with North Down Borough Council amounting to a total investment of £10.5 million. The contribution from my Department is £4.5 million.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total number of claimants for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in each local government district in (a) May 2007; and (b) September 2014 and in each case, what percentage of the working age population was accounted for by JSA claimants.
(AQW 37751/11-15)

Mr Storey: The most recently published Jobseekers Allowance statistics refer to May 2014. Figures for August 2014 will be published at the end of November 2014. The number of Jobseeker's Allowance Claimants by Local Government District and Percentage of Working Age Population at May 2007 and May 2014 are in the table below.

Local Government District	May 2007		May 2014	
	Claimants	% of Working Age Population	Claimants	% of Working Age Population
Antrim LGD	470	1.5%	1060	3.2%
Ards LGD	860	1.8%	1850	4.0%
Armagh LGD	500	1.4%	1390	3.9%
Ballymena LGD	630	1.7%	1340	3.5%
Ballymoney LGD	280	1.5%	730	3.8%
Banbridge LGD	320	1.1%	970	3.3%
Belfast LGD	6330	3.8%	11560	6.4%
Carrickfergus LGD	390	1.6%	920	3.9%

Local Government District	May 2007		May 2014	
	Claimants	% of Working Age Population	Claimants	% of Working Age Population
Castlereagh LGD	470	1.2%	1120	2.8%
Coleraine LGD	720	2.1%	1370	3.8%
Cookstown LGD	290	1.3%	810	3.6%
Craigavon LGD	920	1.7%	2620	4.6%
Derry LGD	2780	4.1%	5320	7.9%
Down LGD	760	1.8%	1950	4.6%
Dungannon LGD	370	1.1%	1270	3.6%
Fermanagh LGD	720	1.9%	1360	3.6%
Larne LGD	300	1.4%	730	3.8%
Limavady LGD	560	2.9%	1190	5.7%
Lisburn LGD	1330	1.9%	2850	3.9%
Magherafelt LGD	250	0.9%	820	3.0%
Moyle LGD	250	2.5%	510	5.0%
Newry And Mourne LGD	1050	1.8%	2850	4.7%
Newtownabbey LGD	860	1.7%	1790	3.5%
North Down LGD	770	1.6%	1560	3.3%
Omagh LGD	580	1.8%	1350	4.3%
Strabane LGD	970	4.0%	1820	7.5%

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Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of people that have benefited from the extra statutory scheme set up in 2013 for contributions based Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and extended in 2014 to include income based ESA, which allows claimants to continue to receive ESA when they move between Northern Ireland and Great Britain; and (ii) how much income has been generated for claimants as a result of the scheme.
(AQW 38014/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) The number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and paid under the extra statutory scheme since its introduction in October 2012 to 30 September 2014 is 239*.

(ii) The total amount of Employment and Support Allowance paid under the extra statutory scheme for the period October 2012 to September 2014 is approximately £672,000*.

* These are not statistics provided by the Department's Analytical Services Unit. They have been taken from management information collected by the Employment and Support Allowance Centre for the periods stated.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of money paid for compensation events issued by the 'All Trades' contractors in each Northern Ireland Housing Executive District Area, since the start of the 2012 contract.
(AQW 38037/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive has advised that their local offices are now structured on a Regional/Area basis. Therefore, they have provided the information in relation to the amount of money paid for compensation events since the start of the 2012 contract by Housing Executive Region/Area, as detailed below: -

Belfast Region

North Belfast Area £529.11

South & East Belfast Area £232.45

South Region	
South West Area	£1,794.97
South Area	£190.37
North Region	
South Antrim Area	£670.50
East Area	£565.61
Causeway Area	£565.61

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development what efforts are being made to re-tender the contracts that were returned to Direct Labour Organisation 'All Trades' after a number of the 2012 contracts collapsed.
(AQW 38038/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive is currently reviewing the provision of response maintenance services with the aim of developing a new procurement strategy to enable the renewing of contracts when they expire in August 2016. Until the strategy is complete, the nature of the procurement will not be known.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the consultations on housing association mergers meets the legal standards set for bona fide consultations in R v Brent London Borough Council, ex p Gunning, (1985) 84 LGR 168 and in R v London Borough of Haringey [2014] UKSC 56.
(AQW 38057/11-15)

Mr Storey: Responsibility for carrying out consultation prior to a housing association merger rests with the housing association concerned. As the regulatory body, the Department is keen to ensure that proper consultation takes place in the eventuality of a merger however any issues arising as to the lawfulness of such exercises, is a matter in the first instance for the relevant housing association to address and ultimately perhaps a court of competent jurisdiction.

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration was given to An Droichead's neighbourhood renewal development project for the Ormeau Road, when the decision was made to transfer the site for development by another organization.
(AQW 38113/11-15)

Mr Storey: In May 2014, officials from my Department met with representatives from An Droichead to advise of the impending transfer of the site at 20-32 Ormeau Road, Belfast to the Department of Education. The representatives raised some concerns regarding their previous proposal and were advised to forward any new proposals for the site to the Department.

No further proposals were received and in July 2014 An Droichead was advised that the Department would proceed with the disposal of the site to the Droichead

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what alternative plans his Department has to progress the An Droichead neighbourhood renewal development project.
(AQW 38115/11-15)

Mr Storey: My officials have met with representatives of An Droichead and discussed alternative sites for their development project that are in my Department's ownership. To date, no alternative proposal from An Droichead have been presented to the Department.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37625/11-15, whether he will consider updating information sent to General Practitioners and other health professionals, when they are asked to provide medical reports about a benefit claimant, so that it includes advice as to the location of guidance about completing such reports on his Department's website.
(AQW 38122/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Security Agency is working with its Medical Service Provider to include information on the documentation requesting an Employment and Support Allowance medical report signposting Healthcare Professionals to the guidance available on the Department's Website, about completing such reports.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency received letters to alert them to the importance of checking their benefits.
(AQW 38162/11-15)

Mr Storey: During 2014/15, approximately 25,000 letters will be issued to older people to encourage them to find out about benefit entitlement. Letters have been issued from 20 October 2014 and will continue through to January 2015.

A breakdown of the information is not available at constituency level but is available for each Local Government District.

Breakdown per Local Government District

Local Government District	Total
Antrim LGD	930
Ards LGD	1826
Armagh LGD	934
Ballymena LGD	1192
Ballymoney LGD	393
Banbridge LGD	575
Belfast LGD	2949
Carrickfergus LGD	592
Castlereagh LGD	1532
Coleraine LGD	1379
Cookstown LGD	503
Craigavon LGD	1133
Derry LGD	1154
Down LGD	1381
Dungannon LGD	526
Fermanagh LGD	654
Larne LGD	506
Limavady LGD	313
Lisburn LGD	1731
Magherafelt LGD	690
Moyle LGD	265
Newry and Mourne LGD	875
Newtownabbey LGD	1148
North Down LGD	1988
Omagh LGD	471
Strabane LGD	386
Total	**26,026**

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Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding for new builds his Department has awarded to each housing authority over the last three financial years.
(AQW 38170/11-15)

Mr Storey: I assume the Member is referring to the Housing Association Grant. The table attached, provided by the Housing Executive, details the total Housing Association Grant awarded/allocated for the social housing schemes which started in each of the last three financial years, broken down by Housing Association.

Housing Association	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Apex	31,875,586	12,235,038	9,927,909	54,038,533
Ark	158,306	1,348,622	739,722	2,246,650
Clanmil	9,122,503	18,717,391	11,088,690	38,928,584
Connswater	4,643,390	3,284,240	1,051,245	8,978,875
Flax	221,724	0	596,473	818,197

Housing Association	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Fold	19,387,228	13,480,789	11,737,877	44,605,894
Grove	0	0	0	0
Habinteg	646,173	794,264	4,455,881	5,896,318
Harmony Homes	831,275	0	88,467	919,742
Helm	2,501,316	875,164	2,625,640	6,002,120
Newington	0	2,594,673	0	2,594,673
Oaklee	7,764,274	11,842,332	10,417,442	30,024,048
Rural	123,288	0	0	123,288
South Ulster	3,123,409	0	0	3,123,409
St Matthews	0	0	69,136	69,136
Triangle	3,989,082	3,086,390	4,680,039	11,755,511
Trinity	2,615,740	3,358,012	5,287,125	11,260,877
Ulidia	1,783,810	1,869,262	2,158,973	5,812,045
Totals	**£88,787,104**	**£73,486,177**	**£64,924,619**	**£227,197,900**

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 Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development how many tenants in each constituency are in receipt of Housing Benefit for homes where the landlord is a family member.
(AQW 38183/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested cannot be provided as the Housing Executive does not hold this detail on the Housing Benefit system.

Whilst the Housing Benefit application form asks applicants whether he/she is related to the Landlord, the answer is not transferred to the Housing Benefit system because if the claimant is a close relative of the landlord and resides in the same property as the landlord, he/she is not entitled to Housing Benefit and the claim would therefore not be put onto the live Housing Benefit System. Conversely, if the claimant lives at a different address from a family member who is the landlord, there is no such bar on him/her claiming Housing Benefit and there is therefore no need for the relationship to be recorded.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the capital receipts generated by his Department since 2011, including how the capital was generated.
(AQW 38200/11-15)

Mr Storey: The capital receipts generated within the department since 2011 are detailed in the table below:

Year	Capital Receipts (£m)	How generated
2011-12	94.96	House &land sales/
2012-13	98.71	Housing loan & grant repayments
2013-14	101.37	
2014-15 (year to date Oct 2014)	52.85	
Total	**347.89**	

Mr McCallister asked Minister for Social Development to detail the efficiencies that have been realised in his Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.

(AQW 38233/11-15)

Mr Storey: To date there have been no efficiencies realised in my Department as a direct result of the work of the Public Sector Reform Division.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38241/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department for Social Development participates in the NICS Cycle to Work Scheme. The NICS Cycle to Work Scheme was launched by the Department of Finance and Personnel in June 2012 and it is open to all NICS staff all year round.

As the Scheme is a NICS scheme it does not extend to NDPBs, for whom the NICS is not the employer. However, DFP as the lead Department on the Scheme provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of cycle to work schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development what research has been undertaken to measure the effect on the construction industry of the consultation on 'Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing'.
(AQW 38245/11-15)

Mr Storey: When developing policy on the introduction of Developer Contributions in Northern Ireland, a draft partial Regulatory Impact Assessment was drawn up, setting out the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of options for the introduction of developer contributions. This partial Regulatory Impact Assessment was published for consultation as part of my Department's draft Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing paper and the Department of the Environment's (DOE) draft Planning Policy Statement 22 Affordable Housing.

The draft Regulatory Impact Assessment acknowledges that whilst some economic modelling/cost benefit analysis has been conducted, 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.

My officials are currently considering the 75 responses received through the public consultation and are liaising further with DOE officials in relation to the responses received to their consultation. Along with the Minister of the Environment, I intend to take account of all of the views received before considering how to move forward with the proposals for affordable housing.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of reserve funds provided by his Department and held by each Housing Association for new build housing.
(AQW 38252/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department does not provide Housing Associations with funding that they can hold as reserve funds for the building of new houses.

Housing Association reserves are accumulated from any surplus made on their operational activities. In general Housing Associations do not maintain reserves as cash balances, but merely accounting entries. Reserves are often reinvested in housing stock, to manage cash flow to minimise borrowing costs and meet their short term liabilities.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37065/11-15, whether he will hold discussions with Housing Associations regarding how they are dealing with the increase in the number of tenants being subjected to court proceedings for anti social behaviour.
(AQW 38270/11-15)

Mr Storey: The increasing number of housing association tenants being subjected to court proceedings for anti social behaviour indicates the commitment of housing associations to tackling this difficult issue, an approach which has my full support. It is my aim to continue to build the capacity of social landlords to deal with anti social behaviour and I am currently seeking the agreement of Executive colleagues to draft a Bill that would extend the range of options currently open to social landlords. When these proposals were published for consultation at the end of last year, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and a number of individual associations responded. The consensus view of these associations was that successful court action depends on access to information about the individuals involved in anti social behaviour and my officials have therefore been encouraging the PSNI to agree an information sharing protocol with the NI Federation of Housing Associations.

The consultation paper included proposals for a new form of social housing tenancy (the "short tenancy") for tenants who have been involved in anti social behaviour. The landlord would be required to provide whatever support services the tenants may need but, if the tenant's conduct does not improve, the tenancy can be brought to an end within a fixed period. The paper also outlined proposals to clarify existing legislation for dealing with anti social behaviour by homeless applicants who have been placed in temporary accommodation. Following the consultation, I intend to propose that the Bill should also provide for a power of arrest without warrant to be attached to the injunctions against anti social behaviour, which are currently available to landlords, as well as the creation of a statutory basis for information sharing.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what procedures are in place to avoid perceived conflicts of interest for departmental officials dealing with Neighbourhood Renewal Grants.
(AQW 38300/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Northern Ireland Civil Service Code of Ethics and Handbook provide guidance on duties and responsibilities of all civil servants including the need to avoid conflicts of interest arising as part of their job. In addition, procedural guidance addressing potential conflicts of interest for officials processing funding applications including Neighbourhood Renewal grants is in place within the Urban Regeneration Group. That guidance explains what a conflict of interest is, incompatible outside interests, the responsibilities of staff and includes declarations for officials to complete as appropriate.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether a conflict of interest was declared by any departmental official dealing with the Lurgan Golf Club Neighbourhood Renewal Grant application.
(AQW 38301/11-15)

Mr Storey: No. My Department recently learned that an official who was involved in the project did not declare a conflict of interest in this case. Staff have been reminded of the need to comply with guidance on declaring potential conflicts of interest and this issue is being dealt with through the normal HR processes.

Whilst the decision to approve funding was made by an independent panel an investigation of the project file is underway to ensure that the application for funding has been fully and properly assessed. This review will be independently verified by the Department's Internal Audit Unit to ensure that all funding decisions were in order.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development for an update in relation to the review of the Housing Executive.
(AQW 38351/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Housing Reform Programme has a mandate to explore the potential for reform of housing structures in NI. The Programme is currently in its second phase. This involves detailed work to present through the first half of 2015 a range of proposals for consultation. These will include a draft strategy for tenant participation, options for the development of a social housing rent policy, proposals for the future nature of inspection and regulation, and proposals for structural reform, if required.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Affordable Warmth Scheme.
(AQW 38352/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department introduced the Affordable Warmth Scheme on 15 September 2014. This is a targeted area based scheme which will improve the energy efficiency of the homes of people most affected by fuel poverty. Eligible households will be contacted by their local Council. The Affordable Warmth Scheme is currently being ramped up to replace the Warm Homes Scheme which is due to end on 31 March 2015.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what funding was provided by his Department or the Social Security Agency to the Citizens Advice Bureau in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38354/11-15)

Mr Storey: Direct funding provided by the Department for Social Development to the Citizens Advice Bureau in each of the last five years is detailed in the attached Annex.

In addition the Citizens Advice Bureau NI (Regional Office) benefited from Departmental funding to the Northern Ireland Advice Consortium. Funding to the Consortium for the period 1 October 2012 to 31 March 2013 was £738,451 and for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 was £1,448,488. Details of specific allocations to the individual members of the Consortium are not available.

The Department also provides funding for frontline advice services of approximately £1.6m through local councils, who provide additional funding. Local councils then commission services and allocate funding from a range of advice providers including the Citizens Advice Bureau. Details of specific allocation to these organisations by local councils are not available.

Annex

Table 1: Funding provided by the Department for Social Development to Citizens Advice Bureau in each of the last five years:

Table 1

FinancialYear	Grant Award Amount
2009/2010	£1,058,983
2010/2011	£934,391
2011/2012	£652,798
2012/2013	£310,281
2013/2014	£2,978

Table 2: Funding provided by the Social Security Agency to Citizens Advice Bureau in each of the last five years:

Table 2

FinancialYear	Grant Award Amount
2009/2010	£398,762
2010/2011	£262,338
2011/2012	£146,000
2012/2013	£Nil
2013/2014	£54,000

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what action has been taken by The Appeals Service (TAS) senior management to date in order to effectively balance and manage the workload of both TAS sites; and whether TAS senior management considered the possibility of certain tasks being downgraded to a lower grade due to the simplicity of the tasks.
(AQW 38365/11-15)

Mr Storey: The volume of work within The Appeals Service (TAS) is continually monitored by TAS senior management. Staff complement in both TAS offices is kept under review to ensure appropriate staffing levels are maintained in line with business requirements, current workloads and future projections. DSD has approved a review of TAS processes, roles and responsibilities and loading and weighting of graded posts. This will be carried out by Business Consultancy Services (DFP) and will commence in the near future. This will further ensure that staffing levels are at an appropriate level to meet business requirements.

Mr Copeland asked Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 36154/11-15, whether he is aware of policy 1.07 of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Handbook; and if so, whether the temporary transfers as described in section 1.07 be used to ensure The Appeals Service offices are operating with only the necessary number of staff.
(AQW 38366/11-15)

Mr Storey: The on-loan provisions referred to in the question govern a formal agreement between NICS departments relating, for example, to the delivery of a service e.g. the majority of staff in the Appeals Service are formally on-loan from DSD to the Department of Justice. As such, the on-loan provision is not an appropriate mechanism by which to seek to address an ad hoc, temporary, post-loading issue within a business unit.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38427/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department's Equality Unit consists of one member of staff at Deputy Principal level and one member of staff at Executive Officer 1 level. The Deputy Principal is also responsible for other Departmental functions.

The Annual total cost of staff in the Equality Unit is £54,217.00.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive households in Foyle with (i) gas; (ii) oil; and (iii) solid fuel as a primary heating source, broken down by District Office.
(AQW 38439/11-15)

Mr Storey: The heating systems in Housing Executive homes in the Foyle Parliamentary constituency, broken down by local office area is as follows: -

Local Office	Gas	Oil	Solid Fuel*
Collon Terrace	826	1,502	13
Waterloo Place	810	1,253	68
Waterside	756	1,501	62

There are a further 150 NIHE dwellings in Foyle with other forms of heating.

* includes gravity fed boilers, open fire back boilers, open fires and room heaters.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the objective of building ten new Shared Neighbourhood Developments under the Together: Building a United Community strategy.
(AQW 38517/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has identified ten sites which provide the potential for development as shared neighbourhoods and is working to identify further potential sites.

Construction works on 1 site have been completed and site or construction works have commenced on 3 further sites.

All new social housing, including on potential shared neighbourhood developments, will be allocated on the basis of housing need and in accordance with the Housing Executive's Housing Selection Scheme. This means that while sites will be earmarked for development as shared neighbourhoods, this status cannot be confirmed until all the social housing within a development is allocated.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development what actions his Department has taken to advance the Together: Building a United Community objective of reviewing housing provision to bring forward recommendations on enhancing shared neighbourhoods.
(AQW 38518/11-15)

Mr Storey: There is already a substantial body of research, evidence and literature on shared housing. As a first step, my officials are working on producing a review of this to identify key gaps. It is then my intention to commission a study in the next financial year, resources permitting, which aims to build further our understanding on how we can further enhance the provision of shared neighbourhoods.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people on the housing waiting list, broken down by Housing Executive District Office, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38663/11-15)

Mr Storey: Table 1 attached details the number of people on the Common Waiting List for each Housing Executive District Office area in each of the last five years. Table 2 attached details the number of people in Housing Stress for each Housing Executive District Office area in each of the last five years.

Table 1 - Total Applicants on the Waiting List by Housing Executive Office

Housing Executive Office	31/03/10	31/03/11	1/05/12*	31/03/13	31/03/14
Antrim	972	977	852	992	918
Armagh	760	802	708	851	721
Ballycastle	357	334	326	352	327
Ballymena	1,420	1,520	1,256	1,564	1429
Ballymoney	439	496	390	481	453
Banbridge	665	677	479	581	539
Bangor	1,885	1,884	2,146	2,414	1,837
Belfast West	2,456	2,618	2,550	2,778	2,641
Belfast East	1,850	2,125	1,392	1,660	1,908
Belfast North	2,479	2,435	2,037	2,496	2,430
Shankill	897	888	672	860	823
Belfast South	2,259	2,112	2,122	2,692	2,409
Carrickfergus	994	974	818	962	866
Castlereagh	1,367	1,462	1,167	1,318	1,246
Coleraine	1,219	1,297	1,026	1,293	1,290
Cookstown	371	407	362	400	355
Waterloo Place	884	982	1,001	1,220	1,166
Waterside	863	1,007	748	943	943
Collon Terrace	827	1,004	1,013	1,123	1,244
Downpatrick	1,213	1,323	1,250	1,601	1,520
Dungannon	895	1,022	920	1,103	1,069
Fermanagh	833	853	639	826	771
Larne	509	550	406	490	461

Housing Executive Office	31/03/10	31/03/11	1/05/12*	31/03/13	31/03/14
Limavady	497	472	372	508	458
Lisburn Antrim Street	1,981	1,991	1,709	1,937	1,851
Lisburn Dairy Farm	626	604	559	598	656
Lurgan	1,061	1,154	961	1,226	1,035
Magherafelt	507	512	429	490	468
Newry	1,828	1,827	1,571	1,965	2,038
Newtownabbey 1	785	826	731	889	846
Newtownabbey 2	906	917	783	928	849
Newtownards	1,706	1,811	1,486	1,690	1,737
Omagh	590	622	495	663	619
Portadown	694	768	646	802	730
Strabane	525	638	511	660	697
Total	**38,120**	**39,891**	**34,533**	**41,356**	**39,350**

Table 2 - Applicants on the Waiting List in Housing Stress (30 or more Points)

Housing Executive Office	31/03/10	31/03/11	1/05/12 *	31/0313	31/03/14
Antrim	436	477	482	506	500
Armagh	281	302	333	375	307
Ballycastle	178	165	186	202	180
Ballymena	806	880	835	967	856
Ballymoney	138	160	164	190	190
Banbridge	285	293	227	259	253
Bangor	958	960	1,077	1,193	1,062
Belfast West	1,755	1,922	2,003	2,045	1,910
Belfast East	929	1,058	742	802	918
Belfast North	1,429	1,335	1,368	1,507	1,490
Shankill	412	414	332	374	372
Belfast South	1,227	1,199	1,307	1,402	1,292
Carrickfergus	494	497	478	559	488
Castlereagh	660	732	664	697	586
Coleraine	563	638	573	673	668
Cookstown	150	180	164	165	157
Waterloo Place	584	636	722	842	810
Waterside	361	446	441	554	588
Collon Terrace	521	683	742	799	919
Downpatrick	665	748	723	874	785
Dungannon	528	615	593	664	619
Fermanagh	360	346	252	302	285
Larne	142	177	146	157	168
Limavady	171	188	173	223	197
Lisburn Antrim Street	1,090	1,103	1,044	1,072	1,000

Housing Executive Office	31/03/10	31/03/11	1/05/12 *	31/0313	31/03/14
Lisburn Dairy Farm	458	460	451	460	502
Lurgan	422	470	442	517	376
Magherafelt	256	244	238	231	198
Newry	1,026	960	912	1,156	1,210
Newtownabbey 1	442	476	438	517	482
Newtownabbey 2	460	464	501	555	506
Newtownards	991	1,092	917	927	937
Omagh	131	160	127	160	175
Portadown	232	257	207	226	234
Strabane	175	230	207	262	326
Total	**19,716**	**20,967**	**20,211**	**22,414**	**21,546**

* NIHE advises that:-

1. Figures for 2011/12 were extracted on 1 May 2012, due to the implementation of a new electronic Housing Management System.
2. Due to the introduction of the new Housing Management System and a change to the annual renewal process for applicants, the number of waiting list applicants for 2011-12 are not directly comparable with previous years.

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.

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development, following a recent Republic of Ireland announcement that it is seeking European Investment Bank funding to assist in the provision of social housing, what is his Department's position in relation to accessing such funding to deliver social housing.
(AQO 7072/11-15)

Mr Storey: I am happy to consider all possible means of accessing funding which may assist in the delivery of social housing while providing value for money to the taxpayer.

The European Investment Bank has delivered financial assistance in the past for major road infrastructure and social housing projects. The Finance Minister and DFP officials have had several discussions with the European Investment Bank during the last year on how the Bank may play a greater role in financing infrastructure projects in Northern Ireland. These discussions also included the potential to establish a NI Investment fund.

My Department has already engaged with the Department of Finance and Personnel to consider the potential for European Investment Bank funding for social housing.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the need for continuing development in the Causeway Coast area.
(AQO 7075/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department continues to work with the Local Council authorities in the Causeway Coast area in order to identify and help deliver regeneration initiatives that will help to develop this area.

The announcement that Royal Portrush Golf Club will host the Open Championship as early as 2019 represents a unique opportunity not only for Portrush but for the whole Causeway Coast and the wider Northern Ireland economy. A ministerial sub- group has met and agreed to work together with all stakeholders to take forward a programme of major infrastructure projects in the Causeway Coast area over the next number of years. A number of projects are at the development stage which will help deliver this vision include –

- Re-developing the harbour to provide a marina attracting luxury cruise boats and the surrounding lands;
- Re-locating the train station and providing a transport hub with the bus/coach station;
- Identifying a suitable location and providing opportunities for a potential development of a 4 star hotel; and
- Providing a major upgrade of the public realm for the town centre.

Officials from my Department are currently drafting a paper on this regeneration programme which will outline the level of investment and benefits to the Causeway Coast and Northern Ireland.

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the positive impact the Boiler Replacement Scheme has had amongst older people.
(AQO 7080/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Boiler Replacement Scheme has been a very popular and very successful scheme. Since the Scheme was launched in September 2012 the Housing Executive has received almost 50,000 enquiries. There have been 22,653 formal applications and the Housing Executive has issued 21,551 approvals to commence boiler replacement works. Up until 31 October 2014 the scheme has helped 16,446 households to install a new boiler of which 1,258 replacement boilers have been in the Lagan Valley constituency.

The Scheme has been particularly popular amongst older people, almost 50% of applicants who had new boilers installed were aged over 66 and another 34% were aged between 51 and 65.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the most recent number of applicants on the Common Waiting List in North Antrim deemed to be in housing stress.
(AQO 7073/11-15)

Mr Storey: At 1st October 2014 there were 2,130 applicants on the waiting list in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency, of which 1,180 were in housing stress. There were 445 allocations in the preceding twelve months.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development, with particular reference to training and expertise, to outline the discussions he has had with the Minister of the Environment to ensure a smooth transfer of powers to the new councils in April 2015.
(AQO 7079/11-15)

Mr Storey: As I announced to the Assembly on 11 November, the commencement date for the transfer of powers for urban regeneration and community development is now April 2016. I have already had preliminary discussions with the Minister of the Environment and we plan to meet again in the future. My officials will continue to engage in discussions with each of the new Councils and with officials in the Department of the Environment to support training and capacity building to ensure the smooth transfers of powers to the new Councils from April 2016.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the Foyle constituency are currently on the Housing Executive waiting list.
(AQO 7082/11-15)

Mr Storey: At 1 October 2014 there were 3,316 applicants on the waiting list in the Foyle Parliamentary constituency, of which 2,298 were in housing stress. The breakdown of the waiting list is as follows:-

- Single 1,581 with 1,059 in Housing Stress
- Small Adult 114 with 67 in Housing Stress
- Small Family 1,045 with 792 in Housing Stress
- Large Adult 27 with 24 in Housing Stress
- Large Family 187 with 121 in Housing Stress
- Older Person 362 with 235 in Housing Stress

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his Department's Empty Homes Strategy in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.
(AQO 7083/11-15)

Mr Storey: Within the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone the Empty Homes Unit in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has recorded 31 empty properties reported to date. These properties consist of seven former Housing Executive properties and 24 other properties, of which, 10 are located in the wider Dungannon area and 21 in County Fermanagh.

Eight cases have since been closed as the properties are either for sale/for rent/or already occupied. One former Housing Executive property is being considered for inclusion in a pilot scheme; however this is subject to the condition of the property and value for money. 22 other properties are registered as being in the wider Empty Homes Strategy.

As part of the Department's five year Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan issued in September 2013 officials will continue to work with the Housing Executive on a number of initiatives and incentives to assist in bringing some of the empty homes back into use, subject to business cases being approved.

I am determined to maximise all opportunities to bring empty homes back into use.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 6903/11-15, to outline how much his Department has spent on town regeneration projects in South Antrim in the last two years.
(AQO 7084/11-15)

Mr Storey: The total amount spent by the Department on town regeneration schemes in the South Antrim constituency in the last two financial years in 2012/13 and 2013/14 is £1,755,548.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many social homes are required across Northern Ireland in the next financial year.
(AQO 7085/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has the statutory responsibility for assessing housing need. Their evidence comes from two main sources: the Common Waiting List for social housing and the Net Stock Model.

The Net Stock Model is a robust, academically based modelling tool. It takes into account a range of key drivers of the housing market, including population growth, the quality of the stock and the level of homelessness.

The Net Stock Model currently estimates a need for 1,200 new social homes per annum in each of the next five years. The Housing Executive has also built in an extra provision of 800 per annum to take account of the cumulative backlog that has developed over the past decade. It concludes that going forward we need to be building 2,000 new social housing units per annum.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Copeland asked the Assembly Commission for a breakdown of how its budget has been spent in each of the last seven years.
(AQW 38198/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): "To ask the Assembly Commission for a breakdown of how its budget has been spent in each of the last seven years."

The Assembly Commission's total budget covers a range of categories of expenditure including financial support for Members.

The Assembly Commission's expenditure is recorded annually in the Annual Report and Resource Accounts. These Accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Copes of the Accounts for each of the past seven years can be found on the Northern Ireland Assembly website at http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/Corporate-Information/Publications/Resource-Accounts/.

The presentation of expenditure in the Annual Accounts follows a prescribed format. In addition, internal management accounting information is maintained which shows expenditure by category. Table 1, over, shows the detail of how expenditure has been incurred within each of the budget categories for the past seven years. A forecast of the expenditure for 2014/15 has also been included.

Table 1: NIA Income and Expenditure Report 2007/08 to 2014/15 (Forecast)

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Forecast 2014/15
Income	-£139,922	-£184,469	-£51,955	-£45,009	-£43,978	-£115,066	-£109,848	-£90,000
Secretariat Salaries	£11,038,081	£12,467,014	£15,344,185	£18,430,781*	£16,918,289	£16,403,524	£16,677,299	£17,163,054
Secretariat Admin	£7,237,106	£8,129,958	£7,757,814	£7,538,845	£7,060,596	£6,361,424	£6,440,954	£6,631,299
Members' Salaries	£6,733,735	£6,836,244	£6,932,416	£7,117,040	£7,021,501	£7,198,961	£7,791,444	£7,818,121
Members' Other Costs	£432,334	£265,643	£393,901	£533,297	£1,178,055	£534,124	£469,460	£595,268
Members Travel & Subsistence	£339,193	£396,332	£312,261	£384,644	£359,547	£368,444	£471,707	£395,150
OCE	£6,896,004	£7,515,875	£7,524,029	£7,772,430	£7,432,845	£7,525,820	£7,383,950	£7,295,955
Party Allowance	£733,087	£787,731	£783,827	£784,987	£790,179	£799,130	£777,495	£856,709
Total	£33,269,617	£36,214,329	£38,996,478	£42,517,014	£40,717,033	£39,076,363	£39,902,461	£40,665,556

* The Secretariat Salaries figure for 2010/11 included payments to staff under a comprehensive grading and pay benchmarking exercise that had been in train since before the restoration of the Assembly in 2007 and payments as part of the Commission's settlement of the NICS Equal Pay claims.

Mr Copeland asked the Assembly Commission what correspondence it had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and his Department before the approval of the Draft 2015/16 Northern Ireland Budget.
(AQW 38199/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission considered the 2015/16 budget at its meeting in June 2014. The Clerk / Chief Executive subsequently wrote to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance and Personnel in July 2014 to update him on the progress made by the Commission in developing

the 2015/16 budget. Further engagement took place between officials during the Summer Recess relating to this and the proposed 2014/15 budgetary reductions. The former Speaker, William Hay MLA wrote to the Minister for Finance and Personnel on the latter issue and received a reply to this correspondence. No further correspondence was issued or received regarding the 2015/16 Draft Budget.

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission, given that the Assembly is a political institution, does it have any plans to review the restrictions on political expression at events in Parliament Buildings organised by Members and political parties.
(AQO 7095/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission met last week to discuss this matter. There have been many disparate policies in place covering events since the Commission agreed the interim criteria in 2008. The Commission have subsequently approved, although not unanimously, the new policy.

The agreed policy takes account of developments and trends since 2008 and reflects the current business needs of Members and the Assembly Commission. In terms of restrictions on political expression at events held at Parliament Buildings, the decision taken by the Commission at its meeting on 5 March 2008 remains. This includes the requirement for events to be sponsored by at least 3 Members to demonstrate cross designation support. The Commission have further agreed that the politically sensitive elements of the policy would need to be considered and reviewed in more detail as part of their wider discussion on Good Relations.

Mr Kinahan asked the Assembly Commission for its assessment of the situation on sittings days, that staff and visitors to Parliament Buildings must resort to parking on Prince of Wales Avenue.
(AQO 7097/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission recognises the problems experienced by Parliament Buildings users with regard to car parking space, particularly on sitting days, and acknowledges that some users of Parliament Buildings are required to park on Prince of Wales Avenue on those busier days. Facilities Management have however been able to ease the pressure within the Lower East car park by some physical realignment and staffing of this car park, and by the provision of an additional overspill car park that came into service in 2011.

Those measures provided the Assembly with an additional 40 parking spaces, and this has been well received by many car park users. The conclusion of the Parliament Buildings Roof Project will also provide a small number of additional car parking spaces at the rear of the building.

Assembly senior management have already looked into the possibility of further developing the provision of car park spaces for users of Parliament Buildings, and have already been involved in discussions with DFP in that regard.

At present however, there is little likelihood of obtaining further spaces for car parking, although naturally Facilities Management will continue to meet with DFP as appropriate.

Mr McNarry asked the Assembly Commission why it has taken no action to extend its control over a greater area of the Stormont estate.
(AQO 7099/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Stormont Estate is owned and managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the Assembly Commission has responsibility for Parliament Buildings and its immediate environs. The land which currently falls under our control is delineated by the security fences to the north, east and west sides and by the metal railings surrounding the front lawns.

Officials representing the Commission liaise regularly with colleagues in DFP on a range of matters including ground maintenance, security, car parking and traffic management. The Assembly Commission has no current plans to make representations to extend its control over a greater area of the estate.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 28 November 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the parity of the monitoring of spending as between small and large beneficiaries of Victims and Survivors Service funding.
(AQW 36353/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) currently vouch and verify 100% of expenditure by all groups funded under the Victims Support Programme.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the North West Gateway Initiative has met its initial aims and objectives to socially and economically improve the North West area, since 2006.
(AQW 38281/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The North-West Gateway Initiative (NWGI) was established to encourage a more integrated and joined up approach to economic growth in the north-west for the mutual benefit of the entire region. The extent to which this objective has been advanced has formed part of a review of the North-West Gateway Initiative (NWGI) on which the views of stakeholders in the north-west were sought.

Responses received were positive and stakeholders have in particular welcomed the focus on the north-west by both the Northern Ireland Executive and the Republic of Ireland Government which the initiative has facilitated. The findings of the stakeholder consultation are now being considered and discussed with relevant departments as the next phase of the review.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many projects have been developed in Limavady through the North West Gateway Initiative since its inception.
(AQW 38282/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The North-West Gateway Initiative has no dedicated funding for specific projects but aims to derive synergy through effective co-ordination of existing public expenditure by a range of departments and other bodies. A number of projects have been taken forward by individual departments, which have contributed to the aims of the initiative and which will benefit the entire north-west region.

These include significant EU funding provided to the region for projects such as Project Kelvin, the North-West Science Park, the Peace Bridge and other Environmental and Health projects. Other major projects include the establishment of a new radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin and the continuing commitment to deliver on major infrastructural improvement through the upgrade to the A5 road.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total cost of sending a delegation to the global summit to end sexual violence in conflict in London in June 2014.
(AQW 38330/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The total cost to OFMDFM to send a delegation to the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, which was held in London in June 2014, was £6,856.46.

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the electronic Property Information Mapping Service (ePIMS) has been rolled out in its full form to all Departments and public bodies; and for an update on the work of ePIMS.
(AQW 38451/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Electronic Property Information Mapping Service (ePIMS) database has been rolled out in its full form to departments and their Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) over the period since September 2011.

Currently ePIMS captures cost and utilisation information for the fully administrative office estate. This data is updated annually by departments.

This information has been used to publish the State of the Estate report, which highlights how Government uses its office estate and the annual running cost of the estate.

This information is being used to plan for the more efficient use of the office estate through maximising the use of our owned estate and vacating leases as they expire, where it is value for money to do so.

The ePIMS database also contains high-level records of other land and property assets, not captured in any other departmental/ALB asset database. This overall picture of the government estate will, for the first time, facilitate the development and delivery of asset management opportunities based on a full understanding of current assets.

Ms Fearon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the British government's refusal to include Kincora House in the child sexual abuse panel inquiry.
(AQO 6975/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 30 September this Assembly unanimously agreed that allegations of cover up by intelligence services and MI5 relating to abuse in Kincora boys' home should be investigated by the Westminster independent inquiry panel into institutional failures in respect of child sexual abuse. So naturally we are disappointed that the Home Secretary has decided not to include it.

However, we are pleased that the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State are committed to a full investigation into any and all aspects pertaining to abuse at Kincora Boys' Home by the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse here.

It is too soon to be sure that the Inquiry will find itself able to deal satisfactorily with allegations of cover up by the Ministry of Defence or the Security Services, but we are heartened to note that consideration can be given at any time to bring it into the remit of the Westminster inquiry panel.

It is, of course, of paramount importance that we consult with Sir Anthony Hart, chairperson of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, on the practicalities of carrying out an investigation into the full range of issues surrounding victims and survivors of Kincora Boys' Home.

Ms McGahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Delivering Social Change Nurture Unit Signature Programme.
(AQO 6981/11-15)

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.

All of the proposed twenty additional Nurture Units are now fully operational and have completed their first academic year.

Latest figures indicate that a total of 135 children have attended the Units, and eleven of which have already been reintegrated back to mainstream classroom. In addition, approximately just over 90% of the parents whose children are within the Units have begun to or have continued to be engaged and / or participate with the schools.

These developments are a very positive reflection of the impact and quality of support the Units are already delivering.

Mr B McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what percentage of their Department's DEL is spent on salaries; and how they intend to reduce this spend in order to make efficiency savings.
(AQW 38688/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The core Department, excluding Arm's Length Bodies, spends 25% of its DEL resource budget on salaries. The Department is working to reduce this spend through careful management of vacancies arising from normal staff turnover, a review of organisational structures within the Department and also through central initiatives being examined by the Executive in light of budget constraints resulting from cuts to the Block grant from Westminster.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department take in instances were a farmer held 93 cattle on their herd book but at a time of compulsory testing, presented only 15 cattle.
(AQW 38496/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): In the north of Ireland, official cattle identification and movement details are recorded and maintained on the Department's Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS). It is in the interests of farmers and the entire industry that the details on APHIS are accurate, as that is the basis for our renowned animal traceability that underpins both disease control and international trade.

If, during a Department inspection of a farmer's cattle or herd book record, a discrepancy is discovered with the official APHIS record, Department staff will investigate the circumstances. If there is a legitimate explanation and the discrepancy can be satisfactorily reconciled (eg a movement notification being processed by the Department) then no further action will follow.

If however the discrepancy cannot be satisfactorily explained or reconciled, there may be a number of consequences depending on the type and scale of discrepancies. These consequences may include the application of statuses and/or the imposition of restrictions on the individual animal or herd; the application of Single Farm Payment penalties on the farm business; and, in serious cases, the referral of the case to Veterinary Service Enforcement Branch to conduct a criminal investigation.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures her Department is taking to tackle the current market difficulties being experienced on local farms, to ensure that cashflow does not become an issue for dairy farmers during the high cost winter months.
(AQW 38519/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since the 2003 EU CAP Reform, it has been clear that the dairy industry would face greater volatility in milk prices as it traded in global markets and there is no way to avoid this happening. Farmers therefore need to embrace volatility as a feature of the dairy industry and plan accordingly.

There will be times when the market delivers record prices followed by times when prices are low. In this scenario the challenge for farmers is to manage their business and cash flow over a longer period than the monthly milk cheque.

To assist farmers, my Department's dairy advisers disseminate relevant information on managing cash flow and other issues to dairy farmers. Briefing on steps to assist with cash flow management has also been provided to the Ulster Farmers' Union and they have used this in recent weeks. At farm level, producers should know their production costs and plan their winter feeding programme so as to maximise feed efficiency. There is also a need to focus on other costs, including whether or not it makes business sense to proceed with a planned approach, to assess borrowing requirements and prepare a realistic cash flow plan for the winter period.

My Department is fully supportive of the dairy industry and will continue to do what it can to assist producers at a difficult time. If necessary we are prepared to act as an advocate with the grain trade, banks and other creditors. But with good forward planning by producers I would hope that any issues can be managed.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the present difficulties being experienced by dairy farmers over market milk price volatility, how her Department is encouraging stakeholders to consider long term approaches such as hedging or insurance cover.
(AQW 38520/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following the 2003 EU CAP reform, milk price volatility was identified as an issue that our dairy industry would have to address. In the interim my Department's dairy advisers have encouraged farmers to consider various matters that would help to mitigate risk. These include: an efficient production system linked to farm resources; business and financial management through benchmarking; prudent expenditure; a good cash flow plan covering all of the year; and hedging contracts for feed, fertiliser and milk supply.

I appreciate that hedging contracts and insurance cover are used by the dairy industry in other countries but so far there does not seem to have been an appetite by our industry to go down this road. However, I can advise that this matter is still on the table for consideration. I understand that hedging contracts were 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 in Going for Growth the need for better integration along the supply chain and effective sharing and mitigation of risk. Hedging contracts would not, however, lead to an overall increase in the price received by farmers.

As this is a commercial matter you will appreciate that my Department cannot engage on discussions between individual milk purchasers and producers on taking this matter forward. This is something that only the various industry interests can do. Nevertheless, I do believe that it is something that individual milk producers may wish to explore further with their milk purchaser.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to ensure that agricultural premises and businesses who employ casual workers are fully appraised of the dangers and illegalities of engaging unlicensed gangmasters; and to ensure that employers are aware of how to check that a gangmaster is legitimate.
(AQW 38551/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department currently supports enforcement of the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 by providing funding for two full-time Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) officers based here in the north of Ireland. Those officers undertake a range of enforcement and awareness raising measures, including attendance at agricultural meetings and site visits to labour users. For example, this year the GLA carried out visits to those horticulture farmers who had previously used workers under the Seasonal Agriculture Workers Scheme (SAWS) in order to establish how they were obtaining their work force following the abolition of the SAWS system in January 2014.

At these agricultural meetings and farm visits, labour users are advised of their responsibilities under the Act and provided with a leaflet detailing the work of the GLA, how to check if a labour provider possesses a GLA licence and how to contact the GLA. In addition, information and advice for labour users is also available on both my Department's and the GLA's websites.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development 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 38701/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is provided below.

(i) DARD

1 April 14	1 April 13	1 April 12	1 April 11	1 April 10
2905.78	2896.70	2853.96	2854.20	2914.56

(ii) Arm's Length Bodies

Arm's length Bodies	1 April 14	1 April 13	1 April 12	1 April 11	1 April 10
NI Fisheries Harbour Authority	19	19	19	19	20
Livestock & Meat Commission	17.5	16.5	15	38	42
Agricultural Wages Board	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
AFBI	776	760.53	778.53	809.48	835.58
Drainage Council	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Foyle Carlingford Irish Lights Commission – Loughs Agency	54	53	53	53	52

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in each Direct Office, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) payscale, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38703/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Academy House, Ballymena

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Typist	0.50				
Administrative Assistant	4.60				
Administrative Officer	24.56				
Executive Officer II	8.00				
Inspector Group 1	8.50				
Executive Officer I	2.94				
Inspector Group 2	11.00				
Inspector Group 3	1.00				
Staff Officer	8.91				
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	3.00				
Inspector Group 4	4.30				
Inspector Group 5	1.00				
Deputy Principal	2.00				
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	3.50				
Principal	1.00				
Agricultural Inspector Grade I	1.00				
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.00				
Veterinary Officer (G7)	5.81				
Veterinary Officer Testing	1.00				
Total	**93.62**				

Atek Building, Armagh

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	12.69	12.20			
Administrative Officer	12.73	15.32			
Executive Officer II	2.59	3.00			
Inspector Group 1	11.36	13.36			
Executive Officer I	2.00	3.00			
Inspector Group 2	9.50	9.50			
Meat Inspector	1.00	2.00			
Poultry Meat Inspector		1.00			
Staff Officer	1.00	1.00			
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	9.20	7.60			
Inspector Group 4	4.50	5.00			
Inspector Group 5	0.50	0.50			
Senior Meat Inspector	1.00	1.00			
Deputy Principal	1.00	1.00			
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	4.00	4.00			
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.00	2.00			
Veterinary Officer (G7)	6.66	6.48			
Veterinary Officer Testing	2.00	1.00			
Temporary Veterinary Officer	1.00	1.00			
Total	**83.73**	**89.96**			

Castleton House, Mallusk

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	7.79	7.74	7.86		
Administrative Assistant (Casual)		1.00			
Administrative Officer	7.00	7.00	7.00		
Executive Officer II	1.75	1.75	1.81		
Inspector Group 1	12.50	13.50	9.50		
Executive Officer I	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Inspector Group 2	3.60	2.60	4.60		
Inspector Group 3	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Meat Inspector	2.54	2.54	2.54		
Staff Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	2.00	2.00	2.00		
Inspector Group 4	1.00	1.00			
Inspector Group 5	0.50	0.50	0.50		
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	0.80	0.80	0.80		
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Veterinary Officer (G7)	6.93	4.88	5.28		
Veterinary Officer Testing	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Sp Veterinary Officer (G6)	1.00	1.00	1.00		

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Total	**52.41**	**51.31**	**47.89**		

Crown Buildings, Coleraine

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Typist					2.00
Administrative Assistant	9.53	10.14	10.14	13.91	13.24
Administrative Assistant (Casual)			1.00		
Administrative Officer	12.22	12.22	14.22	15.75	11.56
Executive Officer II	3.17	2.81	1.81	3.81	3.81
Inspector Group 1	6.00	7.00	8.00	12.00	12.00
Executive Officer I	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Inspector Group 2	9.00	7.00	7.00	6.00	6.00
Inspector Group 3					1.00
Meat Inspector				1.00	1.00
Staff Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	4.00	3.92	3.00	1.00	
Inspector Group 4	3.50	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.80	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Veterinary Officer (G7)	4.75	6.74	6.97	8.91	9.51
Veterinary Officer Testing	2.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
Sp Veterinary Officer (G6)	1.00				
Deputy chief Veterinary Officer(G5)	1.00	1.00			
Total	**60.97**	**64.83**	**65.14**	**76.38**	**73.13**

Crown Buildings, Dungannon

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	8.54	8.00	8.66	9.67	
Administrative Assistant (Casual)		1.00	1.00		
Administrative Officer	9.21	10.87	10.13	8.14	
Executive Officer II	2.81	2.60	2.58	1.77	
Inspector Group 1	13.00	14.00	13.00	14.00	
Executive Officer I	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Inspector Group 2	3.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	
Inspector Group 3	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Staff Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	3.80	3.80	2.80	3.53	
Inspector Group 4	2.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	
Inspector Group 5	1.00				
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Veterinary Officer (G7)	5.86	4.86	2.86	3.00	
Veterinary Officer Testing	3.00				

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Total	**56.72**	**57.13**	**54.03**	**54.12**	

Glenree House, Newry

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Typist				1.00	
Administrative Assistant	12.74	12.74	10.14	11.70	
Administrative Assistant (Casual)		2.00			
Administrative Officer	11.58	12.58	14.58	12.61	
Executive Officer II	3.96	4.00	5.00	4.00	
Inspector Group 1	18.80	21.80	21.30	17.80	
Executive Officer I	0.96	1.50	2.00	2.00	
Inspector Group 2	9.61	12.00	9.00	9.00	
Inspector Group 3	0.60	0.60	1.50	1.50	
Staff Officer	7.67	7.67	6.67	6.67	
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	8.43	6.43	7.40	8.29	
Inspector Group 4	1.50	2.00	2.00	3.00	
Inspector Group 5	1.60	1.60	1.00	1.00	
Deputy Principal	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Principal	2.80	1.80	1.80	0.80	
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.44	1.44	1.37	1.41	
Veterinary Officer (G7)	10.03	13.01	9.76	12.57	
Veterinary Officer Testing	3.80	4.00	4.00	5.00	
Temporary Veterinary Officer	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	
Total	**101.52**	**111.17**	**104.52**	**106.35**	

Inishkeen House, Enniskillen

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Typist	0.52	0.52	0.77	0.77	0.77
Administrative Assistant	7.34	6.31	6.72	8.40	9.43
Administrative Assistant (Casual)		2.00			
Support Grade Band 2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Administrative Officer	16.87	18.68	19.56	16.66	17.02
Executive Officer II	1.94	2.90	2.92	4.00	4.80
Inspector Group 1	14.10	14.10	15.60	15.60	16.60
Executive Officer I	0.82	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.82
Inspector Group 2	8.00	9.00	9.00	7.00	5.00
Staff Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	6.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.80
Inspector Group 4	3.60	2.60	3.60	5.00	5.00
Deputy Principal	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Veterinary Officer (G7)	6.89	6.03	5.34	4.41	5.37
Veterinary Officer Testing	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Total	**73.08**	**74.96**	**76.32**	**74.66**	**78.61**

Moneymore Road, Magherafelt

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	2.42	1.42	1.42		
Administrative Assistant (Casual)		1.00	1.00		
Administrative Officer	3.30	4.30	4.30		
Executive Officer II	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Inspector Group 1	5.00	5.00	5.00		
Inspector Group 2	4.60	5.00	4.00		
Inspector Group 3	1.00	1.00	1.00		
Meat Inspector		1.00			
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	4.50	6.00	6.00		
Inspector Group 4	2.00	2.00	1.00		
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	2.00	2.00	2.00		
Veterinary Officer (G7)	1.60	1.60	1.60		
Total	**27.42**	**31.32**	**28.32**		

Rathkeltair House, Downpatrick

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	2.67	0.67	1.00	2.80	
Administrative Officer	5.02	7.02	6.75	3.97	
Executive Officer II	1.00	0.94	0.92	0.92	
Inspector Group 2	6.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	
Inspector Group 3	1.10	1.10	0.60	0.60	
Staff Officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	4.72	4.50	3.38	1.67	
Inspector Group 4	3.00	3.00	2.00	5.00	
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	1.00	0.96	2.00	2.00	
Total	**25.51**	**24.19**	**21.65**	**21.97**	

Sketrick House, Newtownards

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	5.60				
Administrative Officer	7.10				
Executive Officer II	2.10				
Inspector Group 1	10.00				
Executive Officer I	1.00				
Inspector Group 2	6.00				

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Meat Inspector	1.00				
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	3.00				
Inspector Group 4	4.00				
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	1.00				
Divisional Veterinary Officer	1.00				
Veterinary Officer (G7)	7.20				
Veterinary Officer Testing	1.00				
Temporary Veterinary Officer	2.00				
Total	**52.00**				

Sperrin House, Omagh

Full Grade Name	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Administrative Assistant	10.63	8.22			
Administrative Assistant (Casual)		2.00			
Support Grade Band 2	1.00	1.00			
Cleaner					
Support Grade Band 2 (Casual)					
Administrative Officer	17.29	20.42			
Executive Officer II	3.00	4.00			
Inspector Group 1	14.50	15.30			
Executive Officer I	3.45	3.45			
Inspector Group 2	13.50	8.00			
Staff Officer	4.46	4.66			
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	6.76	8			
Inspector Group 4	7.00	7.00			
Inspector Group 5	1.00	1.00			
Deputy Principal	4.00	4.00			
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	3.00	2.00			
Principal	1.00	1.00			
Divisional Veterinary Officer	0.71	0.71			
Veterinary Officer (G7)	6.46	6.49			
Veterinary Officer Testing	4.00	2.00			
Total	**101.76**	**97.01**			

Payscales 2010-2014

Administraitve Assistant - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14 (and analogous grades - Typist, Support Grade Band 2, Cleaner and Casual Support Grade Band 2)

	Feb 10		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	17,533	Max	17,533	Max	17,533	Max	17,533	Max	17,620
6	17,108	5	17,108	4	17,108	4	17,112	3	17,180
5	16,682	4	16,682	3	16,682	3	16,691	2	16,740
4	16,257	3	16,257	2	16,257	2	16,270	1	16,300

	Feb 10		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
3	15,619	2	15,619	1	15,619	1	15,849		
2	14,981	1	14,981						
1	14,131								

Administrative Officer - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14

	Feb 10		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	22,180	Max	22,180	Max	22,180	Max	22,180	Max	22,180
9	21,835	8	21,835	7	21,835	6	21,533	5	21,622
8	21,490	7	21,490	6	21,490	5	20,866	4	20,953
7	20,799	6	20,799	5	20,799	4	20,239	3	20,284
6	20,109	5	20,109	4	20,109	3	19,592	2	19,615
5	19,419	4	19,419	3	19,419	2	18,945	1	18,946
4	18,728	3	18,728	2	18,728	1	18,298		
3	18,038	2	18,038	1	18,038				
2	17,348	1	17,348						
1	16,312								

Executive Officer 2 - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14 (and analogous grades - Inspector Group 1)

	Aug 09		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	23,250	Max	23,250	Max	23,250	Max	23,999	Max	24,728
6	22,988	5	22,988	4	22,988	5	23,824	5	24,468
5	22,456	4	22,456	3	22,456	4	23,649	4	24,208
4	21,924	3	21,924	2	21,924	3	23,474	3	23,948
3	21,392	2	21,392	1	21,392	2	23,299	2	23,688
2	20,860	1	20,860			1	23,124	1	23,428
1	20,285								

Executive Officer 1 - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14 (and analogous grades - Inspector Group 2, Inspector Group 3, Poultry Meat Inspector, Meat Inspector)

	Aug 09		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	26,086	Max	26,086	Max	26,086	Max	26,638	Max	27,271
8	25,978	7	25,978	6	25,978	5	26,398	5	26,991
7	25,601	6	25,601	5	25,601	4	26,158	4	26,711
6	25,223	5	25,223	4	25,223	3	25,918	3	26,431
5	24,657	4	24,657	3	24,657	2	25,678	2	26,151
4	24,091	3	24,091	2	24,091	1	25,438	1	25,871
3	23,336	2	23,336	1	23,336				
2	22,581	1	22,581						
1	21,826								

Staff Officer - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14 (and analogous grades - Inspector Group 4, Inspector Group 5, Agricultural Inspector Grade III, Senior Meat Inspector)

	Aug 09		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	30,520	Max	30,520	Max	30,520	Max	30,285	Max	31,135
8	30,331	7	30,331	6	30,331	5	30,227	5	30,608
7	29,871	6	29,871	5	29,871	4	29,629	4	30,081
6	29,412	5	29,412	4	29,412	3	29,031	3	29,554
5	28,723	4	28,723	3	28,723	2	28,433	2	29,027
4	28,034	3	28,034	2	28,034	1	27,835	1	28,500
3	27,115	2	27,115	1	27,115				
2	26,197	1	26,197						
1	25,278								

Deputy Principal - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14

	Aug-09		Aug-10		Aug-11		Aug-12		Aug-13
Max	25-Jun-06	Max	38,893	Max	38,893	Max	39,282	Max	39,675
8	05-Jul-05	7	38,538	6	38,538	5	38,395	5	38,778
7	19-Oct-03	6	37,913	5	37,913	4	37,508	4	37,881
6	01-Feb-02	5	37,288	4	37,288	3	36,621	3	36,984
5	09-Jul-99	4	36,350	3	36,350	2	35,734	2	36,087
4	14-Dec-96	3	35,413	2	35,413	1	34,847	1	35,190
3	13-Jul-93	2	34,163	1	34,163				
2	09-Feb-90	1	32,913						
1	08-Sep-86								

Agricultural Inspector Grade II - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14

	Aug 09		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	39,954	Max	39,954	Max	39,954	Max	40,343	Max	40,736
8	39,573	7	39,573	6	39,573	5	39,390	5	39,773
7	38,743	6	38,743	5	38,743	4	38,437	4	38,810
6	38,102	5	38,102	4	38,102	3	37,484	3	37,847
5	37,140	4	37,140	3	37,140	2	36,531	2	36,884
4	36,178	3	36,178	2	36,178	1	35,578	1	35,921
3	34,896	2	34,896	1	34,896				
2	33,613	1	33,613						
1	32,331								

Grade 7 - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14 (and analogous grades - Principal, Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Officer (Grade 7), Divisional Veterinary Officer)

	Aug 09		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	50,796	Max	50,796	Max	50,796	Max	51,304	Max	51,816
8	50,283	7	50,283	6	50,283	5	50,182	5	50,681
7	49,499	6	49,499	5	49,499	4	49,060	4	49,546
6	48,715	5	48,715	4	48,715	3	47,938	3	48,411
5	47,539	4	47,539	3	47,539	2	46,816	2	47,276
4	46,364	3	46,364	2	46,364	1	45,694	1	46,141
3	44,796	2	44,796	1	44,796				
2	43,228	1	43,228						
1	41,661								

Grade 6 - Pay scales for the period Apr 10 to Apr 14 (and analogous grades - Senior Principal Veterinary Officer)

	Aug 09		Aug 10		Aug 11		Aug 12		Aug 13
Max	62,407	Max	62,407	Max	62,407	Max	62,407	Max	62,719
8	61,077	7	61,077	6	61,077	6	60,907	5	60,963
7	59,327	6	59,327	5	59,327	5	59,407	4	59,207
6	57,527	5	57,527	4	57,527	4	57,907	3	57,451
5	55,727	4	55,727	3	55,727	3	56,407	2	55,695
4	53,927	3	53,927	2	53,927	2	54,907	1	53,939
3	52,127	2	52,127	1	52,127	1	53,407		
2	50,327	1	50,327						
1	48,527								

Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer (Grade 5)- Pay scales for the period Apr 12 to Apr 14

	Apr 12		Aug 13
Max	77,500	Max	78,275
10	76,086	10	76,847
9	74,672	9	75,419
8	73,258	8	73,991
7	71,844	7	72,562
6	70,430	6	71,134
5	69,016	5	69,706
4	67,602	4	68,278
3	66,188	3	66,850
2	64,774	2	65,422
1	63,360	1	63,994

Up until April 2012, Senior Civil Servants did not have pay-scales but were paid within a salary band. A Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer (G5) was paid within the salary band of £57,300 - £116,000 at April 2010 and April 2011.

Veterinary Officer Testing

This grade does not have a pay scale but rather the officer is paid a daily rate and headage depending on the number of cattle tested:

- Testing daily rate - £106.32
- Office daily rate - £170.14

Headage: First 200 cattle tested – 50p per head

Thereafter – 65p per head

Temporary Veterinary Officer (TVO)

This grade does not have a pay scale but is paid a daily rate for testing and headage depending on the number of cattle tested (TVO's only have 1 daily rate as they do not get paid for non-testing days):

Testing daily rate - £128.33

Headage: Up to & including 100 cattle – 33p per head

101 – 200 cattle – 50p per head

201+ cattle – 65p per head

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (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 38736/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Staff costs are around 55% of net Departmental Expenditure Limits for the Core Department, rising to 70% when AFBI is factored into the calculation.

My Department's Draft Budget 2015-16 proposals include a staff reductions option of £5.6m which forecasts the reduction of around 300 posts next year from the Core Department. The reduction in staff numbers will be managed through the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme. Further details are set out in my Department's Draft Budget 2015-16 consultation document which is on the DARD website.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development 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 38763/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The total spend incurred by the Department in relation to interpreting services for people who are deaf or have hearing loss, in the last five financial years can be summarised as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15*	Total
Spend on Customers	-	£4,332	£8,026	£2,129	-	£14,487
Spend on Staff	£581	£1,373	£1,254	£433	£606	£4,247
Total	**£581**	**£5,705**	**£9,280**	**£2,562**	**£606**	**£18,734**

* Data for 2014/15 is for the year to date up to 18th November 2014.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the effect that the number of landowners, who are now re-designating themselves as active farmers, will have on agricultural production.
(AQW 38851/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Direct Payments Delegated Regulation (EU) No 639/2014 makes clear that from 2015, the allocation of entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme, and in turn direct payments, should go only 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 being undertaken on the relevant land.

A letter was issued in March 2014 to all SFP entitlement holders highlighting this requirement and its implications for 2015. Subsequently, some 11,800 applications were made to the Department to transfer SFP entitlements and approximately 6,700 fewer Single Application Forms were received by the Department in 2014 compared with 2013.

More recently, my Department conducted a review of all farm businesses claiming SFP in 2014, identifying approximately 7,000 whose records indicate that they may not meet the above requirement in 2015 and, therefore, would not be allocated entitlements unless they take action. We wrote to these businesses and so far, only 1,900 have responded indicating that they will be in a position to meet the requirements of the new regime and intend to apply in 2015.

Therefore, based on this evidence, it appears that most non-farming landowners have already taken the decision to exit the support regime. However, the position will not be clear until applications are received to the Basic Payment Scheme in May 2015.

Consequently, at this stage, I do not expect to see a significant impact on gross agricultural production linked specifically to this issue.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what recent discussions she has had with the Minister of the Environment on improving safety on rural roads.
(AQW 38863/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Minister of the Environment has primary responsibility for road safety policy and I have not held any recent discussions with him regarding improving safety on rural roads. That said, I am however, aware of the increased number of deaths on our roads this year, many of which have occurred in rural areas.

As Minister with responsibility for rural affairs, I realise the importance of partnership working between government departments and how rural communities can benefit from this.

To that end the Rural White Paper Action Plan contains a wide range of actions aimed at dealing with rural issues across all government departments. The Department of the Environment lead on a number of actions, one of which relates directly to road safety. This action aims to understand the cause of, and reduce the number of, collisions on rural roads.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what training will be provided to landowners who declare themselves as active farmers, to ensure they are fully conversant with all European regulations and to ensure that the Department does not leave itself liable to fines from Europe due to farmers not complying with legislation.
(AQW 38865/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All those who intend to apply for the Basic Payment Scheme, the Greening Payment and, if appropriate, the Young Farmers' Scheme must satisfy themselves that they can meet the requirements of the Schemes in full. To assist in this, all applicants will have access to a range of Departmental guidance, web material and literature which will set out specific scheme rules and standards.

My Department's Farm Advisory System will also provide information and advice to farmers on cross compliance, greening, certain measures provided under the Rural Development Programme, requirements arising from the Water Framework Directive and use of plant protection products.

In keeping with its obligations, the Department will have in place a range of control mechanisms aimed at ensuring that EU funding is allocated in compliance with EU Regulations.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether it is acceptable during an inspection for cattle to have a double tag in one ear and a half tag in the other ear; and if not, why this is the case, given that this authenticates identity.
(AQW 38868/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under Regulation (EC) No. 1760/2000 all cattle must be identified by two approved ear tags within 20 days of birth, or before the animal leaves the holding, whichever is the earlier. Each tag must bear the same unique identification number and be applied to each ear. All lost or illegible ear tags must be replaced.

If an animal is noted at a cattle identity inspection as having a complete tag in one ear and half a tag in the other, the inspector would check both ears for signs of tag tampering. The inspector would also check that the animal matches its description as recorded on DARD's Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS).

If no discrepancies are noted then no breach would be applied, however, the inspector would point out to the keeper that the animal is incorrectly identified and advise that a matching replacement ear tag must be obtained and applied within 28 days, or before the animal leaves the holding, whichever is the earlier.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of how representative the three chosen venues are for the Newry and Down Public Meetings of the new Local Action Groups; and whether she has any plans to for additional venues for these meetings.
(AQW 38904/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The process for setting up new Local Action Groups (LAG) is through LEADER ie the bottom up approach. The LEADER Cluster Network Group agreed at the request of my officials to set up facilitation groups in each 10 new LAG areas, drawing volunteers from current LAG's to help inform the LAG formation process for social partners. The groups are facilitated by Rural Network for NI and the local Rural Support Networks in each of the areas. Members of the groups were nominated from the current LAG's and include current LAG Board members and Council representatives.

The purpose of the groups is to support the development of a local engagement and communication plan, helping to identify suitable venues for public meetings, agreeing dates to ensure no obvious clashes with other events and supporting the dissemination of promotional materials locally.

The Newry, Mourne and Down facilitation groups members include SOAR LAG Board members, DRAP LAG Board members and a Newry & Mourne Council Officer.

In the case of Newry, Mourne and Down, because of the large geographical area to cover, it was initially agreed to have three public meetings. The group members discussed the geography of the area and opted to have the following public meetings:-

- 25th November – St Patrick's Centre, Downpatrick
- 27th November – Downshire Arms, Hilltown
- 1st December – Crossmaglen Community Centre, Crossmaglen

The Downpatrick and Crossmaglen venues are both Council run facilities and the Hilltown venue is a hotel.

A number of representations were made to my officials that there needed to be a further event in the Kilkeel area and therefore a fourth public meeting has been arranged for:-

- 3rd December – Kilmorey Arms Hotel, Kilkeel

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when Carnlough River was last dredged or cleaned.
(AQW 38989/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency completed channel works and removed bushes and trees in August 2013. Further maintenance was completed in March 2014. The trash grille downstream of Cashel Close is inspected monthly and was cleared on a number of occasions between 11 and 15 November 2014, in response to a series of weather warnings.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any contingency planning to prevent the spread of African Swine Flu.
(AQO 7124/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is taking a number of measures to prevent the spread of African Swine Fever. The first is surveillance including monitoring the global situation particularly in Eastern Europe; conducting portal and airport controls for incoming pigs and pork products; and sampling any suspect pigs. Secondly the department has a generic contingency plan for major emergencies (the Major Emergency Response Plan – MERP) and a specific contingency plan for swine fever. Thirdly my officials have tested and exercised the African Swine Fever plan in a major British and north of Ireland exercise in 2013 (Exercise Walnut) and more recently in a communications exercise held with Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) counterparts in Newry on 6 November 2014. Finally my officials have been liaising with the pig industry, including a stakeholders meeting that my Chief Veterinary Officer hosted in September and through the distribution of biosecurity advice to pig farmers.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the four areas subjected to remote sensing this year; and what support are those areas receiving from her Department.
(AQW 39261/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The four zones that were selected for inspection by Control with Remote Sensing (CwRS) in 2014 were in North West Tyrone, in South Antrim / North Down, in East Armagh / West Down and in South East Fermanagh.

The process has been supportive of farmers in those areas in a number of ways. All inspected cases received a letter in early November informing them that they had been subject to an inspection. It is also anticipated that all inspected cases will be paid much more quickly than has been achieved in the past, as a direct result of the use of remote sensing. It is likely that this will be a record year in terms of the proportion of claimants paid in December and in terms of the pace of paying inspected cases.

I expect that the final inspection cases will be paid in March which is approximately one month earlier than last year's record outcome. All inspections are already completed in the field, other than a relatively small number of checks that arise at the final stage of processing for some claims and which will be processed in the early weeks of the New Year.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department supports horse racing in Northern Ireland.
(AQO 7122/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department provides funding to Downpatrick and Down Royal racecourses through the administration of the Horse Racing Fund which is maintained through charges on bookmakers. The funding is used to provide or supplement prize money, to improve technical services or services for the operation of racing, and for the purpose of ensuring the safety of spectators or the proper conduct of racing.

The Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order 2010 increased the Horse Racing Fund charge for off-course bookmakers from £1,123 to £2,000 per annum over a five year period for specific investment. This period ends on 31 December 2014. The on-course charge has remained at £99. From 2010 to 2014 this has resulted in just over £1.4 million additional funding to the racecourses.

The off-course bookmakers charge will revert to £1,123 on 1 January 2015. My officials have met with representatives of the bookmakers and the racecourses separately on two occasions over the last two months to discuss the level of future funding. My Department will shortly commence a review of the Horse Racing Fund which will consider the level of future charges on bookmakers. Engagement with the racecourses and bookmakers will continue during the review.

My Department also supports Horse Racing in the north through CAFRE at its Enniskillen Campus. The equine breeding, equitation, farriery and racing units at Enniskillen Campus provide excellent resources to support delivery of its learning provision. The Campus Horse Racing and Equestrian Clubs are also used to support equine programme delivery. Students regularly compete in point-to-point races and other equine competitions including the Balmoral Show.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals she has to deal with the ongoing implementation of the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC) in relation to farming practices in Northern Ireland.
(AQO 7123/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The EU Nitrates Directive is implemented across the north of Ireland by an Action Programme of measures which was first introduced in 2007. The purpose of the Action Programme is to prevent water pollution and ensure that manures and chemical fertilisers are used efficiently.

The Nitrates Directive requires action programmes to be reviewed and, as necessary, revised every four years. A review of the current programme and public consultation on the proposed programme for 2015-2018 has been carried out by my Department and the Department of the Environment.

I am pleased to confirm that we have recently secured EU Commission agreement for our proposed Action Programme for the next 4 year period.

The Action Programme for 2015 to 2018 should not require any significant changes to current farming practices. The majority of the measures in the current programme are being carried forward. Key measures, such as the dates of the closed period for spreading slurry, remain unchanged.

There are some changes which are based on scientific evidence, technical and policy developments or have been requested by the European Commission.

My Department will continue to provide a comprehensive range of guidance, training and advisory support for farmers in relation to the Action Programme. The existing guidance documents will be updated in consultation with industry representatives. Press articles and the Farm Advisory Service "Helping You Comply" Bulletin will also continue to be used to ensure that farmers are aware of the requirements and have the necessary information.

Scientific evidence shows that the Action Programme is delivering better water quality and significant improvements in farming practice. More efficient use of manures and trends in chemical fertiliser use are very encouraging. I commend farmers for the effort they have made and encourage them to keep up the good work to ensure continued progress.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what mechanisms are in place for Rivers Agency to engage with local communities and angling clubs to ensure that works completed on rivers are coordinated with the sport of angling.
(AQO 7125/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency provides notice of works it intends to carry out through advertisements in the local press, usually in January or early February of each year. Prior to the start of the fishing season, the Agency provides details of the watercourses it intends to consider for maintenance in the coming year. This is done through a Service Level Agreement, between the Agency and the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure's Inland Fisheries, who act as liaison between Rivers Agency, statutory fisheries bodies, fishery owners, angling clubs and other bodies or individuals with an interest in fishing. Where it is considered necessary, Inland Fisheries advise those interested, in writing, of the nature, extent and timing of the proposed works, including proposals to mitigate any impact on fish or fish habitat and invite comment on those proposals.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the recent fisheries stakeholders event.
(AQO 7126/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A stakeholder event was held in Belfast on 29 October at which fisheries stakeholders from Britain and the north were able to discuss priorities for the forthcoming December Fisheries Council with the four Fisheries Administrations. This was the first opportunity to discuss the Commission's proposals for Total Allowable Catches since their publication. Unfortunately the scientific advice, and therefore proposals for the Area VII prawn stock which is very important to us, were not available. However the scientific advice has since been published and whilst better than last year we still expect the Commission to propose a quota cut of around 14-15%. I will press for a rollover using the established argument that we and the south are at a disadvantage from a TAC that matches the scientific recommendations, because France and Spain do not fish their full allocations.

For Irish Sea herring a modest reduction of 8%, consistent with maintaining the stock at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels has been proposed and will be accepted. A further cut of 20% in Irish Sea cod quota has been proposed and the case was made that more cuts will result in discards, which is contrary to the recent commitment to implement a landing obligation. A cut of 20% in Irish Sea Haddock has been proposed due to data limitations that prevent a full analytical assessment. It was suggested that qualitative stock trends are positive and a case can be made for a rollover. The Administrations advised that all proposals for cuts in "data limited" stocks, such as Irish Sea haddock and plaice, will be resisted where a case can be made that qualitative trends in the stock are positive.

Finally stakeholders were advised that no proposals about fishing effort (Days at Sea) had yet been made but Administrations would support a further rollover.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the public meetings being held on the new Local Action Group animation process.
(AQO 7127/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you know the animation process to form new Local Action Groups or LAG's started at the beginning of November. So far 12 events have been held and these have been attended by 523 people and we already have 210 people completing an expression of interest form to be a LAG member. A further 16 meetings are already scheduled with more to come. The timescales for forming the LAG's are tight, but I believe it is essential that we have the LAG's in place and

ready to go as soon as the necessary EU processes have been completed regarding approving the Operation Plan that my Department has submitted. I want to see LAG's which are much more representative with more women and young people on them. I know some of the members here have already attended some of the events and I would encourage all rural MLA's to get involved in their LAG.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals her Department has agreed with the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Investment on the implementation of the Going for Growth strategy for the Agri-food sector.
(AQO 7128/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Going for Growth is the report of the Industry led Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB), and contains 118 recommendations addressed to both the Industry and Government bodies. The Executive Response to Going for Growth was published on 16 October 2014. It includes a detailed plan, setting out actions to address over 80 recommendations that Government has agreed to lead on. Development of the Executive Response was coordinated by officials from both Departments. It was signed off jointly by me and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and agreed by the Executive on 26 June 2014.

As we move into the implementation phase, senior officials from DARD, DETI and InvestNI will continue to be part of the AFSB and will work with the Chair and industry members to advise on delivery of agreed actions. Senior officials from both Departments also jointly chair an Inter-Departmental Steering Group, which includes representatives from all Departments/ agencies with a role to play in the implementation of the Executive Response. This Group will be monitoring progress made against the action plan and will provide Ministers and the AFSB with regular updates.

In addition, my officials, and colleagues from DETI/InvestNI will continue to provide policy and advisory support to the AFSB and its sub-groups and, where, appropriate officials from DARD and DETI will work jointly to implement agreed actions.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she is ensuring that Northern Ireland does not lose out to the Republic of Ireland on the oppurtunites presented by the Chinese market.
(AQO 7129/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: China offers lucrative export opportunities for Agri-Food products from across Europe due to its vast size. The north already has access to China for dairy products, and I am pleased to note that it is a growing market.

I was disappointed that the planned inspection to approve our pork plants to export to China in October was cancelled at short notice. In order to secure a new date I have availed of the contacts I made during my visits to China asking them to use their influence with the Chinese authorities to agree a new date. One of my senior official veterinarians accompanied the lead Defra veterinarian to China last week where they met a range of Chinese officials to discuss a new date for this inspection. We await the outcome of these meetings. Mindful that the momentum on this issue must be maintained I have also written to the Defra Secretary of State, Elizabeth Truss MP, and asked that she also prioritises agreeing a new inspection date during her visit at the beginning of December. I remain hopeful that these efforts will prove fruitful.

In respect of beef the recent signing of the TSE Memorandum of Understanding between the north and Britain and China as well as the establishment of a TSE working group are important steps. This is similar to the process adopted by the south and will pave the way to begin market negotiations. We must be mindful though that unlike the south we were subject to the beef ban which means our access to his important trade opportunity will take us longer. Nevertheless I remain committed to doing all I can to attain access for our beef and pork exports.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the City of Culture Legacy capital projects that will be funded by the £2.8m allocation in the October Monitoring Round; and (ii) the funding allocated to each.
(AQW 38459/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Building on DCAL's significant investment in the North West to date, I 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 my 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;
- Provide creative, cultural and sporting equipment for communities to increase skills and encourage social enterprise;

As business cases for the programme are still being finalised, I will be making further announcements in due course.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) total amount of funding allocated to City of Culture Legacy; (ii) projects funded by City of Culture Legacy; and (iii) funding allocated to each project.
(AQW 38461/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I secured over £2m for the January to March 2014 period to support continuation of key projects from the City of Culture's cultural programme and to prevent the loss of key benefits, partnerships and momentum after December 2013. This included strategic investment for sports facility development.

Supported projects included:

- Music projects, for example key elements of the Music Promise project and the return of Other Voices to Derry in February 2014;
- Digital projects, for example continuation of the Portrait of a City project and digital skills provision;
- Literacy skills projects, for example the Disobey Gravity programme;
- Community projects delivered under Community Cultural Strategies developed for neighbourhood renewal areas;
- A pilot creative voucher scheme, which included a focus on the North West, designed to stimulate new collaborations between creative enterprises and businesses from a diverse range of other sectors;
- Expansion of the Nerve Centre's Fab Lab with a wider North West emphasis;
- Walled City Tattoo; and
- Sports facility development in Coleraine.

In addition I made funding available for the purchase of Eamonn O'Doherty's Armoured Pram, Lumiere's Stitch in Time piece and a portable Marquee which will be used as a community venue.

I have secured an additional £3.8m to support a Cultural and Sporting Programme in the North West in the current financial year.

The strategic interventions supported by this programme have been selected because they present opportunities to build on the success of City of Culture 2013 and deliver long term sustainable impacts.

DCAL's support will be allocated and spent by March 2015, however, the Programme is designed to create a lasting impact for communities in need.

The Programme is focussed on delivering:

- Capacity building for the most deprived communities across the North West;
- Building sustainable infrastructure with contributions to key cultural and sporting refurbishment projects;
- Developing festival activity with events delivery equipment like staging, lighting and barriers to reduce the costs of delivering community based festivals for many years to come;
- Expanding the services of existing community facilities with creative and digital equipment such as iPads, 3D printers and equipment to assist the growth of social enterprises within communities.

As business cases for the programme are still being finalised, I will be making further announcements in due course.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many individuals or companies tendered for the Audit of Traditional Music; and what criteria were used by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in selecting a person or company to undertake this work.
(AQW 38464/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council received 4 tenders for the audit of the Traditional Music Sector. All bidders had their applications assessed against the criteria listed below.

Qualitative Criteria (Quality)	**Weight**
Experience	10%
Method Statement	60%

Quantitative Criteria (Price)	**Weight**
Pricing	30%

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the (i) books; (ii) CDs; and (iii) DVDs produced by National Museums of Northern Ireland during the last ten years.
(AQW 38465/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The list of books and DVDs produced by National Museums during the last ten years is set out at Annex A. National Museums has not produced any CDs during this period.

Annex A

Books/Publications:

- Monday, January 1, 1900: A companion to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (2004).
- The Natural History of Ireland's Dragonflies, Brian Nelson and Robert Thompson (2004).
- County Down Scarce Rare and Extinct Vascular Plant Register, Graham Day and Paul Hackney (2004) edited by Julia Nunn.
- County Antrim Scarce Rare and Extinct Vascular Plant Register, Stan Beesley (2006) edited by Julia Nunn and Paul Hackney.
- The Academic Study of Ulster-Scots: Essays for and by Robert J. Gregg (2006) edited by Anne Smyth, Michael Montgomery and Philip Robinson.
- The Butterflies and Moths of Northern Ireland, Robert Thompson and Brian Nelson (2006).
- Treasures from the North – Irish Paintings from the Ulster Museum, Eileen Black and Anne Stewart (2007).
- The Orchids of Ireland, Tom Curtis and Robert Thompson (2009).
- The Flora of County Tyrone, Ian McNeill (2010).
- Visions: A Celebration of Irish Art from the Ulster Museum (2010).
- Census Catalogue of Irish Lichens, M.R.D. Seaward (2010).
- The Natural History of Ulster, John Faulkner and Robert Thompson (2011).
- Titanic: Behind the Legend, William Blair (2011).
- Responses – Exploring the art and themes of William Conor Live & Learn booklet (2011).
- A Year in the Gardens Live & Learn booklet (2012).
- Rare and threatened Bryophytes of Ireland, Neil Lockhart, Nick Hodgetts and David Holyoak (2012).
- The Flora of County Fermanagh, Ralph S. Forbes and Robert H. Northridge (2012).
- Northern Rhythm: The Art of John Luke (1906-1975) Joseph McBrinn (2012).
- Bye the way – a collection of short stories and poems from the Live and Learn Creative Writing Group (2013).
- Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Ireland, Robert Thompson and Brian Nelson (2014).
- County Fermanagh Scarce Rare and Extinct Vascular Plant Register, Robert Northridge, Ralph Forbes and Hannah Northridge (2014) edited by Julia Nunn.

DVDs:

- A Closer Look at some of your favourite things - Ulster Museum (2006).
- Age Awareness film (2010).
- Moving lives a film on migration produced by Live & Learn and film-maker Mairead McClean (2011).
- Bluegrass Festival choir produced by Live & Learn (2012).
- Film made by Sue Cathcart for Live & Learn with a group of Learning Disabled adults (c.2012/13).
- Holy Family Primary School Centenary Celebrations (Feb 2014).
- Around the Hawthorn Tree (produced with 8 primary schools and Lyric Theatre, March 2014).
- Video content is also provided via National Museums YouTube channel.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding the Irish language magazine Nós has received from Foras na Gaeilge or the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38466/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Foras na Gaeilge has provided funding since to Nós 2012 and the amounts are detailed in the table below:

Year	Amount
2012	£24,000
2013	£12,000
2014	£38,447

In addition to this Foras na Gaeilge has committed the following funding for the next three years

Year	Amount
2015	£68,800
2016	£68,800
2017	£54,833

The Arts Council has never received an application for, or made an award of, funding to Nós magazine.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding the television production company Tobar has received from the Irish Language Broadcast Fund.
(AQW 38467/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Irish Language Broadcast Fund has awarded a total of £1,612,918.00 to Tobar Productions and

£ 278,458.00 to Tobar Co-Productions since 2005, broken down as follows;

- 2005 - £206,155.00
- 2006 - £107,692.00
- 2006 - £252,430.00 Co-Production with Green Inc Productions
- 2007 - £460,903.00
- 2008 - £239,202.00
- 2009 - £ 47,750.00
- 2009 - £ 26,028.00 Co-Production with Independent Pictures
- 2010 - £217,042.00
- 2011 - £181,188.00
- 2012 - £152,986.00
- Total: £1,891,376.00

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) City of Culture Legacy projects that will be funded by the £1m allocation in the October Monitoring Round in (a) Derry; (b) Dungiven; (c) Coleraine; (d) Limavady; and (e) Strabane; and (ii) funding allocated to each project.
(AQW 38481/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have secured an additional £3.8m to support a Cultural and Sporting Programme in the North West in this financial year. This includes allocations of £1m for resource and £2.8m for capital.

The resource programme includes a suite of projects which take forward key strands of the City of Culture 2013 Cultural Programme and seeks to maintain momentum in community cultural activity, capacity building and key events in Derry. It also seeks to extend the momentum, learning and networks established as part of 2013 to the wider North West, with support for key cultural events in Coleraine, Limavady, Strabane and Draperstown.

The strategic interventions supported by this programme have been selected because they present opportunities to build on the success of City of Culture 2013 and deliver long term sustainable impacts.

DCAL's support will be allocated and spent by March 2015, however, the Programme is designed to create a lasting impact for communities in need.

As business cases for the programme are still being finalised, I will be making further announcements in due course.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what annual budget her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, set aside for translation and interpreter services for foreign nationals.
(AQW 38507/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No annual budget is set aside specifically for translation and interpreter services for foreign nationals though, in recent years, angling guides have been published in Polish, German and Irish (at a total cost of £4,072) and Libraries NI has procured translation services costing £206.

The Department's arm's length bodies are able to procure these kinds of services as and when required.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether the portraits of Ulster-American presidents by Frank McKelvey are currently on view in the Ulster Museum, or elsewhere within National Museums Northern Ireland; (ii) if not, when they were last on view and for what period of time; (iii) for what period of time they have been on view in the past ten years; and (iv) when, and on what basis, they were initially acquired by the Ulster Museum.
(AQW 38524/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that the 13 portraits that it holds of Ulster-American presidents by Frank McKelvey are not currently on display at the Ulster Museum or at any other of its sites. However, copies of 10 of the portraits are on display in 'back of house areas' at the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh.

The portraits, which were donated by Thomas McGowan to the Belfast Museum & Art Gallery in 1931 (later the Ulster Museum), have not been on display in the last 20 years. National Museums has received no requests for them to be lent to other institutions during this period.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37821/11-15, (i) what are the priorities of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund; (ii) what set the priorities of the fund; and (iii) what work was undertaken in determining the priorities.
(AQW 38525/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The current priorities of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast fund (USBF) are attached at Annex A. The priorities are set and reviewed by the USBF Committee.

This information is used to identify genres that are under-served by USBF funding and any specific points that should be reinforced with the production companies.

Annex A

Priorities (extracted from the USBF Second Call 2014/15 document)

1. The USBF Investment Committee welcomes applications to the second call of 2014/15 (twelfth round of funding overall). Once again applications for television programmes will require a letter of support from a broadcaster.

2. In addition to the general Priorities detailed below, the Committee would make the following specific points;
   - The quality of research is a key factor in the Committee's decisions. The most successful programming supported by the USBF has been underpinned by high quality research;
   - The Committee re-emphasises the importance of engaging with appropriate consultants in a substantive and meaningful way;
   - Priority will be given to projects that have ambition, scale and editorial depth; for example, An Independent People. As well as making a greater impact, it is much clearer that these projects are additional, or over and above, programming that the broadcaster might otherwise have produced and financed itself;
   - In heritage, culture and history programming, advisers and on screen experts should not be limited to political historians but should also include social and community historians;
   - Language remains underserved in the proposals presented to the Committee;
   - There is flexibility in relation to funding ratios where projects have a relevance to the USBF but the subject matter requires a broader focus that would preclude the Committee from funding at the maximum 75%.

General comments on the priorities

The following comments should be noted:

- All programmes should appeal to a North of Ireland audience.
- Programmes that promote awareness/increased understanding of Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and/or language are the priority of the fund.
- The USBF does not require that all of its programming is presented in the Ulster-Scots language.
- The USBF will seek to facilitate new and innovative approaches to the development of educational resources about Ulster-Scots language informed by best/developing practice and academic research.
- The USBF requires programming which describes the context and development of Ulster-Scots, its contemporary expressions, and which reflects the linkages between Ulster and Scotland. It will place less emphasis, at least in the initial calls, on programming about the Ulster-Scots Diaspora.
- Within the overall mix, content designed to reach children of primary school age will be very welcome.

The Priorities

This is a list of genres of programming and themes that the USBF is most interested in funding in this round. This information is provided as guidance to the applicant only. The USBF Investment Committee is not bound by this guidance if the general Assessment Criteria are strongly met by proposals that fall outside this guidance.

Documentary-style Programmes and Series

Applications are welcomed for documentary programmes and series which, for example:

- Describe and explore the development of Ulster-Scots culture and language;
- Reflect and showcase Ulster-Scots music, literature and poetry;
- Explore historical themes and/or the contemporary linkages between Ulster and Scotland - social, religious, economic and artistic;
- Challenge misconceptions about the nature of Ulster-Scots and which describe its role/relevance for local communities;
- Facilitate new research and informed debate about Ulster-Scots history, culture and language;
- Explore the meaning and nature of Ulster-Scots identity;
- Record, and facilitate wider access to, extant forms of Ulster-Scots language use - with a particular focus on the creation of programmes with archival value/significance;
- Reflect and explore Ulster-Scots in both urban and rural environments and involving people from different socio-economic and community backgrounds;
- Examine the ways in which Ulster-Scots culture and language has impacted on wider society;

- Are educational in the broadest sense, and which facilitate informal learning.

Landmark Programmes

Applications are welcomed for programmes with scale and ambition which, for example:

- Describe and explore significant historical themes or events;
- Utilise anniversaries to maximise relevance and appeal to audiences;
- Profile people who have made a significant and lasting difference to Ulster-Scots - in all its different forms/diversity;
- Make academic research about Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and language accessible to a generalist audience and in ways that are innovative and engaging;
- Celebrate the value and impact of Ulster-Scots, its history and continued relevance;
- Facilitate informed debate about/increased understanding of key people and events associated with Ulster-Scots.

Learning Resources

Applications are welcomed for curriculum-related programmes or resources which, for example:

- Describe and explore cultural diversity themes, with a particular focus on Ulster-Scots language and culture;
- Facilitate increased awareness of Ulster-Scots heritage - including people and events;
- Reflect Ulster-Scots in its developing/contemporary forms and involving local children and young people;

Entertainment and Event Programmes

Applications are welcomed for entertainment-style programmes which, for example:

- Showcase Ulster-Scots music, performing talent and themes for a generalist audience;
- Involve studio or event-based performances which celebrate creative excellence in Ulster-Scots music and culture;
- Explore the ways in which Ulster-Scots influences/and is inter-related with wider culture and society ;
- Engage younger audiences with Ulster-Scots themes and using formats and approaches which appeal to/involve them.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, how the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund committee assess how a proposal contributes to increasing awareness and understanding of Ulster-Scots heritage, culture or language.
(AQW 38526/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following factors can be taken into consideration when carrying out such an assessment:

- Whether the proposed subject matter sufficiently explores the Ulster-Scots heritage, culture or language;
- Whether the focus is on a topic that has not been previously explored through Ulster-Scots programming;
- How well the proposal and subject matter have been researched;
- The audience appeal and scope, for example, whether or not the proposal could attract a new audience;
- The potential audience reach of the broadcaster;
- Whether the key contributors have sufficient expertise in their area and will they appeal to a wide audience; and
- The quality of the proposal and the experience of the production company.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, how the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund committee assess the quality of a proposal; and what factors they take into account.
(AQW 38527/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In considering the quality of a proposal, assessors will take the following factors into account:

- The quality of the written application;
- The feasibility of the project; and
- The perceived quality of the end product -
  - The appropriateness of the proposed contributors and presenters for the subject matter;
  - the level of Ulster-Scots content;
  - the suitable experience of the production team to deliver high quality content; and
  - the programme's appeal to the proposed audience.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, how the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund committee assess the audience appeal of a proposal; and what factors they take into account.
(AQW 38528/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is not possible to be prescriptive in answering this question. Broadly, in considering the audience appeal of a proposal, assessors will take the following factors into account:

- Who the broadcaster is and does the proposal sit naturally in their schedule and with their audiences;

- What is the suggested scheduling for the proposal;
- Is the proposal part of a wider range of Ulster-Scots programming e.g. a BBC series; and
- Is the content accessible to a wide audience and will it be informative and/or entertaining.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, how the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund committee assess value for money; and to detail the factors they take into account.
(AQW 38539/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Budgets for each application are assessed by NI Screen's Head of Finance and the Ulster Scots Broadcast Fund to ensure that they are in line with industry tariffs. Different genres require different tariffs, for example drama is more expensive than reversioned animation or straightforward documentaries. Factors taken into account include the need to balance awards made amongst the different genres to ensure that the audiences for the different genres can be catered for within the resources available.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, (i) to explain the meaning of maximising audience aspects; (ii) how the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund committee assess maximising audience aspects; and (iii) what factors they take into account.
(AQW 38540/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maximising audience aspects refers not only to maximising actual audience numbers for the funded content but, within this, also seeking to diversify audience types to ensure the content has a broad appeal where appropriate.

The Ulster Scots Broadcast Fund committee can take the following factors into account in assessing the potential audience reach of the proposed content: whether the content has a broadcaster attached; whether the proposed slot will allow for maximum audience access; and how the content will be marketed to ensure maximum audience awareness.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, (i) to explain what is meant by additionality aspects and match funding arrangements; (ii) how these relate to, or differ from, value for many aspects; (iii) how the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund committee assess additionality aspects and match funding arrangements; and (iv) what factors they take into account.
(AQW 38541/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Additionality refers to whether the proposed content is new and additional to existing content already available to viewers. In terms of value for money, additionality is taken into account in assessing whether the proposed content is over and above programming that the broadcasting organisation might otherwise have produced itself.

In assessing additionality aspects, the committee takes the following factors into account: the number of hours of Ulster-Scots programming previously transmitted by the broadcaster; the value of the broadcaster's Ulster-Scots independent production commissions within the North of Ireland and the overall quality of the Ulster-Scots programming previously transmitted by the broadcaster.

All projects submitted to the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) must also evidence a level of match funding. The USBF will provide up to a maximum of 75% of the overall agreed project costs. The relevant broadcaster or applicant company must then provide the balance.

The level of match funding can have an impact on the value for money, as a project with 50% match funding in place may offer better value for money than a similar project with 25% match funding in place.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, to explain what is meant by the Ulster-Scots independent production sector and infrastructure.
(AQW 38542/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster-Scots independent production sector refers to production companies working on Ulster-Scots content within the independent production sector in the North of Ireland. Infrastructure means expertise and resources other than the production companies themselves which are important to the production of television programmes.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37281/11-15, what weighting is given to each of the eight criteria in assessing an application to the Ulster-Scots Broadcast fund.
(AQW 38543/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No specific weighting is afforded to the eight criteria. Assessment is based on an objective analysis of how an application meets the criteria which are made known to potential applicants in advance.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the nature of the Together: Building a United Community Sports Connect initiative.
(AQW 38544/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department leads on one of the seven headline actions from the Executive's Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) Strategy namely the development of a Cross Community Youth Sports Programme.

A pilot project for the programme will be delivered over a twelve week period starting in January 2015 and will be aimed at 11-16 year olds in the Action Zones of the Lower Falls and Greater Village areas. The programme will aim to enhance good relations through the transformative power of sport.

The Sport Connects initiative is the training programme for the pilot project's Young Leaders (aged 16-24). This initiative will give Young Leaders the opportunity to understand and learn how to communicate good relations messages and acquire coaching and creative industries qualifications and experience alongside the improvement of softer skills such as confidence and motivation which will improve employability prospects.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in her 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 38559/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has no employee, paid on either the Industrial or Non Industrial pay scales, that earn less than £7.20 per hour.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support she has given to the Ulster Orchestra during their current financial difficulties.
(AQW 38597/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I met with representatives of the Orchestra to explore the nature of the problems faced and the work it is undertaking to identify possible solutions. I also discussed the matter with other stakeholders including BBC Officials and Lord Tony Hall, Director General.

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.

All parties are in close contact and will remain so during the crucial weeks ahead, with a view to bringing discussions to a close as soon as possible.

If a new sustainable operating model emerges from this current, iterative 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.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37279/11-15, which of the 37 projects listed as being supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund had a substantial Ulster-Scots language element and thereby contributed to increasing awareness and understanding of the Ulster-Scots language.
(AQW 38649/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following projects had a substantial language element and sought to increase awareness and understanding of the Ulster-Scots language;

1. Santer Series 2
2. Santer Series 3
3. An Ode to Burns
4. Reader of Rabbie
5. Stumpy's Brae
6. The Gaitherin
7. Five Fables
8. Five Fables app
9. Minding our Language

Going forward the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund Committee is intending to support projects that have a more substantive language element.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37279/11-15, which of the 37 projects listed as being supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast fund were broadcast on (i) BBC in Northern Ireland only; (ii) BBC in Northern Ireland and nationally across the United Kingdom; and (iii) UTV.
(AQW 38650/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Details of the projects are as follows:

(i) The Projects commissioned by and broadcast on BBC NI are:

Pipe Dreamers; The Siege; The Covenant Trail; Tattoo Debut; Santer, Series 2 & 3; Mapping Ulster; An Independent People; Ulster's Forgotten Radical; An Ode to Burns; The Extraordinary Life of Castlereagh; 12 Miles – The Narrow Sea; Reader of Rabbie; The Santer Sessions; Five Fables; Tim McGarry's Ulster-Scots Journey; Life Stories Amy Carmichael; Brave New World; Stumpy's Brae; In Search of Richard Hayward; Then Sings My Soul; The Gaitherin;;Imagining Ulster, Brave New World: Canada; The Radical World of William Tennent; Minding our Language; A Rebel Heart: Mary-Ann McCracken and Out of Africa.

(i) The Projects broadcast nationally by the BBC are:

Written in Stone; Ingenious Mr Hutcheson and Kelvin's Cable (as The Man Who Shrank the World).

(ii) The projects broadcast on UTV are:

Paul and Nick's Big Food Trip; Ulster Unearthed; Paul and Nick's Big Food Trip, Series 2 and Paul and Nick's Big American Food. The Paul and Nick series has also been broadcast on STV in Scotland.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the process by which the previous director of marketing and communication in Waterways Ireland was recruited, including (i) when and how the post was advertised; (ii) how many people applied for the post; (iii) how many people were shortlisted; (iv) how many people were interviewed; and (v) who was on the interview panel.
(AQW 38652/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The previous Director of Marketing and Communications was appointed by the former Chief Executive of Waterways Ireland with effect from April 2002. The appointment was made in line with the relevant provisions in the British Irish Agreement Act 1999, which allowed for the designation and transfer of the member of staff from the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. The appointment was not made through an open competition.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in her Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38657/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is currently 1.60 full time equivalent (FTE) staff employed in my Department's Equality Unit.

Details of the grades of staff and salary ranges are contained in the table below.

Grade	FTE	Salary Range
DP	1	£35,190 - £39,675
SO	0.6	£28,500 - £31,135

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's capital build programme, including stadia.
(AQO 7137/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will begin with stadia since these form the largest part of the current capital budget.

UBIRFU. The Ravenhill project is progressing very well with all 3 stands now complete. The official opening of the Stadium took place on 2 May 2014. Completion of the remaining phases of construction work around the education and heritage facilities is planned for early 2015.

IFA. Construction works at Windsor Park commenced on site on 6 May 2014 after the Irish Cup Final and work is progressing well. Provided that significant delays around any legal issues are avoided, then the Windsor Park development can remain on programme with completion of the construction works planned for November 2015.

UCGAA. Design development by the contractor is complete. However construction work at Casement Park is currently delayed temporarily due to a Judicial Review against DOE's planning approval for the Casement Park project. If a favourable outcome to the JR is achieved, it is likely that the contractor could commence construction on site in January 2015 with a planned completion date of November 2016.

Turning now to stadia-associated capital projects, the £567k capital allocation for the purchase of minibuses (Community Minibus Scheme) and the redevelopment of community facilities in the Lower Falls area are on target for spend within this financial year.

I will now briefly summarise progress on other capital projects:

Libraries. £4m will be invested this year. The Lisnaskea library re build is now complete and the project to replace Moira Library is now at tender stage. The work to replace Libraries NI's IT infrastructure successfully completed in year.

City of Culture legacy. £2.8m will be invested this year. £1.3m of this budget has been allocated to Phase 1 of the North Coast Sports Village which is now complete. Refurbishment of seven boxing clubs and extension to the FabLab space in the Derry Nerve Centre is also planned.

Other sporting activity. £1.8m will be invested this year.

Facilities will be modernised at Lisburn Racquets Club. Two handball alleys will be completed at Colaiste Feirste.

Ulster Scots sector. £305k will be invested in the Ulster Scots Hub at Corn Exchange, website development and grants.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what impact her Department's 2015/16 budget will have on funding for local museums.
(AQO 7132/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's financial support to local museums is primarily through the NI Museums Council's grants programme. In addition the Somme Heritage Centre receives funding to support work aligned to the Decade of Centenaries programme.

Without prejudging the outcome of the ongoing budget consultation process it should be possible to maintain our level of combined direct and indirect financial support to the local museums sector in 2015/16 at, or close to, the current level.

The Museums Council has provided my Department with a draft Savings Delivery Plan which shows that it will seek to make internal efficiencies to meet its 2015/16 savings target of eleven point two percent, equating to thirty thousand pounds. This Plan proposes that its grant programme will be protected from these cuts and will remain at the level of approximately twenty five thousand pounds per annum.

In relation to the Somme Heritage Centre, and the approaching anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, it is my intention to continue to provide programme funding to this local museum in 2015/16. The amount of this funding has yet to be confirmed.

My Department, in common with departments across the Executive, is addressing the impact of significant budget reductions in 2015/16. I am working hard to ensure we minimise the impact of these cuts on frontline services. However, the current budgetary situation is undoubtedly challenging.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how much money, and other resources, she intends to allocate to the promotion of the Irish language between now and April 2016.
(AQO 7138/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive's draft budget for the 2015/16 proposes a reduction to DCAL's baseline in Current Expenditure of 10% (before inflation) compared to 2014/15. A high level assessment of the impacts of the proposed budget on DCAL's spending and savings plans for 2015/16 has been published for public consultation.

DCAL's plans for expenditure on the promotion of Irish cover three broad areas - sponsorship of Foras na Gaeilge, Liofa and leading the implementation of the the Gaeltacht Quarter Plan.

The budgets for Foras na Gaeilge for the calendar years 2015 and 2016 have not yet been agreed. An indicative budget of approximately three million pounds (£3m) is proposed for 2015 in line with the required 8% efficiency savings for the period 2014 to 2016.

The planned expenditure on Líofa from 1 November to 31 March 2015 is one hundred and thirty three thousand and eighty three pounds (£133,083).

From 1November 2014 to 31st March 2015, two hundred and eighty three thousand, seven hundred and five pounds (£283,705) has been allocated to Gaeltacht Quarter projects.

During 2014/15 the DCAL North West team also provided An Gaeláras with a capital grant of up to one hundred and fifty thousand pounds (£150k) to contribute towards the refurbishment of "The Manse", the building adjacent to Derry's Irish language Centre, An Culturlann.

The budgets for Líofa and the Gaeltacht Quarter for 2015/16 will be considered in the context of the findings from the public consultation.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many jobs will be created by the re-development of Windsor Park and the surrounding sporting village.
(AQO 7134/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is estimated that there will be 270 direct job years associated with the Windsor Park re-development project.

In addition Specific clauses have been included in the IST Contract for Windsor Park. They require the employment of 17 Long Term Unemployed workers, 8 new apprenticeships and 2 student placements there is also a 5% apprenticeships requirement for contractors/sub contractors with over 20 employees.

The contractor, O'Hare and McGovern, have committed to providing over and beyond the numbers specified in the contract and have identified opportunities for 32 Long term unemployed workers and 19 apprenticeships.

In addition to this social clauses have been included in the IST contracts for the redevelopment of Olympia Leisure Centre. These will also provided further opportunities for Long term unemployed and apprentices throughout the construction stage.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of Windsor Park.
(AQO 7139/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Funding Agreement was issued to the IFA and the successful contractor (O'Hare and McGovern) was appointed in December 2013.

Design development by the contractor is complete and the release of the Construction Notice by the IFA was made on 2 May 2014. Construction works commenced on site on 6 May 2014 after the Irish Cup Final.

Construction work is on-going and progressing well, with the Phase 1 works (construction of the pitch) completed on time for the European Championship Qualifier on 11th October 2014.

Provided that significant delays around any legal issues are avoided, then the Windsor Park development can remain on programme with completion of the construction works planned for November 2015.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the recent decision of the Danish Parliament to prevent the abolition of the Danish National Chamber Orchestra, for an update of her plans in relation to the future of the Ulster Orchestra.
(AQO 7140/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have met with representatives of the Orchestra to explore the nature of the problems faced and the work it is undertaking to identify possible solutions. Officials from my Department, together with the Arts Council continue to engage 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 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 McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any library closures as a result of annual reductions to the block grant available to the Executive.
(AQO 7141/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am working with Libraries NI to ensure that no branch libraries will be required to close permanently in the current, or next, financial year as a result of the annual reductions to the Executive's block grant. Achieving the level of savings required is extremely challenging for my Department and its arms length bodies, including Libraries NI.

The Member may be aware that it was previously proposed that my Department's resource budget for 2015/16 should be cut by 13%. It is now expected that the Department will be subject to a 10% overall reduction, although this is subject to consultation as part of the draft budget process. As part of the budget settlement, I am keen that protection should be offered to Libraries NI in order to avoid library closures. This reflects my clear recognition of the essential role that libraries play within communities, especially in socially deprived areas.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the long-term curation and storage of archaeological archives.
(AQO 7142/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: On 6th November 2014 representatives from both the Environment Agency and National Museums provided the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee with an updated position on a range of significant issues around the management of archaeological finds. This position remains unchanged.

The joint Environment Agency / National Museums Working Group has determined the approximate size and amount of the material held by private archaeological firms. In quantity, this is roughly equivalent to the size of National Museums' existing collections. It is approximately five times the amount of archaeological material currently held by National Museums.

Significantly, the Group has also identified a number of other Government Departments and public bodies that should have an input into the resolution of this matter. These include departments who are involved in large-scale infrastructure projects relating, for example, to water, roads and social housing.

Previously the focus of the Group was on private sector developers and archaeologists. However, more clarity is needed as to how archaeological artefacts owned by these public sector bodies are being stored, and at what cost to the Taxpayer.

A report summarising the Group's findings will, in due course, be submitted to both the DOE Minister and me for consideration. The report will make recommendations as to possible solutions towards resolving the many issues surrounding archaeological archives.

In line with a commitment previously made by former Minister Alex Attwood during an Assembly debate in July 2012, I anticipate that the Environment Minister may wish to present a paper to the Executive on this matter.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the important role of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland, to outline the actions she has taken since September 2014 to support the orchestra in its current difficult financial situation.
(AQO 7143/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have met with representatives of the Orchestra to explore the nature of the problems faced and the work it is undertaking to identify possible solutions. Officials from my Department, together with the Arts Council continue to engage 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 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 Sheehan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide an overview of her Department's sports proposals, as part of the 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy.
(AQO 7144/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has responsibility for one of the seven headline actions in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy – namely the development of a cross community youth sports programme.

A pilot project for the programme will be delivered over a twelve week period starting in January 2015 and will be aimed at 11-16 year olds in the Action Zones of the Lower Falls and Greater Village areas. The pilot project will see participants from each of the Action Zones having the opportunity to collectively take part in a wide range of sporting and creative industry based activity led by elite coaches with support from Young Leaders (aged 16-24) from their areas.

The programme will aim to build community capacity, improve employability prospects and enhance good relations through the transformative power of sport.

The programme's proactive approach to encouraging participation from females, ethnic minorities and disabled people will contribute to tackling inequality and promote social inclusion.

The community is fully engaged in the current development phase of the programme and will continue to be fully involved as the pilot goes live in January. A range of statutory and other partners are also working with the Department on the programme design and delivery. I believe that the pilot is hugely exciting, will be of high quality and genuinely transformative for those taking part.

Department of Education

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the amount of funding provided to each sectoral body for the 2009/10 to 2013/14 financial years.
(AQW 38177/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The amount of funding provided to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) and the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) for the 2009-10 to the 2013-14 financial years is as follows:

£'000		**2009-10 £'000**	**2010-11 £'000**	**2011-12 £'000**	**2012-13 £'000**	**2013-14 £'000**
CnaG	Recurrent	637	679	654	657	674
	Capital	-	-	-	1	3
	Total	637	679	654	658	677
NICIE	Recurrent	691	770	643	643	660
	Capital	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	**691**	**770**	**643**	**643**	**658**

Notes: Figures are based on the final budget allocations for each body in each of the financial years.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the staffing levels of (i) each Education and Library Board; and (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 38227/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The staffing levels (headcount) of (i) each Education and Library Board; and (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, in each of the last five financial years is as follows:

	As at 31/3/10	As at 31/3/11	As at 31/3/12	As at 31/3/13	As at 31/3/14
BELB	473	460	414	414	428
WELB	747	682	623	609	621
NEELB	621	602	529	512	500
SEELB	541	544	525	520	518
SELB	785	762	709	702	701
CCMS	85	80	64	53	56

The headcount figures in the table above include:

- Part-time staff;
- Headquarter staff and out centre staff; and
- Permanent staff and temporary staff who may be covering permanent posts.

School based staff are not included in these headcount figures, and figures can fluctuate during the year due to leavers and new starts.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38377/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of staff employed in the Department of Education Equality Team equates to 2.6 full time equivalent officers. In 2013/2014, the Administration Salary Cost for the officers was £102,491.

In addition to equality of opportunity and good relations issues the staff covers topics such as UNCRC and other conventions, Department's Action Plans:- Racial Equality, Disability and Gender and supports the development of policy.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the funding provided to each sectoral body in the last five years.[R]
(AQW 38437/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The amount of funding provided to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) and the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) for the 2009-10 to the 2013-14 financial years is as follows:

£'000		2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000	2013-14 £'000
CnaG	Recurrent	637	679	654	657	674
	Capital	-	-	-	1	3
	Total	637	679	654	658	677
NICIE	Recurrent	691	770	643	643	660
	Capital	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	**691**	**770**	**643**	**643**	**658**

Notes: Figures are based on the final budget allocations for each body in each of the financial years.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 38044/11-15, given that school attendance is recorded electronically, why it takes a further ten months to provide a breakdown of levels of absenteeism by ward.[R]
(AQW 38651/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Attendance data are collected via the annual School Census, which is conducted on the Friday of the first full week of October each year. This means that attendance data for the school year 2013/14 were collected via the 2014/2015 school Census (10 October 2014). Due to the nature of the Census exercise, it is often the end of November before all Census returns have been made. The following few weeks are taken up by validation of the data and creation of the final datasets.

Publication of initial analysis occurs at the end of January, while publication of detailed statistics occurs at the end of February. Both of these publications are National Statistics, and as such are subject to the Code of Practise for Official Statistics – it is not possible to provide any statistical breakdown of the attendance data until these reports have been published. Therefore a breakdown of absenteeism by ward for school year 2013/14 is not possible until March 2015 at the earliest. See below processes and timescales:

Process	Timescale
Census planning and preparation e.g. end of year procedures from C2K, update syntax in SRT	June - August
School census documentation issued	September
Schools complete, check and upload data to web exchange	October - December
SRT convert files from csv to SPSS for analysis and merge into one file for each school type	November – December
SRT run validations on attendance data and create final datasets	December
Initial analysis and publication of summary statistics	End of January
In-depth analysis and publication of detailed statistics	End of February

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage cut in budget that schools will be required to implement for the 2015/16 financial year.
(AQW 38705/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: 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.

My officials are currently progressing work on identifying the inescapable pressures facing the education budget next year. Until this work is completed and I have had an opportunity to review fully the implications of the draft budget settlement for Education it would be premature for me to provide details of cuts to schools budgets at this stage.

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 remain fully committed to protecting front-line services where possible and to ensuring that the resources available for education are allocated effectively to achieve maximum impact for our children.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to protect and promote the ethos of the four voluntary maintained church managed primary schools (a) Seagoe Primary School; (b) Drelincourt Infants School; (c) Desertmartin Primary School; and (d) Kilcoan Primary School.
(AQW 38718/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for determining and maintaining the ethos of Seagoe Primary School, Drelincourt Infants School, Desertmartin Primary School and Kilcoan Primary School rests with the Board of Governors of each school and the trustees who are represented on the school Board.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Education 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 38765/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's expenditure in the last five financial years on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss was £1,317.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's level of support for The Buddy Bear School in Dungannon; and for his assessment of the criticism from parents and the school community regarding inadequate funding to meet the educational requirements of children who suffer from Cerebral Palsy and other motor disorders and who benefit from this form of conductive education.
(AQW 38773/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have assured DE that the needs of a significant number of children with Cerebral Palsy and other motor disorders are successfully met in a range of grant-aided schools, including special schools and Learning Support Centres attached to mainstream schools where the full range of medical interventions and therapeutic support from medical professionals is available. The educational facility agreed for the child depends largely on the needs of the child and is informed by parental choice.

My department has formally recognised Buddy Bear School as suitable for the admission of children with special educational needs. Therefore should an ELB decide, as a result of a statutory assessment, to place a child in Buddy Bear school, it will pay the child's fees in regard to attendance and may pay other costs in relation to transport and accommodation. In this context my department is providing a tangible level of support to the school.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education what percentage of children in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary education attend Irish-medium schools or Irish-medium units.
(AQW 38788/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below. The information provided relates to the 2013/14 school census, the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will be available in December, finalised figures in February.

Pupils enrolled in Irish medium schools or units, 2013/14

	No of pupils	%
Primary	3594	2.1%
Post-primary	831	0.6%

Source: NI school census

Notes:

(i) Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether there are any legal obstacles that may prevent a nursery school transforming to integrated status.
(AQW 38821/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no legal obstacles to prevent a nursery school transforming to integrated status.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of surplus places in the (a) controlled; (b) maintained; (iii) integrated; and (iv) Irish-medium sectors, broken down by primary and post-primary schools, since 2011.
(AQW 38822/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below. The information provided is based on the 2011/12 – 2013/14 school censuses. The 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year and unfilled places data for this year will be available in April.

Unfilled places in primary schools, 2011/12 - 2013/14

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Controlled	26624	27.4%	24863	25.7%	28837	29.4%
Maintained	28894	28.9%	26839	27.1%	31353	30.9%
Integrated	1551	15.4%	1344	13.3%	1750	17.5%
Irish medium schools	977	29.2%	952	27.4%	927	30.1%

Unfilled places in post-primary schools, 2011/12 - 2013/14

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Controlled	7976	15.7%	8469	16.9%	8050	15.6%
Maintained	10608	21.9%	10052	21.4%	9928	20.6%
Integrated	933	7.7%	1044	8.6%	827	6.8%
Irish medium schools	65	11.1%	60	10.0%	55	9.4%

Source: NI school census

Notes:

2. Figures for primary include reception – year 7 classes only.
3. Maintained includes Catholic Maintained and Other Maintained schools
4. Integrated includes Controlled Integrated and GMI schools
5. It is not possible to separate out unfilled places and approved enrolments for Irish medium units, so the data for Irish medium is based on IM schools only.

6. Irish medium schools have been excluded from their respective management types.

7. Voluntary schools have been excluded.

8. The percentage is the number of unfilled places relative divided by the total approved enrolment

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Education whether he has considered introducing performance related pay for post-primary school teachers to improve academic performance.
(AQW 38830/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Boards of Governors have a legal responsibility to ensure that teachers' performance is reviewed annually in accordance with the negotiated Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) Scheme. Review statements agreed under the Scheme form part of the evidence used to determine pay progression on the Leadership and Upper Pay Scales. Depending on their position on the pay scale, teachers progress up the pay scale either annually or biannually.

The PRSD Scheme came into operation on 1 September 2005 and is well embedded in schools and has become integral to performance management, staff development and overall school improvement.

Discussions are on-going with teaching unions regarding linking performance to pay.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether he will, in conjunction with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, assist with the funding of a Specialist Autism Support Worker to assist children at the nine schools offering autism specific classes.
(AQW 38846/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board provides Autism Specific Classes in ten primary schools and two post-primary schools. The Board has been made aware that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is seeking to recruit specialist therapy assistants to support the work of Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists in some of the primary-based Key Stage 1 autism-specific classes. The Board understands that the Trust is experiencing recruitment difficulties.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education why autism specific support is not provided to pupils from Key Stage 2 onwards; and for his assessment of the impact of the non-provision of support to pupils who have received assistance during Key Stage 1.
(AQW 38847/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Autism specific support is provided, as appropriate, to all children and young people with Autistic Specific Disorder across the age range (0-19 years).

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools from the maintained sector have transferred to the integrated sector, in the last ten year.
(AQW 38867/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No primary schools from the maintained sector have transferred to the integrated sector in the last ten years.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the effectiveness of Education Scotland in improving educational standards of pupils in Scotland; and what lessons can be learnt from this in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38876/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is too early to make a properly informed objective assessment of the effectiveness of Education Scotland in improving educational standards of pupils in Scotland. We look forward to seeing a formal evaluation of the arrangements in due course.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many schools who exited the Formal Intervention Process have re-entered the process.
(AQW 38877/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: One school that had exited the Formal Intervention Process subsequently re-entered the Process.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, in the light of the Chief Inspector's comments on poor school attendance amongst pupils in receipt of free school meals, what additional action is he considering to improve attendance amongst these pupils.
(AQW 38878/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: School attendance and achievement are inextricably linked. My expectations for children and young people entitled to free school meals are no less than for any other child.

The NI Audit Office (NIAO) and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) published reports on Improving Pupil Attendance earlier this year. The Memorandum of Reply, published on 4 August 2014, sets out a programme of work for my Department

and the Education and Library Boards. This includes the development of a Pupil Attendance Strategy. My Department has already started to engage with stakeholders and to develop the strategy which will be in place by the 2015/16 school year.

My Department alone cannot address the underlying issues of non-attendance. Key to the new Attendance Strategy will be the role and responsibilities of parents, schools, the Education and Library Boards, young people themselves, the community, other government Departments and agencies in addressing poor attendance.

The Education Works campaign continues to engage with parents and supports the work on improving attendance by stressing the value of education to families and communities, particularly those from disadvantaged communities.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the minimum number of pupils that a school is required to have to be accepted on the Shared Education Campus Programme.
(AQW 38886/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The protocol document for the Shared Education Campus Programme details the criteria which each application will be assessed against. These include the endorsement of the relevant Planning Authority (the local Education & Library Board) who will have to provide assurance that each school involved in the proposal meets the criteria in my Department's Sustainable Schools Policy. Where this is not the case, the Planning Authority will have to provide a rationale for its endorsement of the proposal, including an explanation as to how the proposed scheme will contribute to the delivery of sustainable education provision in the local area in the years to come.

The Shared Education Campuses Programme protocol document can be found on my Department's website via the following link - http://www.deni.gov.uk/shared_education_campuses_programme_-_second_call_for_expressions_of_interest_-_protocol_document.pdf

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what steps he took to avoid real, perceived or potential conflict of interest in the appointment of Northern Ireland's Qualification Regulator as a member of the Board of Governors of Antrim Grammar School.
(AQW 38962/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The DE governor posts in controlled and maintained school sectors are nominations and are not classified as Ministerial appointments. The education and library boards are the appointing authorities in the case of controlled schools.

Applicants for DE governor posts have to declare any conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are not always a barrier to the offer of a school governor post. In this case, the school's scheme of management provides for any member of the Board of Governors to declare a conflict of interest in a matter which is under consideration by the governors and to withdraw from the meeting and any discussion and vote taken in relation to that matter. I am satisfied that this is sufficient to provide for the effective operation of school business by the members of the Board of Governors of Antrim Grammar School.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to define the term "international best practice" as referred to in the Final Report "Aspiring to Excellence" by the International Review Panel on Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 39071/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Aspiring to Excellence: the Final Report of the Initial Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland was conducted on behalf of the Minister for Employment and Learning. Terminology within that report would therefore be a matter for the Minister for Employment and Learning.

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's position on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) PISA-Based Test for Schools.
(AQO 7152/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I agreed earlier this year that, the OECD PISA-Based Test Schools should be available to our post primary schools, should they wish to use it to support self-evaluation and school development planning.

I have written to all local post primary schools to alert them to the fact that this useful and credible OECD assessment is now available to them to use as a tool for self-improvement. It is for each school to decide if they wish to participate in the test.

The OECD PISA-Based Test assesses the application of skills in reading, maths and science as well as attitudes to learning and is potentially a very useful tool for schools.

The assessment examines not only what is learned but also the application of that knowledge in the real world and as such sits well alongside the curriculum.

If a school takes part in the PISA test, they receive a report on their pupils' performance which will provide schools with a tool to support self-evaluation and enable them to benchmark their performance in an international context.

This new PISA-Based assessment complements but is not part of the PISA studies undertaken every three years, the next study is PISA 2015 planned for next year.

These international comparisons when used as part of the self evaluation that schools already undertake, can only serve to assist schools in raising standards and closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achievers.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to outline the impact of budget cuts on the Education Welfare Service.
(AQO 7155/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Resourcing of the Education Welfare Service is a matter for the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The ELBs fund the Education Welfare Service through their block grant allocation and this is supplemented by my Department.

If there are any resourcing pressures it is expected that the ELBs would bring the matter to the attention of officials.

The Chief Executives of each ELB have reported that there have been no budgetary cuts to the EWS in the current financial year.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus.
(AQO 7151/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Steady progress has been made on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus Programme and it is on target to meet the PfG commitment to initiate the first phase of construction by 2014/15.

Demolition has now been completed on the area of the site earmarked for Arvalee School & Resource Centre. The tender process for the construction contract for Arvalee has begun and it is intended that the construction contract will commence early 2015 and completed by mid 2016.

Demolition for the remainder of the site is out to tender and work on site is due to commence before the end of the year.

Planning of future phases of the Programme is progressing and procurement options are currently being considered.

The Strathroy Link Road project, which is essential to the campus delivery, is being taken forward by the Department for Regional Development – Roads Service and remains on schedule for completion early in 2018.

The current delivery schedule estimates completion of the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus by 2020, with a view to schools coming into operation in September of that year.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education how his Department's resource baseline, not including ring-fenced resource, was calculated for the 2015/16 Draft Budget.
(AQO 7153/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's draft budget outcome for non ring-fenced resource totalled £1,849.3 million. This resulted in a £94.4 million reduction from the 2014-15 baseline. In setting Departmental baselines for 2015-16, the 2014-15 opening position was substantively rolled forward, with the removal of certain time-bound allocations. The Executive agreed to a level of reductions from this baseline to provide funding for central and strategic pressures, along with an amount to be allocated in support of key public services.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education what impact the recent Review of Irish-medium Post-primary Education will have for Irish-medium post-primary education in the Derry City Council area.
(AQO 7154/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In August 2013, I set up an Advisory Group to focus on the development of practical and deliverable solutions to increase access to Irish-medium post-primary education and to address the challenges facing the future development of sustainable provision. The Advisory Group presented its findings and recommendations to me in April 2014, which I subsequently considered.

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.

I have noted comments in relation to the need for a standalone school in Derry City. I am satisfied that the framework now exists more than ever before to facilitate development towards an Irish-medium post-primary school in Derry and the wider Foyle constituency.

Of course such a Development Proposal must still meet robust criteria around future demand and sustainability. If that is not possible within prevailing circumstances and subject to parental wishes, I also accept the Advisory Group Report proposal which suggests moving in the direction of travel towards stand-alone schools by building a clear pathway incrementally from smaller units in high quality existing schools towards stand-alone provision. This has been balanced with the need for excellent teaching to ensure learning and pupil attainment are not put at risk.

I would point out that all developments in the Irish-medium sector are taken forward within the context of area planning, the Sustainable Schools Policy and my Department's duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to outline how the ongoing post-primary area planning process takes into account the effect that Development Proposals to expand a school in one sector can have on the sustainability of schools in other educational sectors.
(AQO 7156/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development Proposals brought forward should be consistent with the Area Plans published by the planning authorities. Any proposed change must support the delivery of the vision for education provision in the area and meet the identified needs of the pupils.

Development Proposals relate to specific schools and are considered within the area context and in line with the Department's Sustainable Schools Policy, which sets out six criteria for assessing the viability of a school. In addition the Department is required to consider the impact that a proposal may have on another grant-aided school. The Department assesses the likely impact that a proposal will have on other schools' ability to remain sustainable and again this is assessed in line with the Sustainable Schools Policy.

I can assure you that before I make a decision on any proposal I take account of all pertinent information. However, my primary focus is always on the needs of pupils and not institutions.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education what procedures are in place to ensure that pupils remain safe should school patrol personnel be absent from work.
(AQO 7157/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for the safety of pupils when on foot in the vicinity of schools rests with their parents. School crossing patrols are provided to assist parents with their responsibility.

When the absence of a school crossing patrol person is known in advance schools should bring this to the attention of parents. When a patrol is absent at short notice, a member of a school's personnel may fulfil the role on a temporary basis and Boards will provide training for those persons such that they will be in a position to replace the patrol if required.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he plans to remove Royal Navy, Army or Royal Air Force literature from Jobs and Benefits offices.
(AQW 38480/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I have no plans to remove Royal Navy, Army or Air Force literature from Jobs and Benefits Offices or indeed from JobCentres across Northern Ireland. There is a network of 35 offices across Northern Ireland, which includes 8 JobCentres and 27 Jobs & Benefits offices. Currently there is a range of information leaflets and posters displayed across the offices.

In common with many other employers, my Department has a longstanding arrangement to promote recruitment opportunities within the Armed Forces in general.

Each Jobs and Benefits office and JobCentre has access to a dedicated Armed Forces Liaison Officer which has helped to promote good working relationships.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38561/11-15)

Dr Farry: No employee of the Department for Employment and Learning, is paid below £7.20 per hour.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on research grants to (i) Queen's University Belfast; and (ii) University of Ulster for work on energy storage and efficiency research projects.
(AQW 38615/11-15)

Dr Farry: The majority of research funding provided by my Department is distributed by reference to quality, as assessed by performance in the most recent Research Assessment Exercise. This is known as Quality-related Research (QR) funding and is used to cover the underpinning research infrastructure necessary for our universities to maintain a dynamic and responsive research base. It also encourages ground breaking basic research with the potential to drive future innovation and respond quickly to changes in the external environment.

This enables our universities to apply for research funding for specific projects from external bodies such as the UK Research Councils, Invest NI, industry, charities and the EU.

However, on occasion, and when suitable funding is available, my Department has supplemented this core funding with a number of special initiatives, some of which have provided funding for energy related research projects. There have been a number of such projects over the last five years representing a total investment of £8,517,658, consisting of £5,187,689 for Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and of £3,329,969 for the University of Ulster (UU). These are summarised below:

US-Ireland R&D Partnership

Under the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership, the Department is currently funding five QUB projects with a total value of £1,503,267, and one UU project with a total value of £319,854, all in the thematic area of Energy / Sustainability.

Strengthening the all-Island Research Base Programme

£1.15m to QUB for a project on "Improving the Sustainability of Transport using Advanced Composites and Digital Manufacturing" and £1.54m to UU for an "Energy Storage" project.

Sustainable Research Fund

For the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11 my Department provided funding for areas that encompass the theme of sustainability, particularly research which related to alternative/renewable energy sources or green technology. QUB received £2,534,422 and UU received £1,470,115 from this Fund.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, when considering issues such as the renaming of a university that has had difficulties attracting students from a section of the community, what equality impact assessments would be made regarding the worsening of recruitment if the renaming were to proceed.
(AQW 38639/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides funding to the Higher Education Institutions for teaching and learning and research purposes. The Universities are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including those relating to renaming.

Both Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster have been established under Royal Charter and any name change would need to be approved by the Privy Council. In considering renaming, a university would be expected to consider its obligations under its own statutes and charters and any Section 75 obligations.

It would then be for the university to carry out any required equality impact assessments.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38656/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning currently has two Civil Servants who are employed on a full-time basis in the Department's Equality Unit. Salary costs have been provided in terms of pay bands as release of the information requested would result in a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998, in particular the first data protection principle of the Act.

Civil Servants employed in Equality Unit	Grade	Pay Band at 1 August 2014
1	Deputy Principal	£35,190 - £39,675
1	Staff Officer	£28,500 - £31,135

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the number of training suppliers providing services for young people in East Londonderry participating in the Training for Success Programme.
(AQW 38671/11-15)

Dr Farry: There has been no change to the number of training suppliers providing services for young people in East Londonderry participating in the Training for Success Programme since my response to the original question (AQW 36046-11-15) in September 2014.

The Training for Success Programme continues to be delivered across Northern Ireland by 32 contracted training suppliers of which 11 hold contracts to provide training in East Londonderry. The 11 contracted suppliers are listed at

Annex A.

Contracts for the current Training for Success Programme were awarded in June 2013 and will run until March 2016.

The full list of Training for Success suppliers and the areas in which they are contracted to deliver can be found on the nidirect website. http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/trainingforsuccess

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning 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 38694/11-15)

Dr Farry: The 2014-15 salaries budget for the Department is £70,799k. This is 9.3% of the total non-ringfenced resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) budget of £760,306k.

The Department is in the process of developing a Workforce Plan for 2015-16 which will set out the scope for reducing the number of posts to make required efficiency savings. This work will be taken forward in the context of the NICS-wide Voluntary Exit Scheme on which DFP is taking the lead.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) his Department; and (ii) each of his Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38712/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The full time equivalent number (FTE) of staff in the Department for Employment and Learning in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	FTE
2010	1,943.57
2011	1,938.38
2012	1,945.38
2013	1,991.82
2014	2,036.43

The FTE figures shown above are based on HR records for October of each the years 2010 to 2014.

(ii) The information currently available in relation to the full time equivalent (FTE) number of staff in each of the Department for Employment and Learning's arm's-length bodies in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Arms-length Body	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
St Mary's College[1]	145.0	144.7	139.3	133.7	133.5	-	-
Stranmillis College[1]	196.0	187.0	185.0	189.0	195.0	-	-
2NI Advisor on Employment & Skills[3]	-	-	7.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.0
Belfast Metropolitan College[1]	1,083	1,176	1,003	874	830	-	-
Northern Regional College[1]	760	737	726	682	678	-	-
North West Regional College[1]	617	622	605	598	594	-	-
South Eastern Regional College[1]	838	819	802	753	746	-	-
Southern Regional College[1]	799	824	748	715	721	-	-
South West College1	503	533	555	561	570	-	-
Ulster Supported Employment Limited[3]	-	-	102	97	97	98	98
Labour Relations Agency[3]	-	-	62.8	62.8	62.8	62.8	62.8
Certification Officer for NI[3]	-	-	4	4	4	4	4
Construction Industry Training Board,[4]	-	-	31	31	32.5	29	28.5

1 Figures relate to academic years

2 No longer an arms-length body of the Department

3 Figures relate to financial years

4 Figures are based on records as at 31st August

The Department also has responsibility for 3 Tribunal Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs): the Industrial Tribunal, the Fair Employment Tribunal and the Industrial Court for Northern Ireland. These NDPBs have jurisdiction in a specialised field of law and are supported by staff from the Department and do not have their own budgets. The staff who provide this support have already been included in the overall staff numbers relating to the Department at point 1.

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 Department is committed to widening access and promoting educational opportunities for all individuals across Northern Ireland. The Further Education colleges offer a variety of courses throughout their network of campuses.

My Department has also put in place a number of initiatives, delivered by the Further Education Colleges, to make education more accessible to all throughout Northern Ireland. These initiatives include the Learner Access and Engagement Programme, Care to Learn Scheme and Additional Support Fund.

The Northern Regional College (NRC) has responsibility for delivering further education courses in the North Antrim area and has campuses based in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Coleraine. NRC operates the following initiatives to help increase the number of people from North Antrim enrolling in further education courses:

Learner Access and Engagement (LAE)

NRC took the decision to focus LAE on four council areas, Moyle, Larne, Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus. In Moyle, NRC has partnered with Larne Enterprise Development Company to engage learners onto this programme which has resulted in an increase of 44% of community classes in Moyle.

Creating Pathways to Success

NRC has in place a programme funded by Department for Social Development (DSD) Neighbourhood Renewal called Creating Pathways to Success. This programme offers mentoring support to those students from the designated Neighbourhood Renewal areas in North Antrim.

The programme ensures that students undertaking any course at NRC who come from a Neighbourhood Renewal area are offered specialist mentoring support to encourage retention and progression.

Community Access to Lifelong Learning (CALL)

NRC has also drawn down £98k in funding from DSD to offer accredited and non accredited learning opportunities to youth and the wider community in the Neighbourhood Renewal areas of Ballymena under the NRC delivered CALL project.

Community Outreach in North Antrim

NRC is working with community partners to deliver learning opportunities outside of its campus infrastructure. In 2013/14 NRC engaged with a total of 37 community groups in the North Antrim area. This engagement resulted in the delivery of 81 courses in the North Antrim area with over 800 individual enrolments. From 2012/13 to the year 2013/14, NRC noted an increase of 83% in its overall community provision.

Entitlement Framework in North Antrim

NRC has an extensive Entitlement Framework provision involving three learning communities in North Antrim. In 2013/14 over 1,000 students from 21 post-primary schools engaged in an accredited course as part of this programme. For example, a young person may attend NRC one day a week from any of the local post primary schools and at the end of an academic year gain a CCEA qualification in Occupational Studies in a range of vocational and technical areas. Some of these students will then decide to progress to full-time further education programmes or enrol on a Training for Success/Apprenticeship provision at NRC.

NRC also works with Coleraine Girls' High School, Coleraine Inst, Cross and Passion, St Josephs High School and Ballycastle High School using integrated delivery combining classes from across these schools, delivering sub diplomas in Engineering and Construction.

The Entitlement Framework offered in the Ballymoney campus includes CCEA Occupational Studies in Digital Technology, Construction, Technology and Innovation, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, and Catering and also sub diplomas including Engineering, Sports Studies, Health and Social Care.

This outreach to post primary school students and to the wider community demonstrates NRC's commitment to encourage and increase the number of learners engaging in further education courses.

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 Further Education courses.
(AQW 38852/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department is committed to widening access and promoting educational opportunities for all individuals across Northern Ireland. The Further Education colleges offer a variety of courses throughout their network of campuses.

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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.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of the Final Report Aspiring to Excellence by the International Review Panel on Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38949/11-15)

Dr Farry: Aspiring to Excellence is the report produced by the International Review Panel under the stage 2 review of Initial Teacher Education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The fees and expenses of the International Review Panel for this assignment totalled £119,518.81.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Employment and Learning 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 39031/11-15)

Dr Farry: No employee of the Department for Employment and Learning is paid below the current UK Living Wage of £7.85, as published by the Living Wage Foundation. This calculation is based on net figures. The Department for Employment and Learning does not have agencies.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what annual budget her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, set aside for translation and interpreter services for foreign nationals.
(AQW 38508/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI set aside a specific budget for translation and interpreter services which is currently £1,000. For the rest of DETI and its NDPBs these costs are not met from a specific budget.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Financial Capability Strategy.
(AQW 38514/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In accordance with Programme for Government commitment number 48, a Financial Capability Strategy for Northern Ireland consumers was developed by 31 March 2013, Departmental Financial Capability Action Plans to support the delivery of the Strategy were developed by 31 March 2014, with many of the key actions already having been implemented or underway before this date.

The combined Strategy and Action Plans were considered by the Enterprise Trade Investment Committee on 20 February 2014, before being submitted to the Executive for final clearance at a future meeting.

A report assessing the impacts of the Strategy's implementation will be produced by March 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when Ballycastle electricity sub-station will receive the upgrade it requires to facilitate further green energy connections.
(AQW 38592/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The connection of generation to the grid is a matter for NIE operating under a regulatory framework determined by the Utility Regulator.

The Utility Regulator approved investment in some 40 lower cost 33kV investments totalling £2.3m in October 2013. Ballycastle substation was not one of the 40.

In its final determination of the regulatory price control, the Competition Commission decided that levying further costs of 33kV investment on the general customer base to support small scale renewables was not in the public interest.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide details and timescales of the planned repairs to the Moyle Interconnector.
(AQW 38611/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy is working on proposals to permanently repair the Moyle Interconnector by 2017. This will involve laying new low voltage cables alongside the existing Moyle cables. The project is making good progress with the procurement process nearing completion.

In the interim, Mutual Energy had been examining a range of possible options for effecting a temporary solution, including a seabed repair to the existing low voltage cable fault. While this engineering process did yield some positive results it has, ultimately, not produced a satisfactory outcome. As of November 2014 Mutual Energy has decided to discontinue this work and focus fully on the cable replacement project, which provides a permanent solution.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment 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 38698/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The full time equivalent number of staff in DETI and in each of DETI's arm's-length bodies is detailed in the table below. The figures shown are as at the 31 March for each of the last 5 years.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
DETI	483.56	483.17	450.05	460.45	462.76
Health & Safety Executive NI	118.50	121.49	117.12	114.01	119.00
Invest NI	577.74	555.93	549.08	545.69	555.51
Consumer Council for NI	47.2	46.4	47.3	43.6	42.3

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
NI Tourist Board *	159	157	152	163	166

*NI Tourist Board figures are actual headcount as they do not hold FTE for their staff.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment has been made of the impact on the viability of important sporting events, such as the Armoy Racing Club's annual 'Race of Legends', of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's decision not to open the Tourism Events Fund to new applications in 2015/16; and whether she will ensure the decision is reviewed due to the impact on key tourism related events.
(AQW 38750/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In 2013/14 a total of 43 events including the Armoy Road Race, were supported by NITB through the Tourism Events Funding Programme.

Evidence indicates that events such as these generate a positive economic impact. Previous evaluations, such as for the NI 2012 events, indicated a direct economic impact of £2.6 for every £1 invested by the public sector.

Since NITB assumed responsibility for the events function in 2010 there has not been a Budget exercise to allow for an appropriate dedicated budget baseline to be established for events. As a result, NITB has always relied on in year monitoring to meet its commitments for events funding. The decision of NITB not to open the Events Fund is solely due to the fact that it does not currently have the funds required to do this.

The draft budget allocations for 2015/16 for my Department 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 savings which will need to be made and I can confirm that the availability of funding support for events is currently being reviewed as part of that work.

Department of the Environment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current staff complement of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (i) Crime Enforcement Team; and (ii) Licensing Team.
(AQW 38443/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): At 1 November 2014, staff complement of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Crime Enforcement team, known as the Environmental Crime Unit, was 34.4 (full time equivalent), and in the Waste Licensing Team, the staff complement at 1 November 2014 was 17.6 (full time equivalent).

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38664/11-15)

Mr Durkan: No employee in my Department, paid on either the Industrial or Non Industrial pay scales, is paid below £7.20 per hour.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the budget allocated for planning enforcement; and (ii) how much was spent on planning enforcement in each local council area in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38685/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Enforcement expenditure is reported on an Area Planning Office basis and therefore it is not possible to provide enforcement expenditure for each local council area. There is no specific budget allocated for planning enforcement in each Area Office. The table below sets out enforcement expenditure for each Area Planning Office for the last three years.

It is only possible to provide information for 2011/12 from October 2011 to March 2012, as the analysis code to record enforcement expenditure separately was only set up in October of that year.

Enforcement expenditure largely comprises of legal costs. Enforcement action can be a lengthy, protracted and complex process and as a result there can be variations in expenditure on legal costs between financial years.

Enforcement expenditure for each Area Planning Office [(1)]

Area Planning Office	Financial Year		
	2011/12 [(2)]	2012/13	2013/14
Belfast	6,121.93	14,025.33	5,951.20
Northern	13,469.31	9,417.44	36,814.49

Area Planning Office	Financial Year		
	2011/12 (2)	2012/13	2013/14
South Antrim	2,964.01	13,031.54	22,530.88
Southern	22,388.21	32,857.64	40,295.20
Downpatrick	12,518.80	29,433.21	23,320.76
Western	30,068.98	24,765.20	23,592.29

(1) The majority of the expenditure is for legal costs. Staff costs are not included.

(2) Spend from October 2011 to March 2012

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment 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 38690/11-15)

Mr Durkan: For 2014/15 forecast salaries spend is expected to be approximately 58.5% of my Department's current net resource DEL.

In relation to reducing spend on salaries my Department has already taken action in-year by suppressing vacant posts, putting in place controls over use of temporary promotion and a reduction in overtime.

Additionally, work is ongoing to further reduce the overall size of my Department's salary spend as part of the wider Public Sector Workforce restructuring strategy.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place to (i) ensure that local councils abide by legal obligations under waste legislation to prevent environmental damage; and (ii) to encourage waste contracts where waste can be traced from source to final destination.
(AQW 38730/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Under the Waste Operational Plan I published in October, the Department is focussing on working in strong partnership with Councils on all waste management issues. In terms of the Council's legal obligations, it is a requirement of Northern Ireland waste legislation that a waste authorisation must be obtained, from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), to be able to operate a waste facility. Like any other operator, councils have to comply with waste legislation, and with any waste authorisations that they hold.

NIEA inspect all waste management facilities, including Councils, which hold a waste authorisation issued by NIEA. The areas inspected are set out in the conditions of the waste authorisation and agreed working plan for the site. The inspection frequency depends on the type of site, and the potential risks that it poses to the environment and human health.

The majority of planned site inspections are unannounced, however NIEA also carry out pre-announced site audits. NIEA also inspects all waste management facilities in response to complaints received, or as part of wider investigations.

When an operator is in breach of their licence conditions, NIEA will take regulatory and/or enforcement action, in accordance with The NIEA Enforcement and Prosecution Policy. The regulatory and enforcement tools available to NIEA range from warning letters for minor breaches, to harsher penalties for more serious breaches- including corrective notices, suspension or revocation notices, the issue of fixed penalty notices, passing enforcement investigation files to the Public Prosecution Service, and High Court injunctions.

In addition, The Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (the Order) imposes a duty of care on anyone who handles controlled waste, including the transfer of waste only to someone who is authorised to take it.

It is an offence for anyone to fail to comply with the requirements of the duty of care legislation, and the enforcement tools that NIEA may apply are considered in accordance with the NIEA Enforcement and Prosecution Policy and include, for example, issuing warning letters, fixed penalty notices or passing enforcement investigation files to the Public Prosecution Service.

A Joint Working Group between Local and Central Government was established in November 2013 to develop a holistic approach to the control and monitoring of municipal waste including procurement, contract management and Duty of Care.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37480/11-15, why a private taxi operator was permitted to dispose of booking records after six weeks and no action was taken in relation to a breach of regulations; and to detail who decided that no action would be taken.
(AQW 38795/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 37480/11-15.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37736/11-15, why this question has not been answered.
(AQW 38931/11-15)

Mr Durkan: AQW 37736/11-15 was answered on Wednesday 19 November 2014.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) who authorised a departmental official from the Vehicle Policy Branch to compose and distribute a letter headed "TAXI (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2008 PROPOSED NEW TAXI PLATES"; (ii) the date this was authorised or decided it would be sent; (iii) the date it was sent and to whom; (iv) why there has been a denial that this correspondence was sent; and (v) whether he will order an internal investigation into this matter.
(AQW 39000/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This correspondence issued in February 2014 to a range of public hire and private hire taxi operators, along with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), the Consumer Council and Disability Action. It was part of routine policy development in connection with the implementation of the Taxis Act (NI) 2008. Its content and issue were approved by Departmental officials. The responses to the correspondence shaped my Department's proposed specification for the roof sign and new taxi plate.

There has been no denial that this correspondence issued and I see no requirement to order an internal investigation into the release of this public document nine months ago.

Mr Agnew asked Minister of the Environment why planning application Z/2014/1473/F, which proposes to increase the waste burning capacity of the energy from waste incineration at Bombardier from 120,000 to 180,000 tonnes, has not been accompanied by a new environmental impact statement.
(AQW 39027/11-15)

Mr Durkan: On receipt of a planning application my officials are required to determine whether a proposed development is EIA development in accordance with The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2012. In relation to planning application Z/2014/1473/F, my officials are currently completing their determination on whether an Environmental Statement (ES) is required to accompany the application.

Planning applications can therefore be submitted without an ES. The issue of why this application was not accompanied by an ES is a matter for the planning applicant.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the RUC George Cross Widows Association, whether his Department determined that the Association's classification as being in the private sector and was therefore not a function of government, which resulted in the loss of annual Department of Justice funding.
(AQW 33972/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Government departments are responsible for ensuring that bodies that they help to establish or have an ongoing relationship with are correctly classified and accounted for. The independent Office of National Statistics (ONS) makes decisions on which sector or sub-sector actual or proposed bodies are in. More straightforward cases may be settled by HM Treasury or, for Northern Ireland bodies, by Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Decisions are currently made in accordance with international guidelines set out for European Community member states in the European System of Accounts (ESA95).

As part of the review of Arm's-Length Bodies (ALBs) commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department of Justice (DOJ) provided information relating to a number of their bodies, including the RUC George Cross Widows' Association. My officials considered this information in terms of the ONS classification guidelines. This clearly indicated that the RUC George Cross Widows' Association should be classified as a Private Sector body. My officials wrote to DOJ officials in April 2013 to notify them of the determination.

This determination did not result in the loss of annual Department of Justice funding. Decisions regarding the funding and governance arrangements of the RUC George Cross Widows' Association rest with DOJ. It should be noted that while a change in classification may require a review of funding and governance arrangements, it should not adversely impact on the provision of funding to the body.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update of the impact of the current budgetary crisis across the Northern Ireland Executive.
(AQW 37007/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Executive is facing significant level of budget pressures both in the remainder of this year and in 2015-16.

A 4.4% reduction to departmental baselines has been agreed in the 2014-15 Monitoring Rounds. This addressed Executive commitments in June Monitoring and the £87 million cost of not implementing Welfare Reform in October Monitoring. In addition there have been a large number of inescapable pressures emerging in departments this year. My statement to the

Assembly on 13 October 2014 provided details of the allocations agreed by the Executive along with the mechanism agreed with HM Treasury for funding them.

My statement to the Assembly on 3 November 2014 set out the Executive's draft Budget position for 2015-16, including the significant pressures being faced and the Executive's response to these.

It is now for individual Ministers to determine what this will mean for their departments and to publish details for consultation. Public consultation ends on 29 December 2014, after which I will bring a paper to the Executive on the final Budget position for 2015-16.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any Joint European Resources for Micro and Medium Enterprises Programmes operational in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 37099/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No.

The Joint European Resources for Micro and Medium Enterprises Programmes (JEREMIE) are not operational in Northern Ireland, however Invest NI's Access to Finance suite of funds emulates the features of JEREMIE, addressing market failure in access to finance. The Access to Finance initiative was approved by the Invest NI Board, DETI and DFP in 2011.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the input his Department will have in setting the district rate for ratepayers in new super-councils where there is disparity between the existing councils.
(AQW 37359/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department will have no input in relation to the setting of district rates for councils following the reorganisation of local government.

The setting of district rates is entirely a matter for the new councils.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the increased rate payments which are likely to affect businesses and householders in Coleraine, as a result of local government restructuring from April 2015.
(AQW 37361/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In terms of the effects of local government restructuring, given that Coleraine will be joining with Ballymoney, Limavady and Moyle Councils, all which have a higher district rate, it is likely that the convergence effects will increase rate bills. However, any such increase which occurs as a result of convergence will be phased in incrementally due to the support package agreed by the Executive which has a cost of up to £30m.

You should note however that a number of other factors may lead to changes to individual rate bills that will issue in April 2015 to individual householders and businesses. These include the level of district rates set by the councils next February, which will reflect their forthcoming spending plans, the changes occurring as a result of the non-domestic revaluation exercise and the future of the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he expects the results of the public consultation on a subsidy scheme for rate payers under the new local government structure to be published; and what plans are in place to increase public awareness of relevant changes for rate payers.
(AQW 37373/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The report on the consultation exercise was published on the DFP website and issued to the Finance Committee earlier this month. I will be publishing the final details of the scheme shortly.

My Department only recently completed its financial modelling. This had to await receipt of information from LPS about the latest revaluation position, as this affects the costing of the scheme. I have received the required advice within the last few days and am currently considering the matter.

On the issue of publicising the scheme, LPS has a communications strategy and plan in place, which will include meeting with key groups and raising awareness of the scheme in the run up to bills issuing next year.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration has been given to developing of an App for iOS and Android devices allowing members of the public to access government forms, transactions and tools such as booking a MOT test, calculate entitlement to benefits and pay a rates bill.
(AQW 37381/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: All 'Digital First' services delivered by NI Direct through the '16 by 16' Digital Transformation programme are being developed as 'responsive websites' to work on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets as well as on desktop systems.

The development of standalone mobile apps will be considered once these services are fully deployed.

NI Direct will also cooperate with private sector organisations that wish to develop and release their own apps that can add value to NI Direct services.

Mr Agnew asked Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) for a breakdown of his Department's bids in the forthcoming October monitoring round; (ii) which bids for funding are inescapable or required to meet the Department's statutory obligations; and (iii) whether he will deposit a copy of his Department's bid in the Assembly Library for scrutiny ahead of the Assembly debate.
(AQW 37450/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department submitted bids of £0.7m for inescapable pressures arising from legal cases and £2.3m for depreciation costs, both of which are deemed to be inescapable.

The bids are scrutinised by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and the final decision is made by Executive members. I therefore do not propose to deposit a copy in the Assembly Library.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost of calls to directory enquiries from land line telephones from all Departments, in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 37453/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below includes expenditure by the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as Northern Ireland government departments.

Financial year	Expenditure
2009/10	Information not held
2010/11	£8,117
2011/12	£7,238
2012/13	£12,697
2013/14	£15,591

On the basis of knowledge of previous expenditure, I decided at the end of 2013/14 to ensure that directory enquiry calls should only use best value for money providers. The implementation of my decision has already impacted on the cost of using directory enquiries - expenditure for the first 6 months of the 2014/15 financial year is £2,567.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost of calls to the Speaking Clock from land line telephones from all Departments, in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 37455/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below includes expenditure by the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as Northern Ireland government departments.

Financial year	Expenditure
2009/10	Information not held.
2010/11	£1,327
2011/12	£1,355
2012/13	£2,336
2013/14	£2,714

On the basis of knowledge of previous expenditure, I decided at the end of 2013/14 to bar calls to the speaking clock across all departments.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the regulations in relation to the proximity of oil tanks to residential housing.
(AQW 37460/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The regulations in relation to the proximity of oil tanks to residential housing are set out in The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (as amended), Part L- Combustion appliances and fuel storage systems, Regulation 75 – Protection of liquid fuel storage tanks, "Reasonable provision shall be made to ensure that a liquid fuel storage tank and connecting pipe work is so constructed and separated from adjacent buildings and the boundary of the premises as to reduce to a reasonable level the risk of the fuel contained inside it igniting in the event of a fire occurring in adjacent buildings or premises."

These regulations are available in the Assembly Library.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic rates revenue generated in the last five years.
(AQW 37503/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The total (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic rates receipts for each of the last five years is provided in the table below.

Domestic and Non-Domestic Receipts 2009/10 to 2013/14

Financial Year	Domestic Receipts	Non-Domestic Receipts
2009/10	£472,090,403	£533,525,810
2010/11	£497,797,021	£564,917,208
2011/12	£519,660,402	£574,730,510
2012/13	£545,098,392	£591,394,059
2013/14*	£572,433,720	£598,199,929

* 2013/14 figures subject to audit assurance.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what were the ten most frequented visitor attractions in 2013; and what was the change in visitor numbers from 2012 for each facility.
(AQW 37512/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Visitor numbers to visitor attractions are collected by the Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey. This is a voluntary survey and the findings are thus based solely on the respondents choosing to participate. Visitor numbers for the top ten most frequented visitor attractions and the top ten most frequented country parks/parks/forests and gardens in 2013, their visitor numbers in 2012 and the percentage change is shown in the attached table.

Table: Top 10 visitor attractions 2013 (excluding parks / forests / gardens)

Ranking (2013)	Attraction	Visitors (2012)	Visitor (2013)	Change 2012-13
1	Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site	523,605	753,929	+44%
2	Titanic Belfast	665,000	604,385	-9%
3	Ulster Museum	594,897	416,028	-30%
4	Derry's Walls	280,922	410,870	+46%
5	Murlough National Nature Reserve	n/a	358,425	n/a
6	W5 whowhatwherewhenwhy	327,606	296,937	-9%
7	Pickie Fun Park	244,879	274,513	+12%
8	Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge	276,381	263,000	-5%
9	Belfast Zoological Gardens	259,359	235,986	-9%
10	Oxford Island National Nature Reserve	196,606	210,397	+7%

Source: NISRA Visitor Attraction Survey

Table excludes those who wished their information to remain confidential or who did not respond.

Table: Top 10 country parks / parks / forests / gardens

Ranking (2013)	Attraction	Visitors (2012)	Visitor (2013)	Change 2012-13
1	The Peace Bridge	914,739	1,200,947	+31%
2	Lagan Valley Regional Park	1,088,240	1,131,821	+4%
3	Lurgan Park	487,853	442,874	-9%
4	Roe Valley Country Park	250,000	300,000	+20%
5	Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park	280,000	300,000	+7%
6	Delamont Country Park	226,331	246,823	+9%

Ranking (2013)	Attraction	Visitors (2012)	Visitor (2013)	Change 2012-13
7	Dungannon Park	142,426	224,060	+58%
8	Carnfunnock Country Park	193,389	202,427	+5%
9	Scrabo Country Park	155,193	161,412	+4%
10	Tollymore Forest Park	n/a	134,707	n/a

Source: NISRA Visitor Attraction Survey

Table excludes those who wished their information to remain confidential or who did not respond.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the volume of (i) exports; and (ii) imports through local ports in each of the last five years.
(AQW 37617/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The tonnage of goods through ports in Northern Ireland for the last five years is provided in the attached table. This includes goods transported to and from Great Britain.

Table: Tonnage of goods through the principal ports in Northern Ireland

Outward Traffic (Thousand Tonnes)

Year	Belfast	Larne	Londonderry	Warrenpoint	Other Ports	Total
2009	3,643	1,998	77	880	445	7,043
2010	4,227	2,194	61	990	602	8,074
2011	4,947	2,089	157	1,079	515	8,787
2012	5,455	1,431	96	1,087	330	8,398
2013	6,296	1,106	115	1,218	447	9,182

Inward Traffic (Thousand Tonnes)

Year	Belfast	Larne	Londonderry	Warrenpoint	Other Ports	Total
2009	8,407	2,299	1,542	961	534	13,743
2010	8,600	2,419	1,696	1,337	785	14,837
2011	8,614	2,306	1,583	1,346	616	14,465
2012	9,731	1,482	1,563	1,343	1,039	15,158
2013	10,487	1,263	1,755	1,489	1,146	16,140

Source: 'Northern Ireland Ports Traffic' bulletin published by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the current budgetary constraints and that leavers cases appear to be resolved, whether he can provide an indication on the progress regarding the resolution of equal pay claims for PSNI and former Northern Ireland Office staff, further to his engagement with the Minister of Justice.
(AQW 37627/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As I have previously stated, it has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement, although I hope the paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before the summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff. However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure will require the approval of the Executive. I await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the measures his Department has taken in the October Monitoring Round specifically aimed at providing a boost to the construction industry; and (ii) any spending allocations in the next monitoring round which will support the construction industry.
(AQW 37629/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Written Statement to the Assembly on the October Monitoring Round detailed the Capital DEL allocations agreed by the Executive. This included a number of allocations that will benefit the construction sector.

The Executive has not yet considered the January Monitoring Round. However, I will advise the Assembly on its outcome once agreed.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what communication his Department has had with HM Revenue and Customs regarding a reduction in the rate of VAT for the hospitality sector.
(AQW 37640/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: 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.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) East Londonderry are employed in the hospitality sector.
(AQW 37644/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is not possible to provide a comprehensive estimate of how many people in Northern Ireland and East Londonderry are employed in the hospitality sector. This is because the hospitality sector includes categories that are not separately identified within the UK Standard Industrial Classification system (SIC2007) used to classify business activity.

However, for information, the number of employee jobs in “accommodation and food service activities” as well as “convention and trade show organisers”, which is a broad definition of the hospitality sector, is provided in the attached Table 1 for the year 2013 (the latest available).

Table 1 Number of Jobs in Hospitality Sector

Year	Number of Employee Jobs in “Hospitality Sector” in East Londonderry	Number of Employee Jobs in “Hospitality Sector” in Northern Ireland
2013	2,853	43,137

Source: NI Census of Employment, September 2013

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the annual cost of welfare related spending by Executive Departments in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 37680/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table attached at Annex A reflects the annual welfare related spending in each of the last ten years. Please note that the amounts provided for the years 2003-04 to 2012-13 are final outturn while the expenditure for 2013-14 is based on provisional outturn.

One caveat I would like to add is that the figures provided for the years 2003-04 to 2006-07 have been extracted from a former financial management system. However, every effort has been made to ensure comparability with the expenditure in the later years.

Annex A

Annual Cost of Welfare Related Spending from 2003-14 to 2013-14:-

	Benefits	Social Fund	Total
2003-04	3,466.0	73.8	3,539.8
2004-05	3,631.8	77.7	3,709.5
2005-06	3,711.6	77.5	3,789.0
2006-07	3,900.7	90.1	3,990.8
2007-08	4,077.6	83.0	4,160.6
2008-09	4,325.9	97.0	4,422.9
2009-10	4,667.4	103.9	4,771.3
2010-11	4,829.7	107.1	4,936.7
2011-12	5,039.3	71.5*	5,110.8

2012-13	5,298.5	68.4	5,367.0
2013-14	5,321.5	62.3	5,383.8

* The reduction in Social Fund expenditure in 2011-12 is largely due to a decrease in the amount of Winter Fuel Payment per household in that year combined with a reduction in the Cold Weather Payments due to a milder winter.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to introduce full parental leave pay for Civil Service employees.
(AQW 37741/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No consideration has yet been given to whether to offer enhanced contractual pay to NICS employees who avail of shared parental leave.

The Work and Families Bill, which is currently progressing through the NI Assembly and has just completed its Committee Stage, will establish shared parental rights to leave from work and statutory shared parental pay in Northern Ireland. Subject to the Assembly process, it is anticipated that Northern Ireland's working parents will be able to avail of these rights in respect of children expected to be born, or adopted, from April 2015.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a breakdown by Department on the monies surrendered since 2011 in each monitoring round due to budget and accountancy rules.
(AQW 37758/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The main principles which apply to the in-year monitoring of public expenditure in the 2014-15 financial year are set out in the guidance published on the DFP website. A link to this guidance is provided for ease of reference.

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/in-year-monitoring-of-public-expenditure-2014-15-guidelines.pdf

Reduced requirements declared by departments are a consequence of departments complying with this guidance. All reduced requirements declared are detailed, by department, in the tables which accompany my Statements to the Assembly following each monitoring round.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in the event of a voluntary redundancy scheme for civil servants, how many employees in the 55-65 age group are likely to be eligible to apply.
(AQW 37780/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Executive has asked the Department of Finance and Personnel to bring forward a range of proposals for strategic personnel interventions to effect a pay bill reduction 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.

DFP is beginning the process of engaging with departments to secure the information necessary to develop this range of proposals in more detail. The actual scale and scope of the required interventions will only be known once departmental budgets are agreed for 2015-16. At this early stage therefore, it is not possible to provide information on the detail of any exit scheme, including the eligibility of staff to apply.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money is estimated to be in dormant bank accounts.
(AQW 37850/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Unclaimed Asset Register (UK) estimates that there is approximately £400m of unclaimed funds in UK banks and building societies.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money from dormant bank accounts has been distributed to good causes in each of the last five years.
(AQW 37851/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: To date, none of the available funding from the Dormant Accounts Scheme has been distributed to local causes, as agreement is still required on the identified spending priorities.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 35728/11-15 and AQW 36956/11-15, whether he will now answer the questions that have been asked.
(AQW 37853/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my previous answers.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 36878/11-15, to detail each of the inescapable pressures which his officials had identified in each Department in preparation for the October Monitoring Round.
(AQW 37872/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Executive agreed to support a number of inescapable Resource DEL pressures in the October Monitoring Round, and full details are set out in my Statement to the Assembly on 13th October. The pressures deemed 'inescapable' and supported are consistent with my recommendations to the Executive which were based upon my consideration of the advice received from my officials.

Details of the Capital DEL bids and allocations agreed by the Executive as part of the October Monitoring Round were set out in my Written Statement to the Assembly on 28th October 2014.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his estimation of the revenue that would be generated from a 1 per cent increase in the regional rate in the next financial year.
(AQW 37958/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is likely that in the region of at least £7m additional revenue would result from a 1% increase to regional rate revenue.

Almost the same amount of additional revenue would result from a 1% increase to district rate revenue when estimated at a Northern Ireland level.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much additional resource the Executive would receive should the cap on household rates be removed.
(AQW 37959/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The removal of the maximum capital value would provide additional rates revenue for the Executive of just over £4 million a year.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the incoming INTEREGG programme will benefit rural villages, particularly those located close to the border that may be eligible for any cross border co-operation measures.
(AQW 37971/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The draft INTERREG VA Programme worth €282m was submitted to the European Commission on the 22nd September. It is currently under review by the Commission, which will be followed by a negotiation stage with Member States, which may take up to six months.

The programme has identified its priority objectives as Research and Innovation, Environment, Sustainable Transport and Health.

It is anticipated that the first calls for funding will be announced in Spring 2015, when all stakeholders, including those in rural and border areas, will have an opportunity to apply for support from the programme.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any recent discussions she has had on the reinstatement of the Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.
(AQO 6995/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I wrote to the Exchequer Secretary, Priti Patel MP, on 11th September 2014 following the European Commission's announcement of its final decision on the Aggregate Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS). As the Commission found that the ALCS was compatible with the Environmental Aid Guidelines that applied at the time, I asked the Exchequer Secretary to agree that her officials work with their Northern Ireland counterparts to explore if and how a new scheme could be introduced. The Exchequer Secretary has agreed to this work being taken forward.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether consideration will be given to a rates relief scheme for traders who have been affected by disruption from the public realm works in North Down.
(AQW 37982/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have no plans to introduce a special relief scheme.

Under the existing rating system, however, ratepayers can apply to the District Valuer in LPS to reassess an individual valuation. Temporary allowances can be given if the works are of sufficient severity and duration to directly cause a loss of trade that is sufficient to affect annual rental values in the vicinity.

In practice this means that the works need to last for a considerable period of time (more than a few months) and ratepayers will have to apply and in most cases produce evidence of cause and effect. Each situation is treated on its own merits and the outcome will depend on the degree of disruption. For example, temporary allowances were given in Donegall Place, Belfast for the major Streets Ahead project but not for the public realm works in Strabane, Ballynahinch, Newcastle and Omagh.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he plans to introduce a single occupancy discount scheme, similar to those operated by some councils in Great Britain.
(AQW 37999/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: A single occupant discount was given detailed consideration by the Executive in 2007 and was rejected because it was adjudged that such a widespread discount was difficult to justify on grounds of cost, need and vulnerability to fraud.

I think these same considerations apply today and therefore I have no plans to introduce such a scheme.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on plans for a Northern Ireland Civil Service wide redundancy package, or voluntary exit scheme, in 2015.
(AQW 38118/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Executive agreed a draft Budget on 30 October 2014. At this stage, departments are considering the impact that a range of strategic personnel interventions can effect towards a reduction in the NICS paybill.

The Department of Finance and Personnel, in close collaboration with other NI departments has begun the process of establishing the overall size of the pay bill reduction that needs to be delivered by the NICS and how this is to be achieved.

The Northern Ireland Executive asked the Department of Finance and Personnel to bring forward a range of proposals for strategic personnel interventions to effect a paybill reduction 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.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how his Department monitors the reliability of the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency scheme.
(AQW 38171/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department does not monitor the reliability of the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency scheme (CIGA).

CIGA is an independent organisation and its operations in Northern Ireland are limited to providing a guarantee for the retro-fitting of insulation into masonry cavities in existing properties.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many complaints on Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency schemes his Department has received in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38172/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department is not aware of any complaints received about the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency (CIGA) Scheme in the last five years.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average daily spend by tourists over the last five years.
(AQW 38202/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The average daily spend on overnight trips of (i) NI residents; (ii) non-NI residents and (iii) NI and non-NI residents combined over the last four years are detailed in the attached table. Figures prior to July 2010 are unavailable.

Table: Average daily spend (£) on overnight trips of (i) NI residents; (ii) non-NI residents and (iii) NI and non-NI residents combined.

Annual Period	(i) Average daily spend NI residents	(ii) Average daily spend non-NI residents	(iii) Average daily spend NI and non-NI residents combined
July 2010 – June 2011	£35	£46	£43
July 2011 – June 2012	£41	£47	£45
July 2012 – June 2013	£50	£51	£51
July 2013 – June 2014	£41	£53	£49

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest pound

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the ratio of success to failure of new business start-ups in East Londonderry, in the last three years.
(AQW 38216/11-15)

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 those local government districts (LGD), which fall at least in part within the East Londonderry PCA, for the most recent three years available.

Table: Number of business births and survival1 rates (2009-2011)

Coleraine LGD	2009	2010	2011
New business births2	100	150	90

Coleraine LGD	2009	2010	2011
One year survival	80.0%	88.3%	88.9%
Two year survival	65.0%	66.7%	..
Three year survival	55.0%	..	..
Limavady LGD			
New business births[2]	70	100	75
One year survival	85.7%	90.0%	93.3%
Two year survival	64.3%	80.0%	..
Three year survival	57.1%	..	..
Derry LGD			
New business births[2]	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 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 B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the reasons for the lack of provision for future penalties, or for the development of an IT system, for Welfare Reform in the draft Budget 2015-16
(AQW 38225/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The draft Budget does not account for any future penalties, nor is there any cover for the development of a bespoke welfare IT system for Northern Ireland. The cost of doing both those things would have been around £200 million in 2015-16 alone which is an additional burden on departments that would not have been manageable.

The draft Budget sets aside £70 million for a package of measures to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform. These measures will be refined as part of the ongoing talks and final Budget processes. This will ensure we can implement Welfare Reform, keep welfare payments happening in Northern Ireland and avoid the worst effects of Welfare Reform as they have happened across the water.

This approach of dealing with Welfare Reform as part of the talks process and simultaneously providing a package of measures within the draft Budget that will go a long way in mitigating the worst effects of Welfare Reform, is the right way to proceed.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the reform of the public sector will have on pension provisions for arm's-length bodies.
(AQW 38226/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The reform of the public sector will have no impact on pension provisions for arm's length bodies.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether his Department operates a cycle to work scheme; (ii) whether staff can join the scheme at any time over a twelve month period; and (iii) whether the scheme is extended to non-departmental public bodies.
(AQW 38240/11-15)

Mr Hamilton:

(i) DFP participates in the NICS Cycle to Work Scheme.

(ii) The NICS Cycle to Work Scheme is open to all NICS staff all year round.

(iii) The Scheme is a NICS Cycle to Work Scheme and therefore does not extend to NDPBs for whom the NICS is not their employer. However DFP, as the lead department on the NICS Scheme, provides advice and guidance to NDPBs on the establishment and operation of cycle to work schemes. This has included meeting with, giving advice and providing documentation to a number of NDPBs.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total spent on capital and other projects which have not proceeded, broken down by each project and the loss, since May 2007.
(AQW 38299/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department incurred costs of £3.2m on Non-Domestic Revaluation 2007, which did not proceed due to market conditions in 2010.

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 Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 31802/11-15, whether the work of the panel has been completed; and if so, to detail (i) when; (ii) the outcome; and if not, when it will be completed.
(AQW 38302/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The work of the independent panel was completed on 2 May 2014. The outcome is not a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the publicly owned land and buildings which have been notified to Land and Property Services as being surplus to requirement over each of the last five years; and what is the current status of each asset.
(AQW 38450/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Land & Property Services (LPS) has been notified of 840 surplus land and property assets in the five years from November 2009 to November 2014.

A summary by year of notification to LPS is contained in Table 1. The full list of the surplus assets notified to LPS is contained at Table 2.

Information on the current status of each of the properties is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost. Nevertheless, LPS has provided the status of these properties as it currently understands it. Where the status is unknown this has been indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Status	Nov –Dec 2009	Jan – Dec 2010	Jan – Dec 2011	Jan – Dec 2012	Jan – Dec 2013	Jan – Nov 2014	Total
Circulating to public sector.	0	0	0	0	1	8	9
Public sector transfer	3	6	7	5	17	14	52
Referred back to disposing body **	5	20	35	79	67	108	314
Open market sale recommended **	1	11	6	20	21	33	92
Currently on open market	1	4	3	5	3	2	18
Sale completed	18	82	64	76	42	9	291
Withdrawn from surplus register	0	17	12	27	8	0	64
Total	**28**	**140**	**127**	**212**	**159**	**174**	**840**

** The current status of these assets is unknown to LPS. This represents the status at the date of referral by Central Advisory Unit back to the disposing body.

Table 2

Year	Address	Town	Status
2009	Land at Millennium Way	Lurgan	Open Market Sale Recommended
2009	Land at Good Shepherd Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2009	The Banks 165 Groomsport Road	Bangor	Sale Complete
2009	36 Ballygasey Road, Loughgall	Armagh	Sale Complete
2009	15-17 Ferniskey Road ,Kells	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2009	5-7 Garvagh Road, Kilrea	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2009	804 Shore Road, Greencastle	Belfast	Sale Complete
2009	12 Cliff Road, Belleek	Fermanagh	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2009	900 Antrim Road ,Templepatrick	Antrim	Sale Complete
2009	11-15 Rathfriland Road, Dromara	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2009	Land at Charlestown, Road (Carn)	Portadown	Currently On The Open Market
2009	Land at Millennium Way	Lurgan	Sale Complete
2009	Land at Millennium Way	Lurgan	Sale Complete
2009	Land at Mccrums Court, Mall West Car Park	Armagh	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2009	Land at 6 Upper Road, Greenisland	Carrickfergus	Refer to Disposing Body
2009	Land at 8 Newry Street	Crossmaglen	Refer to Disposing Body
2009	88 Shore Road, Greenisland	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2009	Land at 5 Murley Road	Fivemiletown	Sale Complete
2009	Land at Flush Road	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2009	Land at 7 Strathallan Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2009	4 Knockmore Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2009	Westacres	Craigavon	Sale Complete
2009	Land at 122 Newry Road	Crossmaglen	Refer to Disposing Body
2009	Ballykeel Rd, Larne Road	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2009	Land at Site 119, Old Tullygarley Road	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2009	Land at Ann St/Donegall Quay	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2009	Land at Foreglen Road	Dungiven	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2009	Land at 211 Shore Road	Newtownabbey	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 185 Ballynahinch Road	Dromore	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land Adjacent 265 Old Belfast Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Upper Dromore Road	Warrenpoint	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Altaveden Road	Fivemiletown	Sale Complete
2010	25 School Road, Forkhill	Armagh	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Killyman Road	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Mi Motorway	Hillsborough	Sale Complete
2010	Castle Street	Portadown	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Maghera High School, Tobermore Road	Maghera	Withdrawn
2010	Land at Glenmachan Place	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Downe Hospital, Pound Lane	Downpatrick	Currently On The Open Market
2010	Land at 3 Annesborough Industrial Estate, Lough Rd, Lurgan	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Annesborough Road, Kinnego	Lurgan	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Dunanney Avenue	Newtownabbey	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 71 Woodside Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Lurgan Junior High School	Lurgan	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Frys Road	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Berryhill Road	Strabane	Sale Complete
2010	Land at M12 Motorway	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Drumellan	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2010	Land at 48 Upper Road	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Moneymore Road	Cookstown	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Erne Hospital, Cornagrade Road	Enniskillen	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2010	Land at 1A Station Road Greenisland	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Madison Avenue East	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Hill Street	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Ballynahatty Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	72 Kingsdale Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Frederick Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	21 Barnetts Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	6 Main Street, Toomebridge	Antrim	Sale Complete
2010	8 Mowhan Road, Markethill	Armagh	Sale Complete
2010	45 Main Street, Bellaghy	Magherafelt	Sale Complete
2010	Farmland at Dunloy	Strabane	Sale Complete
2010	23 Clabby Road, Fivemiletown	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Davis Street, Keady	Armagh	Withdrawn
2010	276 Duncastle Road, Dunnamanagh	Strabane	Sale Complete
2010	9 Main Street, Belcoo	Fermanagh	Sale Complete
2010	15 Main Street, Greyabbey	Newtownards	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Tandragee Road, Pomeroy (400 Pomeroy Road)	Cookstown	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 10 Main Street, Claudy	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 48 High Street, Newtownbutler	Newtownbutler	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 58-60 Main Street, Coagh	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 31 Hillhead, Stewartstown	Cookstown	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Dans Road	Ballymena	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2010	17 Barnetts Crescent	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Musgrave Park Hospital	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	57-59 Great Patrick Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 87 Abbey Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Lands at Knockmenagh Road	Portadown	Currently On The Open Market
2010	Lands at Birchill Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2010	Lands at Roads Service Depot, Victoria Street	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 89 Drumcroon Road	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2010	Farmland at Dunloy	Antrim	Sale Complete
2010	Bog at Dunloy	Antrim	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Flagstaff Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Gortgonis Playing Fields	Coalisland	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Elmgrove Primary School	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Frederick Street Link Road	Newtownards	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Orangefield Campus	Belfast	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2010	100 High Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Westminster Avenue	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Drumagrove Road, Clough	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Church Street, Irvinestown	Fermanagh	Withdrawn
2010	Land at Mcconnell Place / Sedan Street	Omagh	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Belfast Road	Holywood	Sale Complete
2010	Office Space at Mossley Mill	Newtownabbey	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Moylin Brownlow Psni Station	Craigavon	Currently On The Open Market
2010	Land at Prince William Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2010	Site 1 52 High Street	Killyleagh	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2010	Site 2 52 High Street	Killyleagh	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Cascum Road	Banbridge	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Edfield Way	Fivemiletown	Withdrawn
2010	Land at Lislea Drive	Belfast	Withdrawn
2010	Office Space at Headline Building Victoria Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	2-14 George Street	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Lakeview Road	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Lakeview Road/Balteagh Road	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at 167 Finaghy Road South	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Lower Ballinderry Primary School	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2010	Lambeg Primary School	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2010	Kindle Integrated Primary School	Killough	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Killard House Special School	Newtownards	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Clifton Special School, Old Belfast Road	Bangor	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2010	Brookfield Special School	Moira	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Oldpark Library, 46 Oldpark Road	Belfast	Withdrawn
2010	23 Steeple Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2010	2A Smithfield Square	Lisburn	Currently On The Open Market
2010	10A Belfast Road	Saintfield	Withdrawn
2010	Ulsterbus Depot, Moss Road	Millisle	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2010	Legacurry Primary School, Ballynahinch Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2010	Hilden Integrated Primary School Bridge Street	Lisburn	Withdrawn
2010	35-37 Slieveban Drive	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	15 Parkgate Avenue	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at Derryhaw Road, Tynan	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Gorminish Park, Garrison	Enniskillen	Withdrawn
2010	63 Keady Road	Armagh	Sale Complete
2010	Site at Parkmore	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at Tarsan Lane, Charlestown Road-M12 Motorway	Portadown	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2010	Ballymacarrett Library 19-35, Templemore Avenue	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Andersonstown Library, 38 Slievegallion Drive	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Ligoniel Library, 53-55 Ligoniel Road	Belfast	Withdrawn
2010	Steeple Road	Antrim	Withdrawn
2010	109-111 Queen Street	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2010	17A Parkgate Avenue	Belfast	Withdrawn
2010	Grovetree House, Grosvenor Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Scrabo Street	Belfast	Withdrawn
2010	Land at Middlepath Street	Belfast	Withdrawn
2010	Ahoghill Library, 16 Brook Street,	Ahoghill	Sale Complete
2010	72 Bannview Road	Banbridge	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Foyle Drive	Limavady	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Millennium Way	Lurgan	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at Millennium Way	Lurgan	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at Shore Road/Skegoneill Avenue	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Drumcroon Road	Coleraine	Withdrawn
2010	Land at Carbet Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Carbet Road	Portadown	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at Carbet Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2010	Carnview Childrens Home, 41 Knockenagh Avenue	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at 199 Belfast Road	Comber	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Fields at Loughry Campus	Cookstown	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 2 Richmond Drive	Tandragee	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	Land at Saintfield Road/Cairnshill Road	Castlereagh	Withdrawn
2010	Land Adjacent To St Brendans Primary School, Brownlow	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land Adjacent To Ardowen Estate	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2010	Land at M1/M12 Charlestown Road	Craigavon	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Drumnagoon Road, Portadown	Craigavon	Sale Complete
2010	Ballynahinch Library, 16 Windmill Lane	Ballynahinch	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Carbet Road	Portadown	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2010	Land at Kilvergan Road/Carbet Road	Craigavon	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 41 Marlo Heights	Bangor	Withdrawn
2010	Land at 1A Robinson Road	Bangor	Sale Complete
2010	Land at Station Road, Scarva	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2010	64 Mountpottinger Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 19 & 23 Ballyhackett Road	Castlerock	Sale Complete
2010	Land Adjacent 41 Galgorm Road	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2010	Land Adjacent 169 Banbridge Road	Dromore	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 49 Brough Road	Castledawson	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2010	Land at 1-6 Pheasant Drive	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2010	Land at 50-52 Moneymore Road	Magherafelt	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Dairyland Road	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2011	271 Shore Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Plot 1 Ballynamoney Lane	Lurgan	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Glebe Road	Annahilt	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Dunglady Road	Magherafelt	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Magherafelt Road / Bowmans Road	Magherafelt	Sale Complete
2011	34-44 Shore Road, Greenisland	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2011	Land at Monbrief	Craigavon	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	Belfast School Of Music, 99 Donegall Pass	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	Felden House, Mill Road	Newtownabbey	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Tullyah Road	Newry	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 18 Belt Road	Derry	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 171 Seven Mile Straight	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Depot Road	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Moneyrannel Road	Limavady	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	42 Dennet Gardens	Derry	Sale Complete
2011	32 Maghaberry Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2011	Former Quarry, Old Road, Maghaberry	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2011	58 Main Street	Larne	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Drumcairn Road /Moy Road	Armagh	Sale Complete
2011	Former Psni Station, 28 Mill Road Crumlin	Crumlin	Sale Complete
2011	Former Psni Station, 42 Old Saintfield Road	Carryduff	Sale Complete
2011	Massereene Barracks	Antrim	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Ballysally Road	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 45 Ardmore Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 15 Ballyhenry Grove	Newtownabbey	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Carn Road	Portadown	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	Land at Derryvore Lane/Seagoe Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Ballyneill Road ,Loup	Derry	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Park Drive, Hamilton Road	Bangor	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	141 Mill Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2011	Land Adjacent To 65 Hillsborough Road	Banbridge	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 481 Upper Newtownards Road	Belfast	Withdrawn
2011	77-79 Garnerville Road	Belfast	Withdrawn
2011	3 Steeple Road	Antrim	Withdrawn
2011	Prince's Gardens Childrens Home	Larne	Currently On The Open Market
2011	Duke Of Westminster High School, Ederney, Kesh	Fermanagh	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 158 Loughinisland Road, Annacloy	Downpatrick	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2011	Former Turf Lodge Youth Club, Monagh Road	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	1A College Square East	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	14 Brunswick Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Oldpark Psni Station, 12 Torrens Avenue	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Rathfriland Psni Station, 18A Downpatrick Street	Rathfriland	Sale Complete
2011	Unit 1 Nelson Trade Centre, Nelson Street	Belfast	Withdrawn
2011	195 Templemore Avenue	Belfast	Currently On The Open Market
2011	414 Ormeau Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	116-120 Great Victoria Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	2 Gilnahirk Rise	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Benagh Road/ Corcreaghan Road	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land Adjacent 2 Kingsdale Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Ballee Primary School	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2011	149 Falls Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	151 Falls Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Old Colin Road	Lisburn	Open Market Sale Recommended
2011	Land at Ladas Drive West	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Ladas Drive East	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Cregagh Glen	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land Adjacent To 178 Banbrdige Road	Banbridge	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Westland Mews	Portadown	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Festival Road	Portadown	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Corcrain Avenue	Portadown	Sale Complete
2011	Land Between 402 & 404 Shankill Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2011	Land at Old Mountfield Road	Omagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2011	36 Church Street	Downpatrick	Sale Complete
2011	11 Liminary Road	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2011	Drumellan	Craigavon	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Windyhall Estate	Coleraine	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Dhu-Varren	Portrush	Withdrawn
2011	Brownfield Site 11 Plumbridge Road	Strabane	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Loughview Cottages	Omagh	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Glenelly View	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Monagh Grove/Monagh Link	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Crevenagh Road	Omagh	Sale Complete
2011	137-141 Ormeau Road	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	Academy Boys, 8 Derry Road	Strabane	Sale Complete
2011	10 Ballyduggan Road	Downpatrick	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 4 Mullamore Drive	Drumaness	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 23 Suffolk Drive	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2011	Land at 17 Fairview Gardens	Dromore	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 60A Leafair Park	Derry	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 76 Lisnevenagh Road	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 53 Hospital Road	Omagh	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Derrychara Road	Enniskillen	Open Market Sale Recommended
2011	Former Newtownbreda Primary School	Castlereagh	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Derrycraw Road	Newry	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Rowantree Road	Dromore	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Newtown Road	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Plot 1 Belt Road	Derry	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 1 Castlehill	Castlewellan	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Crebarkey Road	Dungiven	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 949 Upper Newtownards Road	Castlereagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Necarne Estate, Irvinestown	Fermanagh	Currently On The Open Market
2011	29A Annadale Avenue	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	180 Ballyeaston Road	Ballyclare	Sale Complete
2011	Land Adjacent 115 Carryduff Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Newbridge Road	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Newbridge Road	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2011	2 Station Road, Kesh	Fermanagh	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 10 Agherton Halls, Portstewart	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 11 Agherton Halls, Portstewart	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 12 Acherton Halls, Portstewart	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 14 Agherton Halls, Portstewart	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 1 Adam Clarke Gardens, Portstewart	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 5 Adam Clarke Gardens, Portstewart	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 243-267 Upper Lisburn Road	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Carpark at Kent Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 60 Lisnevenagh Road	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Antrim Road	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Tandragee Road	Newry	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 154 Glenville Road	Whiteabbey	Withdrawn
2011	Land at Kernan	Portadown	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2011	Land at 27 & 29 Browning Drive	Derry	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 21 Deanfield	Derry	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 7 Loughanmore Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2011	Land at 58 Gilpin Gardens	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 5 Rathgill Gardens	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 13 Lisnaclin Court	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 170-172 Larne Road	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Grove Primary School Site	Belfast	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2011	Shankill Youth Club	Belfast	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Drumragh Avenue Car Park	Omagh	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Obins Street	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Tullyhogue	Cookstown	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Quoile Road	Downpatrick	Sale Complete
2011	Land at Strabane Old Road	Derry	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at 10-12 Scotch Street	Downpatrick	Refer to Disposing Body
2011	Land at Regent Street/Clifton Street	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at 378A Saintfield Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Bridge End	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 62 Primity Crescent	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 2A Templemore Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Ballyblaugh Road	Newry	Sale Complete
2012	Moygashel Lane	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2012	Molesworth Road	Cookstown	Sale Complete
2012	Cloonagh Road	Downpatrick	Sale Complete
2012	Newmills Road Lower	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2012	172 North Road	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2012	Ballybrakes Road	Ballymoney	Sale Complete
2012	Scroggy Road	Limavady	Sale Complete
2012	Ardmore Road	Armagh	Sale Complete
2012	Blackstick Road	Enniskillen	Sale Complete
2012	Belfast Road, Derryvolgie House	Lisburn	Currently On The Open Market
2012	Former Ballycloughan Primary School, 38 Ballygowan Road	Saintfield	Sale Complete
2012	Land Ay Belmont Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Tobar Park, Cullybackey	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 26A Rossbay	Londonderry	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at 26B Rossbay	Londonderry	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Ardina Road, Articlave	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Mourne Hospital	Kilkeel	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2012	Dunmurry Library	Lisburn	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	28 Shore Road, Greenisland	Carrickfergus	Withdrawn
2012	Land at 177 Old Kilmore Road	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 74 Deerpark Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Moy Library, 1 The Square, Moy	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 65 & 67 Hillsborough Road	Dromore	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Killyliss Road	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2012	Victoria Day Centre, 25A Tamar Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	449 Antrim Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	1-4 Minnowburn Terrace	Belfast	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2012	Land at Parkhead Crescent	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Comber Road/Blenheim Road	Newtownards	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	1 Glenwood Green, Poleglass	Dunmurry	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Greyabbey Clinic, 17 Main Street	Greyabbey	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Falcon Road	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Edward St/Millennium Way	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 2 Church Park	Newtownabbey	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	1-12 Dog Kennel Crescent	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	1-8 Dog Kennel Close	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 8 Kirkistown Park, Cloghy	Cloghy	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 27 Rosconnor Place	Rathfriland	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Church Hill Gardens	Dromara	Withdrawn
2012	Downpatrick Health Centre, 12-14 Pound Lane	Downpatrick	Currently On The Open Market
2012	Clogher Regional Primary School, 4 Augher Road	Clogher	Sale Complete
2012	Loch Cuan House, 4 Dakota Avenue	Newtownards	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Bradley Way	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at New Street, Randalstown	Antrim	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Monaghan Road, Milford	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	16 Cranston Court	Bangor	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Prince Andrew Way	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 7 Derriaghy Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Belt Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land Adjacent To 18 Market Street	Downpatrick	Sale Complete
2012	Former Campus Fountain Street	Antrim	Currently On The Open Market
2012	7 Convent Hill	Bessbrook	Sale Complete
2012	Fields at Ardglass Road	Downpatrick	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Shaftesbury, Belfast Road	Bangor	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Moorfields Road	Ballymena	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at 2 Eliza Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 14 Broomhill	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 20 De Courcey Way	Dundrum	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 26 Moss Drive, Glenburn	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	1 Kenbella Parade	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Ballysillan Avenue	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 48 Lir Gardens, Keady	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Lynn Doyle Place	Downpatrick	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Sconce Road, Articlave	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 2 Annadale Terrace	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	46C Castle Street	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Ashdown/ Portadown Road	Lurgan	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2012	Land at Belfast Road, Muckamore	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	21 Hospital Road	Omagh	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Troutbeck Avenue	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 3 Collon Terrace	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 38 Horn Walk	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 27 Annesborough Road	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 4 Clovelly Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Glen Road	Maghera	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Linfield Road/Sandy Row	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Moeran Park	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	96-98 Main Street Bushmills	Bushmills	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2012	36 Downpatrick Road	Killyleagh	Sale Complete
2012	6 Saintfield Road	Crossgar	Sale Complete
2012	5 Millisle Road	Donaghadee	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	26 Crossgar Road	Saintfield	Sale Complete
2012	49 Church Street	Irvinestown	Sale Complete
2012	16A Killinchy Street	Comber	Sale Complete
2012	31-33 Main Street	Cloughmills	Sale Complete
2012	2 North Queen Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 45 Victoria Manor	Ballyclare	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Ballinahone Avenue	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Castle Park	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Woodside Road	Ballymena	Withdrawn
2012	Land at 14 Orchard Street	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 109 Dublin Road	Omagh	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 19 Carhill Road	Garvagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	13 The Cloney, Glenarm	Larne	Sale Complete
2012	28 New Street, Randalstown	Antrim	Sale Complete
2012	1 Liskey Brae, Fintona	Omagh	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Antrim Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 504 Ardowen	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 58 Ballydogherty Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 1 Buchanans Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Tullymacarette Primary School 23 Upper Quilly Road	Loughbrickland	Sale Complete
2012	Blood Transfusion Centre 89 Durham Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 33 Ferney Rise	Enniskillen	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 34 Avondale Drive	Ballyclare	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 301 Mullacreevie Park	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	16 Cupar Street	Belfast	Currently On The Open Market
2012	Land at 100 Beech Drive	Ballymena	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2012	Land at Churchill Gardens, Dromara	Lisburn	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Derryhaw Road, Tynan	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Rosmoyle	Craigavon	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Westland Mews	Portadown	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Mountcollyer	Belfast	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Moyraverty	Craigavon	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Woodvale Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Woodgreen Road	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	3 Magheralave Park East	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	4 Magheralave Park East	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	10 Magheralave Park East	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	Mountview Drive	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2012	Carnany Drive	Ballymoney	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Tiree Street	Antrim	Withdrawn
2012	Fountain Hill/Donegore Drive	Antrim	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Church View Way	Lawrencetown	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Leckpatrick Gardens	Strabane	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Festival Road	Portadown	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Corcrain Avenue	Portadown	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Loughview Cottages	Omagh	Withdrawn
2012	Braniel Health Clinic And Library, 16 Glen Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Derryardry Lane	Dungannon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at University Road	Belfast	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Ballyclare Road	Newtownabbey	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Burn Road, Ballysally	Coleraine	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Shore Road	Newtownabbey	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Grange Drive	Ballyclare	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Blackcave North	Larne	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Clanabogan Road	Omagh	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Blackcave Park	Larne	Withdrawn
2012	Land at 1-4 Rathenraw	Antrim	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Kintyre Road	Larne	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Drumellan	Craigavon	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Windyhall Estate	Coleraine	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Dhu-Varren	Portrush	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Hawkes Crescent	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Riverside Gardens	Castledawson	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Boating Club Lane	Londonderry	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2012	Land at Patrician Villas	Strabane	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Sandown Park	Ballymena	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Wyncroft	Ballymena	Sale Complete

Year	Address	Town	Status
2012	Land at Glenelly View, Plumbridge	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Gainsborough	Belfast	Withdrawn
2012	Land at Stirling Road	Castlereagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Queens Park	Saintfield	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Glebe, Macosquin	Coleraine	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Sea Road	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Carnagat Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Antrim Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Old Westland Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2012	Land at Strand Park	Newtownards	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 7 Carntall Gardens	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Blackcave Manor	Larne	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 28 Ashvale Park	Larne	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 88 Tobergill Gardens	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	32-38 Fountain Street	Antrim	Currently On The Open Market
2012	Land at York Street Station	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Connswater Greenway	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Glenshane Road	Castledawson	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 11 Grange Drive	Ballyclare	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 5 Woodlands Court	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Glenshane Road	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 83 The Park, Millars Forge	Dundonald	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Galliagh Park	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 29 Islandbawn Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Killough Road	Downpatrick	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Kennel Lane Car Park	Newtownards	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 100 Clooney Road	Limavady	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Ballee Road East	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land Adjacent 294 Old Belfast Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Rainey Street	Magherafelt	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Seymour House, Laurel Way	Lisburn	Withdrawn
2012	Land at 180 Creggan Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Former Donegall Pass Youth Club, 61-63 Donegall Pass	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Grosvenor Road / Durham Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Gray's Park	Castlereagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 209 Knock Road	Belfast	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Bracken Park	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 2 Newtownards Road	Comber	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 76 Sea Road	Castlerock	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 38-40 Dublin Road	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2012	50 Ballymiscaw Road	Holywood	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 27 Caw Park	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Madam's Bank Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Former Tor Bank Special School	Dundonald	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Hillside Park	Whitehead	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Hillside Park	Whitehead	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 34 Muskett Gardens	Carryduff	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 74 Hillhead Road	Toombebridge	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 1 Rose Gardens	Comber	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land Adjacent To 64-67 Coleraine Road	Garvagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Castle Hill Car Park	Gilford	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Newry Street Car Park	Warrenpoint	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 7 Main Street	Millisle	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at Oldstone Road / Six Mile Water	Antrim	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2012	Land at Oldstone Road / Six Mile Water	Antrim	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2012	Former Bus Depot Killinchy Street	Comber	Sale Complete
2012	Land at Elizabeth Avenue	Carrickfergus	Refer to Disposing Body
2012	Land at 117 Ballyrobin Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2012	Land at 219 Clooney Road, Greysteel	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Teagy Road	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Belvoir Clinic/Library 52 Drumart Square	Belfast	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Belfast Road	Larne	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Former Newport Primary School 117 Culcavey Road	Hillsborough	Sale Complete
2013	Land at The Square	Stewartstown	Sale Complete
2013	Former Police Station, Main Street	Dungiven	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at 135 Kilrea Road, Upperlands	Magherafelt	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adjacent To 67 Coleraine Road	Garvagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Annesborough Road	Lurgan	Sale Complete
2013	Bangor Courthouse, 6 Quay Street	Bangor	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at Derriaghy Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 43 Carbet Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2013	Land at 18 Church Hill, Jonesborough	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 18 Moss Drive	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Baranailt Road	Limavady	Sale Complete
2013	Land Adjacent To 3 Carnearney Road	Ahoghill	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Ballynease Road	Bellaghy	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Former Drumlegagh Primary School, 2 Archill Road	Newtownstewart	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Former Duke Of Westminster High School, Ederney Road	Fermanagh	Sale Complete
2013	Former Dunmurry High School River Road	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress

Year	Address	Town	Status
2013	Land at Watson Park	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Main Street	Brookeborough	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Drumbeg Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2013	79 Charlotte Street	Ballymoney	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Larne Courthouse, Victoria Road	Larne	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land Adjacent To 70 Knockwood Crescent	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Whitehouse Park / Gideons Green	Newtownabbey	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Blacks Road	Dunmurry	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 26 Willowfield	Tandragee	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Kenlis Street Carpark	Banbridge	Sale Complete
2013	2B Portaferry Road	Newtownards	Currently On The Open Market
2013	Former Psni Station, Banbrdige Road	Dromore	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at 44 Ashfield Gardens	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Alliance Avenue	Belfast	Withdrawn
2013	Land at 23-25 Kilbroney Road	Rostrevor	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at New Lodge Road	Antrim	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Former Glenarm Primary School, 2 Straidkilly Road	Glenarm	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land at 20 Brandywell Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Ashfield Gardens	Fintona	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 16 Castle View	Gilford	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Melmount Road	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 3 Tirkeeran Road, Garvagh	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 58 Upper Road, Greenisland	Carrickfergus	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Rathfriland Road	Banbridge	Withdrawn
2013	Land at Magherabeg Road	Dromore	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adjacent To Drumgask Road	Craigavon	Sale Complete
2013	Land at 2 Carnalea Road	Fintona	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Broad End/Ringsend Road	Limavady	Sale Complete
2013	70 Hillsborough Road	Lisburn	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at Ledley Hall Close	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Shore Road / Northwood Parade	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adjacent 38 Stewartstown Avenue	Cookstown	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Former Psni Station Davis Street	Keady	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Annadale Crescent	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Main Street, Rosslea	Fermanagh	Withdrawn
2013	Land at Crevenish Park, Kesh	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Station Road, Kesh	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Castlebalfour Park Lisnaskea	Fermanagh	Withdrawn
2013	Land at Leathem Crescent, Ederney	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Pound Street, Irvinestown	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2013	Former Gilford Library, 37 Mill Street	Gilford	Sale Complete
2013	Former Psni Station, 21 Limavady Road	Garvagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Former Psni Station, Main Street	Eglinton	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Riddels Building, 87-91 Ann Street	Belfast	Sale Complete
2013	Land at 16 Riverview Park	Ballymoney	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Plot Drumnagoon Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2013	Former Psni Station, 20 Lisburn Road	Hillsborough	Sale Complete
2013	Land Adjacent To Fairhill Walk	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Moneygran Road	Magherafelt	Withdrawn
2013	Land at Kernan	Portadown	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land Adjacent 116 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adjacent 23 Kylemore Gardens	Larne	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adjacent 166 Edenderry Park	Banbridge	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adjacent 67 Shore Road	Kircubbin	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at 10 Somerset Park	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Queens Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Obins Street	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Ashbourne Manor	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Castlegore Road	Castlederg	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land at 46 Cregagh Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Newtownbreda Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Depot at Dergbrough Road	Plumbridge	Sale Complete
2013	Keady Primary School, Crossmore Road	Armagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at 105 Annareagh Road	Richhill	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	63 Clarendon Street	Londonderry	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at Campsie Road Car Park	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Lynwood Hostel 1-11 Ballyfore Park, Ballyduff	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land Adjacent To 41 Hydepark Road	Newtownabbey	Sale Complete
2013	Fire Station Mountjoy Road	Omagh	Currently On The Open Market
2013	Ravara House, 13 Ravara Gardens	Bangor	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land Adjacent To 38 Forthill Gardens, Ballyduff	Newtownabbey	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 33 Cravenny Road	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 41 Wyndell Heights	Newtownards	Withdrawn
2013	Land at Kevlin Road	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 14 Elmgrove Crescent	Portaferry	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land Adj Rossneal Children's Home, Rossdowney Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Green Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 22 Belt Road	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Ashwood	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2013	Land Adjacent 9 Keely Gardens	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Abbots Road	Whiteabbey	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land at Woodside Industrial Estate, Woodside Road	Ballymena	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	1 Station Road	Greenisland	Sale Complete
2013	Land at 45 Annaghilla Road	Augher	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Annaghilla Road	Ballygawley	Withdrawn
2013	Land at 4 Knockburn Grove	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Lands at Drumard & Drumhoney	Kesh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Annaghilla Road	Ballygawley	Withdrawn
2013	Land at 2 Lisburn Road	Ballynahinch	Sale Complete
2013	Land at 264 Foreglen Road	Limavady	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Fisher Park, Bridge Street	Newry	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at Craigstown Road	Randlastown	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Annaghilla Road	Ballygawley	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Halftown Road, Annaghilla	Ballygawley	Sale Complete
2013	Land at 23 Munro Villas	Kilkeel	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 25 Lurgan Road	Aghagallon	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	23 Cherry Valley	Enniskillen	Sale Complete
2013	25 Cherry Valley	Enniskillen	Currently On The Open Market
2013	Unit 4 Bridgeview, Glenville Industrial Estate	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at 1 Tudor Brook	Magherafelt	Sale Complete
2013	Maghera High School, Tobermore Road	Magera	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land at 4 Landscape Terrace	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Killyliss Road	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 3 Mullybrannon Road	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Dungannon Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2013	Former Psni Station, 244 Antrim Road	Glengormley	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Fromer Psni Station, 5 Main Street	Broughshane	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Former Psni Station, 6-8 Ballymena Road	Portglenone	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Blacks Road	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Queensway/Moss Road	Lisburn	Sale Complete
2013	Land Adj To Drumgor Park	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at Butler Walk/Place	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Elderly Persons Home Shore Road	Greenisland	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	44A Tempo Road	Fermanagh	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Lothian Avenue	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 1 Laburnum Court	Comber	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 9 Somerset Road	Coleraine	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	Land at Upper Dunmurry Lane/Stewartstown Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Knockbracken Reservoir, Saintfield Road	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress

Year	Address	Town	Status
2013	Land at 2 Millbrook Court	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Gracefield Lodge, Belfast Road, Dollingstown	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Millar Park	Lawrencetown	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Castlekeele Heights, Martins Lane	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Caw Park	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Killybrack Road	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Former Lisnasharragh High School, Stirling Avenue	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	3 Manor Drive	Lisburn	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land Adjacent 234 Glenshane Road	Londonderry	Circulating to Public Sector
2013	Land Adjacent 1 Castlewellan Road	Newcastle	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Frederick Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at Sandy Row	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2013	Land at 2 Shore Road	Larne	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Grovetree House, 106 Cullingtree Road	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land at Culmore Point	Londonderry	Sale Complete
2013	14 Lower Crescent	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2013	2 Kilkeel Road	Newry	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Newport Primary School	Hillsborough	Sale Complete
2013	Land at Great Patrick Street/ Dunbar Link	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2013	Land Adjacent To Orchard Mews Newtownbreda	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 44 Vicarage Road	Portadown	Sale Complete
2014	Land at Hillview Park	Enniskillen	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 17 Dundrod Road	Crumlin	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Shackleton Barracks, Dukes Lane, Ballykelly	Limavady	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Bonds Hill, Waterside	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Hurtletoot Road	Antrim	Sale Complete
2014	Land at Cliftonpark Avenue	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Lisnisky Lane	Portadown	Currently On The Open Market
2014	Land at 24 & 26 Browning Drive	Londonderry	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land Adjacent 48 Station Road Cullybackey	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Martins Lane	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Site at Urney Road, Clady	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Ballyclare Road/ Manse Road	Newtownabbey	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at Magowans Filling Station	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 276A Comber Road	Dundonald	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Faughan View Park, Clady	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Hightown Industrial Estate	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Boyne Court	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 3 Rathmore Road	Limavady	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2014	Land at 115 Old English Road	Dungannon	Sale Complete
2014	Land at Montague Villas Dromore	Omagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Former Ballygolan Primary School, 41-83 Serpentine Road	Newtownabbey	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at York Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Railway Street	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Margaret Street	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 127 Clonmeen	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Burn Road, Ballysally	Coleraine	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 15 Bridge Road	Moira	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 76 Finvoy Road	Ballymoney	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land Adjacent 25 Orchard Hill	Crumlin	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 717 Rosmoyle	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 1 Ashbourne Court	Ballymena	Sale Complete
2014	Land Adjacent To 211 Drumgor Park	Craigavon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land Adjacent To Greenhaw Primary School	Londonderry	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at Annaghilla Road	Ballygawley	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 88 Killowen Drive	Magherafelt	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Portadown Health Centre, Tavanagh Avenue	Portadown	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land at Moltke Street/Ebor Street	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Weavers Meadow	Banbridge	Sale Complete
2014	Land at Paget Square	Enniskillen	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	St Patrick's Barracks Demesne Avenue	Ballymena	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at James Connolly Park	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Crebarkey Road	Dungiven	Sale Complete
2014	Land at 9 Bawnmore Grove	Newtownabbey	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 126 Lettershandony Avenue	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 64 Bridge Street	Kilrea	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Newmills Road	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Hillside Terrace	Lisburn	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 2 Ards Drive	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Leckpatrick Gardens, Artigarvan	Strabane	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Shore Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 61 Irvinestown Road	Fermanagh	Sale Complete
2014	Land Adjacent 19 Lisnafin Park	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Knockbracken Healthcare Park	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at Frederick Street Car Park	Belfast	Sale Complete
2014	Land at Linley Drive	Comber	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Corporation Street	Enniskillen	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Carnany Drive	Ballymoney	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 29 Ballymena Road	Ahoghill	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2014	Land at Old Eglish Road, Magowans Filling Station	Dungannon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Rossbay/Deanfield	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land Adjacent Magowans Filling Station	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Long Commons Car Park	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Seymour Street/Queens Road	Lisburn	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Lough Cowey, Deer Park Road	Portaferry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Portavoe, Lower Balloo Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Conlig Lower, Bangor Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Quoile Lower, Longmore Road	Broughshane	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Conlig Upper, Main Street, Conlig	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Stoneyford , Stoneyford Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ballysallagh, Ballysallagh Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Leathemstown , Leathemstown Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Lough Money, Ballystokes	Downpatrick	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Altmore , Reclain Road	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Craigahullier Road, Corbally	Portrush	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ballysallagh Lower, Millbrook Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ballyversal Road	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Upper Killea Road	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Church Road , Church Road	Holywood	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Dunalis Reservoir, Windyhill Road	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Boomers , Derriaghy Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ballydoolagh Road	Enniskillen	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Crockacleaven, Clogher	Tyrone	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ballylane Lough, Glenanne	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Creightons Green , Creightons Green Road	Holywood	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ballintemple Water Treatment Works, Ballintemple Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Altmore , Cappagh Road	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Rathfriland Road	Banbridge	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land Adjacent 238 Gilford Road	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 42 Main Street, Moira	Lisburn	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 5 Rathmore Road	Limavady	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Riverside, Leitrim Road	Banbridge	Sale Complete
2014	Land at Cloyfin Road	Coleraine	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Kintyre Road	Larne	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Tiree Street	Antrim	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Clarawood Park	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Ulster Hospital	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Roads Service Depot, Aghalun	Brookeborough	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Tassagh Road	Keady	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2014	Land Adjacent 178 Banbridge Road	Down	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Former Bus Depot, 46 Parade	Donaghadee	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land Adjacent To 558 Carnhill	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Ligoniel Library, Ligoniel Road	Belfast	Currently On The Open Market
2014	Oldpark Library, Oldpark Road	Belfast	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 36 Banbridge Road	Loughbrickalnd	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Old Rectory Park	Portadown	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Queens Park	Saintfield	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Iveagh Drive	Banbrdige	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at Rockland Drive	Moneyreagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 292-296 Shore Road	Newtownabbey	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 2 Inniskeen Close	Enniskillen	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at The Creamery, Swanlinbar Road	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Laburnum Court	Comber	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 13 North Street	Greyabbey	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Ballyrobert Road	Bangor	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	37 Glantane Drive	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at Glenariff Road	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at North Lurgan Community Centre, Levin Road	Lurgan	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 18 Poyntzpass Road	Scarva	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Old Colin	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Annaghilla Road	Ballygawley	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 160 Coalisland Road	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Loughview Cottages	Omagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Monbrief	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Ardowen	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Drumellan	Craigavon	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Roslyn Street Youth Club	Belfast	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at 15 Ballyreagh Road	Portrush	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Churchview Way, Lawrencetown	Banbridge	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Loughview Cottages	Omagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 53 Rathvarna Drive	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Knockenagh Avenue, Rathfern	Newtownabbey	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Former Railway Track Lands	Coalisland	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land at Windyhall Estate	Coleraine	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 65 Ardmore Avenue	Dundonald	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Toome Wharf, Agivey Road	Kilrea	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Ballee Drive	Ballymena	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 26 New Street, Ederney	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 19 St Patrick's Park, Rosslea	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body

Year	Address	Town	Status
2014	Abbey Street Car Park	Bangor	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Dufferin Avenue Car Park	Bangor	Public Sector Transfer In Progress
2014	Land at Coagh Crescent	Cookstown	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Quoile Crescent	Downpatrick	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Bligh's Gardens	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Old Saintfield Road	Belfast	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	1 & 2 Hazelwood Park	Omagh	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 1 The Cottages, Whinney Hill	Holywood	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Carbet Road	Portadown	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at Garvary, Teemore	Fermanagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Lisnamuck Park	Coleraine	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 78 Lettershandoney Avenue	Londonderry	Open Market Sale Recommended
2014	Land at 186 Lincoln Court	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Riverside, Leitrim Road	Cookstown	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Wilmar Road/Belsize Road	Lisburn	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 131 Shore Road	Newtownabbey	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Duncrue Street	Belfast	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land at Slieve Croob	Castlewellan	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Avonmore	Armagh	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Longfield Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Barnagh Park	Donaghadee	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 107 Dublin Road	Newry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 24 Deanfield	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Crilly Park, Killeter	Tyrone	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land at Edenbane Road	Kilrea	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Mckeens Green	Carrickfergus	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Thistlewood Gardens	Antrim	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Colinglen Road	Dunmurry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Breezemount Rise	Conlig	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at St Donard's Walk	Dundrum	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land Adjacent 6 Lisneal Court	Londonderry	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at Halftown Road	Lisburn	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land at Syerla Road, Moygashel	Dungannon	Refer to Disposing Body
2014	Land at 5 Creevy Avenue	Belfast	Circulating to Public Sector
2014	Land at Church View	Strabane	Refer to Disposing Body

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is aware of the concern of local companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, regarding payment delays under the Property Management Pan Government Collaborative Framework Agreement 2014; and to outline how he proposes to address these concerns.
(AQW 38470/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department is not aware of any concerns having been raised regarding payment delays under the Property Management Pan Government Collaborative Framework Agreement 2014.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the resource spend in each of the last four financial years; (ii) the planned resource spend for 2014/15; (iii) a breakdown of the spend by annual management expenditure to departmental expenditure limit recategorisations; and (iv) the real terms spending figure, taking into account Treasury Gross Domestic Product deflators.
(AQW 38479/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below shows Final Outturn reported for 2010-11 to 2012-13, Provisional Outturn for 2013-14 and Forecast Outturn for 2014-15 for all Resource Expenditure in both AME and DEL. Resource expenditure adjusted to 2014-15 prices using GDP deflators is also detailed in the table below.

£m	2010-11 Final Outturn	2011-12 Final Outturn	2012-13 Final Outturn	2013-14 Provisional Outturn	2014-15 Forecast Outturn
Resource DEL	9,963.6	9,856.2	10,035.6	10,160.9	10,251.1
Resource AME	3,146.9	7,516.3	7,769.6	7,547.3	8,472.9
Total Resource	13,110.4	17,372.5	17,805.2	17,708.3	18,723.9
Real Terms Resource*	14,121.6	18,383.4	18,532.4	18,097.8	18,723.9

* with 2014-15 as the reference year

Totals may not add due to rounding

Resource AME spend in 2010-11 is significantly lower than in subsequent years as a consequence of the UK government decision to change from using the Retail Prices Index (RPI) to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) for calculating uplifts to public sector pensions. This change resulted in a downward adjustment to Resource AME spend in 2010-11.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on progress being made on proposals from May 2014 to resolve outstanding issues related to the Civil Service Equal Pay Settlement.
(AQW 38523/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I refer the Member to my response given in AQW 37447/11-15.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38586/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel currently employs one part-time member of staff (0.65 full-time equivalent) in its Strategic Equality Branch.

The staff member is a Deputy Principal and the salary range for a full-time staff member at this grade is £35,190 - £39,675.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Terms of Reference for the research on the economic impact of Welfare Reform, as suggested by his Department and the Executive.
(AQW 38620/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There has been much public debate in recent months around the economic costs and benefits of implementing or alternatively not implementing the welfare reforms contained within the Welfare Reform Bill. In order to provide further clarity, I have commissioned a study to examine this issue in greater detail.

The study is underway and I expect a report to be completed in the near future.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38665/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No DFP employee, paid on either the Industrial or Non Industrial pay scales, is paid below £7.20 per hour.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the public will be made aware of the relevant changes for rate payers under the new local government structure.
(AQW 38673/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The reform of local government in Northern Ireland presents a once in a lifetime opportunity for the new councils to better serve the communities they represent and it will be up to the new local councils to make their ratepayers aware of the benefits that will result. However, decreasing the number of councils from 26 to 11 will present immediate

challenges, including the issue of the convergence of district rates. The Member may already be aware that I announced the final details of a scheme to manage this issue on 20th November.

Now that the final make-up of the Scheme has been announced, my Department will be making ratepayers aware of the support being provided to help ease the transition. The Scheme provides an automatic subsidy to domestic and non domestic ratepayers located in areas where district rates are relatively low. There is no need for anyone to apply for this, help and details will be provided in the rating leaflet that issues with the 'turn of year' rate bills. In advance of this, DFP will be producing an online factsheet and publicising details of the Scheme on its website.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the public consultation on a subsidy scheme for rate payers under the new local government structure.
(AQW 38674/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: On 19 November 2014 I announced the final detail of the scheme to manage the issue of rates convergence arising out of the new council structures.

The scheme will see the effects of rates convergence phased in over the full council term with an 80% subsidy applied next year (2015/16). This will remove 80% of the amount which has been identified as the "convergence" effect. That support will then be gradually phased out over the 4 year term and will be applied at increments of 60%, 40%, and 20% over the remaining years of the scheme.

These discounts will be automatically applied to the district rate shown on the rate bill from next year for the life of the scheme and therefore there is no need for anyone to claim it.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) his Department; and (ii) each of his Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38713/11-15)

Mr Hamilton:

Number of Full Time Equivalent Staff

Year	Dept of Finance & Personnel	Special EU Programmes Body
2009/10	3125.29	65
2010/11	3313.79	65
2011/12	3305.28	65
2012/13	3240.15	65
2013/14	3349.37	57

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made on resolving the issue of equal pay for Department of Justice and former Northern Ireland Office staff.
(AQW 38768/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I refer the Member to my response given in AQW 37447/11-15.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel 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 38803/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The amount spent by the Department of Finance and Personnel on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss is contained in the table below.

Financial Year	Total Cost
2009/10	£1,296
2010/11	£1,500
2011/12	£3,416
2012/13	£2,535
2013/14	£2,672

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 37672/11-15, how in practice is the Utility Regulator held accountable to the Assembly.
(AQW 38869/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Utility Regulator is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly through financial and annual reporting obligations. The work of the Utility Regulator is subject to scrutiny by Assembly Committees and its office is accountable to a Board, whom I am responsible for appointing. The Utility Regulator also publicly consults on its work plan each year and publishes an annual report which is laid in the Assembly.

In accordance with the requirements of relevant European Directives the Utility Regulator, like equivalent regulatory authorities, is legally distinct and functionally independent from any other public or private entity.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he plans to safeguard the highest skilled workers following the voluntary redundancy schemes that will be introduced as part of public sector reforms.
(AQW 38957/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Executive has asked the Department of Finance and Personnel to bring forward a range of proposals for strategic personnel interventions to effect a pay bill reduction 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.

The Department of Finance and Personnel, in close collaboration with other Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments, has begun the process of establishing the overall size of the pay bill reduction that needs to be delivered by the Northern Ireland Civil Service and how this is to be achieved.

The selection criteria for any voluntary exit scheme has yet to be decided.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the rationale for using public money to subsidise all free prescriptions for people who indictate they would be able to afford them, at a time when frontline health and social care services are under such significant pressure.
(AQW 38254/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The decision to abolish prescription charges from 1 April 2010 was supported by all the parties in the Assembly. Since the charge was abolished the number of prescription items has increased from 33.4million items in 2009 (the last complete calendar year before charges were abolished) to 38.7million items in 2013. This increase is within the normal historical rate of increase.

However, the ingredient cost per prescription has decreased and as a result the overall cost of prescription drugs has decreased by 9% since 2010/11.

However, I have indicated that in light of the current financial position I am considering the reintroduction of a prescription charge which could be used to support frontline services and new treatments. Any proposal to reintroduce prescription charges would be subject to the agreement of the Executive and would be subject to a full public consultation.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a detailed breakdown of the £600,000 of savings, as referred in the Assembly on Monday 3 November 2014, that will arise as a result of the temporary closure of Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle.
(AQW 38292/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust expects to make the following savings as a result of the temporary closure of 12 MS Respite beds and 20 Intermediate Care beds in Dalriada Hospital. The savings plan will apply until 31 March 2015.

Cost Savings for Intermediate Care (Inc MS Respite) – Dalriada Hospital

Ward Costs	**Cost Savings for 4 months from 01/12/2014 £'000**
Nursing Costs	405
Goods & Services Costs of Ward	31
Support Service Costs	79
Utilities	9
Medical Cover	41
Allied Health Professional Costs	57

Ward Costs	Cost Savings for 4 months from 01/12/2014 £'000
Total Dalriada Ward Costs	**622**
Less: Gross Reprovision Costs of 6 MS beds	(61)
Totals Net of Reprovision Costs	**561**

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the £8.5m allocation in the 2014 October Monitoring Round will support the Infrastructural Support Programme.
(AQW 38396/11-15)

Mr Wells: The £8.5m allocation, which is part of the £80m allocated to my Department in the June and October Monitoring Rounds, is being used to fund a range of Departmental priorities:

£1.4m will be made available for Northern Ireland's contribution to a number of nationally-led schemes, such as NHS Blood/ Organ Transplant and the National Institute of Biological Standards and Control (part of MHRA).

£3m will be made available for grants to voluntary and community sector bodies and the Family Fund.

£4.1m will be made available for a range of other priorities, such as providing additional funding to support GMC training needs, enabling a programme of innovative pharmacy initiatives, such as Phase 1 of the SBRI project, Departmental reviews (including the Child Sexual Exploitation Inquiry and the review being led by Sir Liam Donaldson), Departmental input to the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry and support for the provision of health visiting.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether funding has been sought or received from the Commissioning Group for additional staff in the Emergency Department in the South West Acute Hospital since it opened.
(AQW 38408/11-15)

Mr Wells: The allocation of funding for health and social care services is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board, as service commissioner, in discussion with the Health and Social Care Trusts. The Western Health and Social Care Trust is developing a business case for investment in nursing and medical staff which will be presented to the commissioner when completed.

The Trust has not considered opening an additional ward in the South West Acute Hospital to reduce waiting times in the emergency department; there are escalation processes in place to manage any increase in emergency care demand. The emergency department of the South West Acute Hospital is the highest performing Type 1 emergency department in Northern Ireland; in September 2014, 96.5% of patients were treated and discharged, or admitted to a ward, within four hours and no-one waited longer than 12 hours.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what specialist resources, including staff, are available at the Robinson Community Hospital, Ballymoney, for Multiple Sclerosis patients and their families.
(AQW 38429/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are currently no Multiple Sclerosis (MS) specialist services provided at Robinson Community Hospital. However, two staff members have previously worked within the MS respite centre in Dalriada Hospital. Any equipment resources that are not already available within Robinson Hospital could be transferred from Dalriada as necessary.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation his Department had with patients of the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre at Dalriada Hospital, and their families, prior to and following its temporary closure.
(AQW 38430/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following my budget statement on Thursday 30 October 2014, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust contacted MS service users and families from the Northern Trust area to advise them: of the temporary closure of 12 Multiple Sclerosis respite beds in Dalriada Hospital; and, that relevant key workers would be in contact to arrange appointments to meet and discuss options for their future respite care.

These initial meetings have now been completed and the Trust continues to liaise with service users as required. The Trust has also liaised with the Western Trust and Belfast Trust regarding the change.

Senior Management of the Trust attended Dalriada Hospital on Thursday 30 October and engaged 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. Ongoing communication is also taking place with the MS Society.

The Trust will continue to do all it can to communicate with all stakeholders to ensure everyone understands the service options now available to them.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has funded the opening of beds in community hospitals in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust for the services of Multiple Sclerosis patients, since 1 November 2014.
(AQW 38431/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is the Northern Health and Social Care Trust which is responsible for services in its area and their funding.

Those who require MS respite continue to have access to a range of respite options including a hospital bed if indicated.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how long his Department will provide funding for the reopening of four beds at Robinson Hospital, Ballymoney.
(AQW 38432/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board commissions an intermediate care service from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust which is largely provided in local community hospitals and also in some residential and nursing homes. One facility offering intermediate care is the Robinson hospital in Ballymoney. There are currently 21 beds on the Robinson site.

Prior to November 2013, there had been 25 beds on the Robinson site. However, in light of improvements to length of stay, the Trust was able to reduce the bed complement to 21 at that time.

There are no plans at present to re-open four beds on the Robinson site.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) his Department; and (ii) each of his Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38454/11-15)

Mr Wells: The full time equivalent number of staff in my Department and each of my arm's length bodies, at 31st March in each of the last five years are detailed below:

DHSSPS

	Mar-10	Mar-11	Mar-12	Mar-13	Mar-14
DHSSPS	703.6	641.9	623.6	605.8	593.0

Note: Figures exclude staff on career break and seconded into the department.

HSC - Arm's Length Bodies

	Mar-10	Mar-11	Mar-12	Mar-13	Mar-14
Belfast HSC Trust	16749.2	16457.4	16456.4	16683.4	17015.4
Northern HSC Trust	9112.7	8814.0	8881.5	9028.3	9033.3
South Eastern HSC Trust	7173.0	7159.3	7372.2	7635.2	7759.7
Southern HSC Trust	7751.3	7645.5	7779.8	7941.8	7842.1
Western HSC Trust	8100.4	8008.2	8180.5	8321.8	8422.1
Health & Social Care Board	390.0	365.1	433.8	444.6	525.4
Business Services Organisation	760.7	840.5	988.2	1062.4	1209.3
NI Ambulance Service	1117.0	1143.9	1122.2	1181.8	1159.5
NI Blood Transfusion Service	180.5	180.7	173.3	171.4	175.1
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	55.7	55.8	58.9	64.0	65.6
NI Practice & Education Council	18.4	17.3	15.4	19.4	17.9
NI Social Care Council	52.8	49.0	56.0	55.7	54.4
Patient Client Council	21.3	26.5	29.4	24.9	25.5
Public Health Agency	185.6	215.7	288.5	292.2	306.8
The Beeches	72.5	70.8			
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	139.8	139.0	132.0	139.5	135.4
NI Medical and Dental Training Agency					163.3

Notes: Figures in HSC table above exclude bank staff, members of staff on career breaks, members of staff with a WTE of less than 0.03, and Chairpersons/members of Boards. They also exclude Home Helps/Domiciliary Care staff, as their recorded WTE does not provide an accurate assessment of their contributions to the service.

The Beeches staff became part of BSO between March 2011 and March 2012.

Figures for the NI Medical and Dental Training Agency are not available before 2014 as they had not previously used the HSC's Human Resources system.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)	**Mar-10**	**Mar-11**	**Mar-12**	**Mar-13**	**Mar-14**
Whole Time	917.5	899.5	911	917	918
Retained *	993	999	979	945	974
Controls	55.9	54.2	52.7	52.7	51.7
Support	222.5	216.1	207.8	200.7	205.6
Agency	53**	47**	52.9	53.7	44.8
Total	**2,242**	**2,216**	**2,203**	**2,169**	**2,194**

* NIFRS report the level of Retained employees based on headcount rather than FTE in order to align with establishment levels.

** Agency levels shown for 2010 and 2011 relate to the average number over the full financial year as NIFRS do not hold the details relating to actual FTE on 31 March for agency workers during these 2 years.

_____ Date:_____

Signed and approved by the Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety

Background Note AQW 38454/11-15

1. The question has been asked by Michael Copeland (East Belfast). The reason for the question is unknown.
2. Departmental figures are shown as Full Time Equivalent (FTE) at 31 March each year and have been sourced from Departmental HR records.
3. HSC figures are also shown as FTE at 31 March each year and Information Analysis Directorate, NISRA statisticians have provided the data for the HSC bodies.
4. NIFRS do not hold FTE figures for retained employees therefore this figure is a headcount figure at 31 March each year.

Prepared by: Pamela McIlwrath on 17 November 2014

Cleared by: Sharon Gallagher on 18 November 2014

Cleared by Permanent Secretary – [DATE]

Cleared by Special Advisor – [DATE]

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Julie Thompson

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Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37650/11-15, why the original answer to AQW 36829/11-15, irrespective of the distinct processes for referring patients, did not reference the surgery that took place at providers outside of the Health Service.
(AQW 38469/11-15)

Mr Wells: The answer to AQW 36829 provided information on the number of patients referred for treatment through the Extra Contractual Referral process, which is the Health and Social Care Board's primary mechanism for providing specialist treatment in the UK or abroad where it cannot be provided locally. This information is held centrally by the Health and Social Care Board and can readily be interrogated.

Information on the number of patients referred for treatment as part of the independent sector/waiting list initiative is held at specialty level. Although the Western Health and Social Care Trust has provided this information at sub-specialty level, the Health and Social Care Board has advised that this information could only be provided, primarily by the Belfast Trust, at disproportionate cost.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many referrals were made to the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle in each of the last ten years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38474/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of referrals made by each Health and Social Care Trust to the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital is not collected centrally.

Information is however available on the number of admissions to Dalriada Hospital with a primary diagnosis of respite care by the patient's trust of residence, which is detailed in the table below.

Admissions1 to Dalriada with a primary diagnosis of Respite Care2, 2004/05 - 2013/14

HSC Trust of Residence[3]	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Belfast	67	58	44	31	30	18	16	5	3	3
Northern	186	201	211	226	198	165	154	105	117	99
South Eastern	17	6	10	9	6	0	0	0	0	0
Southern	18	12	15	10	9	8	6	0	0	0
Western	42	36	28	44	43	33	26	15	18	16
Northern Ireland	330	313	308	320	286	224	202	125	138	118

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Notes:

Figures relate to admissions rather than individuals as such an individual may be admitted to hospital more than once during the year or across years and will be counted for each admission.

Cell sizes less than 5 have been recoded to 3 to protect patient confidentiality.

1 Admissions are estimated using deaths and discharges.

2 Respite Care has been defined using the International Classification of Disease (revision 10) code Z75.5, in only the primary diagnostic position.

3 HSC Trust of residence refers to the patient's Local Commissioning Group which is based on the patient's postcode.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the services that will be cut by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust as a result of the £5m shortfall in the current budget.
(AQW 38483/11-15)

Mr Wells: The main services which are expected to be affected as a result of the £5m shortfall in the current budget are as follows:

- There will be temporary closure of 6 beds in Ward 14 in Lagan Valley Hospital
- There will be temporary closure of 9 beds in Downe Hospital, and medical and cardiology beds within the two remaining twenty bed wards will be consolidated.
- There will be temporary closure of 20 beds in Bangor Community Hospital.
- The Bangor Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor Community Hospital will be temporarily closed and will be consolidated at the Minor Injuries Unit at Ards Community Hospital.
- A new nurse led weekend Minor Injuries service scheduled to commence in Autumn 2014 at Lagan Valley Hospital has been postponed.
- Elective care treatments will be focused on urgent procedures.
- There will be a reduction in domiciliary care places, as the Trust will now replace only 2 out of every 3 domiciliary care packages. This change has been risk assessed and patients with the highest needs will be prioritised.

These contingency plans are to apply until the end of March 2015. The decisions taken by the Trust reflect what is achievable in maintaining safety and minimising costs between now and the end of the financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to Bangor Community Hospital, to detail the cost of (i) maintenance; (ii) new capital works; and (iii) all associated operational costs, such as utilities, in 2013/14.
(AQW 38487/11-15)

Mr Wells: In 2013/14, the maintenance costs for Bangor Community Hospital were £40,000, the new capital works costs were £659,000 and all associated operational costs were £140,695.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what work is being completed to retain and expand maternity services in the South West Acute Hospital.
(AQW 38493/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust is committed to the development of maternity services at the South West Acute Hospital in line with my Department's Regional Maternity Strategy and will continue to work closely with the Health and Social Care Board to develop this service. The delivery of safe quality maternity services is a key part of the Hospital's overall portfolio of services.

The Trust submitted an "Options Paper to Ensure Sustainable Medical Staffing of the Obstetric and Paediatric Units at the South West Acute Hospital" to the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency in January 2014. The Trust was then asked to provide a further paper, and a follow-up paper was submitted in July 2014 and is currently awaiting a decision from the Board.

While this decision is pending, the Trust has funded temporary and agency medical staff to ensure compliance with the Safety and Quality Learning Letter.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the required savings to be made by each Health and Social Care Trust to ensure they are brought within budget by March 2015.
(AQW 38500/11-15)

Mr Wells: As both these questions relate to savings to be made by each Health and Social Care Trust. a combined response has been provided.

Below is the list of contingency plan proposals for each of the Trusts. These lists exclude measures to contain goods and services expenditure and administration costs which are being managed locally within Trusts in order help achieve break even and also their original savings proposals from the start of 2014/15, as their contribution to the overall Departmental savings target of £170m. It is expected that there will be an element of movement in these plans, as implementation progresses.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£m
Agency & Overtime	Reduction on admin agency and overtime	0.750
Domiciliary Care	Reduction in current Dom Care packages & restrictions on all new packages until April 2015	0.400
CEAs 2012/13 & 2013/14	Release of funding of lower award CEAs for 2012/13 & 2013/14	0.340
Total		**1.490**

Northern Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£m
Workforce control	Delay recruitment to posts. Eg no back fill of maternity cover unless direct care services and manage the use of locums, agency and temp staff	0.400
Overtime	Overtime restrictions across selected areas	0.960
Aids/Equipment, etc.	Reduce installation of client lifts, minor works, new community equipment, non urgent wheelchairs (allow for pressure points)	0.405
Domiciliary Care	Restrict care packages to projected levels as at period 5 (end Aug 14) ie no planned growth, sustain current level of investment	0.137
Dalriada Hospital Intermediate Care & Respite	Temporarily close MS beds from end Nov and reprovide MS respite in Independent Sector (at patient choice). Temporary closure of Intermediate care beds from end Nov to bolster substantive staff at Causeway Hospital (spend reductions will be in bank/agency staff in acute hospital not in Dalriada).	0.555
MIU/Medical out of hours	Temporary closure of Whiteabbey Minor Injuries from mid Nov (£0.076m) & reduce locum staff at night/weekends at Whiteabbey Medical OOH and enhance Band 2 nursing staff - hospital at night model (£0.04m)	0.116
Mid Ulster intermediate care	Mid Ulster Intermediate Care – retain service with 20 beds from current 27 under a primary care medical model from 1 Dec allowing some staff to be directed towards Antrim. Same volume can be met if length of stay is reduced	0.216
Unfunded transport	Cease evening transport for C&V groups by end Feb 2015	0.006

Description	Proposal	£m
Temporary AHP staff	Selectively reduce temporary staff in AHPs (including OT, physio, dietetics) from end Nov	0.200
Learning Disability Cash Awards	Cease LD cash awards from end Feb 15 (allowing for a consultation/ retraction period)	0.010
Day surgery on non acute local hospital sites	Temporarily remove day surgery from Whiteabbey and Mid Ulster Hospitals to redirect staff resources to acute sites – by end Dec (Note 1 below)	0.200
Elective Care	1 Locum post (Urology) ends mid October and will not be replaced – will deliver within a 2 Consultant model and working with Western Trust	0.104
Residential Homes	Re-accommodate residents from one residential Home from end Jan (with new Supported Living facility being built).	0.117
Clinical Excellence Awards	Withdraw circular on clinical excellence awards for 2012/13, 2013/14 & 2014/15	0.830
Total		**4.256**

Note 1 - This NHSCT proposal will be delivered through reductions in locum, agency and temporary staff in services where there is an overspending in provision of elective work. Day surgery will continue to be provided on Whiteabbey and Mid Ulster sites.

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**

Note 2 – Bangor MIU will also temporarily close which will deliver savings of £65k.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£'m
ED/MIU	ARMAGH MIU – temporary closure. Redeploy staff to DHH and CAH to enable reduced medical locum spend. Average attendance – 4 per hour	0.045
Workforce Controls	Vacancy Controls: continue to hold vacant posts within the recruitment process until 31 March 2015	1.000
Agency	50% of admin and clerical agency workers released by 31 October 2014	0.875
Admin/ management/ corporate	Ceasing application of TYC transitional funds for project support and programme management	0.250
Domiciliary Care	Review of Domiciliary Care - hold all 'NEW' packages (with the exception of hospital discharges – with priority focus of community teams to review within 72 hours). This will also include hold/ defer any increases for the rest of the financial year (unless in exceptional circumstance – to be risk assessed by MD team) (Note 4)	0.118
Ambulatory Cover	Reduce provision of STH ambulatory cover to 2 days per week (Note 5)	0.042

Description	Proposal	£'m
Overtime- Transport	Cessation of Transport Overtime	0.113
Clinical Excellence Awards	Withdraw circular on clinical excellence awards for 2012/13, 2013/14 & 2014/15	0.350
Total		**2.793**

Note 3 – there will also be ongoing flexible reduction of beds in Loane House, to reflect reducing demand for beds in Loane House.

Note 4 – the practical application of this proposal will result in a maximum 4 week waiting list for community domiciliary care packages on a risk assessed basis.

Note 5 – the provision of this service will be from 9am to 1pm Monday to Friday rather than the previous 9am to 5pm

Western Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£m
Wards/Beds/OPD	Closure of Roe Valley OPD (Note 6)	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
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 6 – Roe Valley to continue to provide services; savings will be delivered through elective care spend reductions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38061/11-15, what steps the Northern Health and Social Care Trust are putting in place to ensure that the staff who are "temporarily" relocated from the Dalriada Hospital, return to the same post, when it reopens in 2015.
(AQW 38505/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am advised by the Northern HSC Trust that all staff affected by the service change have been asked to complete a displaced officer proforma. This enables staff to state their preference of employment base for the duration of the temporary change.

A database is then retained of all staff which includes their band, hours and permanent base and where they are transferring to for the duration of the service change. This will enable staff to be easily identified to return to Dalriada Hospital.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what annual budget each of the Health and Social Care Trusts set aside for translation and interpreter services for foreign nationals at GP practices.
(AQW 38510/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following the regional Review of Language Interpreting and Translation Services in 2013 the funding of language interpreting services for patients requiring access to all health and social care services, including GP Practices, is provided by the HSCB.

The HSCB has set aside a budget of £2.8m in 2014/15 to fund this service. There is no specific budget set aside for GP Practices.

In addition, there is no annual budget set aside for written translation services as all HSC organisations, including GP Practices, pay for written translations as required.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how the recent budget cuts will impact on the levels of elective surgery at Downe Hospital; (ii) whether these budget cuts will impact on any elective surgery has been scheduled to be performed at Downe Hospital after 1 December 2014.
(AQW 38581/11-15)

Mr Wells: This is a temporary closure of 9 beds in the Downe Hospital, in line with other changes taking place across Northern Ireland due to the ongoing financial pressures. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is putting additional measures in place at the Ulster Hospital to address the increase in demand that happens naturally over the winter period and these additional measures will help to absorb any impact from the bed reductions in the Hospital. While there will be a reduction of 1 elective theatre list cardiac and medical services will continue to be provided in the Downe. My priority is to ensure that the services provided continue to be safe and effective and the Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain so.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of how the proposed reduction of services at Downe Hospital will affect service quality provided to the people of South Down and North Down.
(AQW 38582/11-15)

Mr Wells: This is a temporary closure of 9 beds in the Downe Hospital, in line with other changes taking place across Northern Ireland due to the ongoing financial pressures. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is putting additional measures in place at the Ulster Hospital to address the increase in demand that happens naturally over the winter period and these additional measures will help to absorb any impact from the bed reductions in the Hospital. While there will be a reduction of 1 elective theatre list cardiac and medical services will continue to be provided in the Downe. My priority is to ensure that the services provided continue to be safe and effective and the Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain so.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment on how the closure of nine beds in Downe Hospital will impact on the Ulster Hospital; and whether additional resources and beds have been made available in the Ulster Hospital.
(AQW 38583/11-15)

Mr Wells: This is a temporary closure of 9 beds in the Downe Hospital, in line with other changes taking place across Northern Ireland due to the ongoing financial pressures. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is putting additional measures in place at the Ulster Hospital to address the increase in demand that happens naturally over the winter period and these additional measures will help to absorb any impact from the bed reductions in the Hospital. While there will be a reduction of 1 elective theatre list cardiac and medical services will continue to be provided in the Downe. My priority is to ensure that the services provided continue to be safe and effective and the Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain so.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what how his Department will ensure that any individual affected by the closure of the Independent Living Fund in June 2015 has access to free independent advocacy and advice.
(AQW 38599/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department provides funding to a range of voluntary sector organisations, including Disability Action, who provide information and advice to people on disability related issues.

More widely, my Department published Developing Advocacy Services – A Guide for Commissioners in May 2012, together with an associated Action Plan. The guide aims to help commissioners better understand and develop advocacy services in Northern Ireland, by introducing a number of principles and standards to underpin future commissioning and delivery. Independence is one of the key principles and this is also reflected in the standards.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to ensure there is adequate public access to minor injury units; and how many of these units will remain open to the public.
(AQW 38617/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Trusts' contingency and savings plans include proposals for the temporary closure of the minor injuries units at Bangor Community Hospital, Whiteabbey Hospital and Armagh Community Hospital. The minor injuries units at Ards, Mid Ulster, South Tyrone and Tyrone County Hospitals will remain in operation. A weekend minor injuries service operates at the Downe Hospital. People who are unable to access a minor injuries unit can contact their GP or the GP Out of Hours service or attend their local emergency department.

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department carries out any assessment of productivity levels within the Health Service; and if so, to detail how productivity levels (i) have changed over the last ten years; and (ii) compare with the private health sector.
(AQW 38619/11-15)

Mr Wells: In relation to productivity levels for the Health Service in Northern Ireland, my Department feeds into UK statistics compiled by the Office of National Statistics, the latest version of which was published in December 2012.

http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/psa/public-sector-productivity-estimates--healthcare/2010/index.html

Year	UK Healthcare Productivity Index (1995=100)
2000	100.2
2001	102.6
2002	100.5
2003	101.5
2004	102.2
2005	104.6
2006	107.7
2007	107.1
2008	108.4
2009	107.2
2010	106.2

There is no comparable figure for the private health sector.

My Department has participated in previous reviews such as those undertaken by PEDU, Professor Appleby and McKinseys. The Department has achieved £490 million of savings over the last three years, with a further £170m anticipated in 2014/15.

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an assessment has been completed on the number of 'unnecessary' visits to Emergency Departments and GP practices each year; and how his Department is encouraging alternatives or more responsible use of these services.
(AQW 38621/11-15)

Mr Wells: No data is held on the number of 'unnecessary' visits to Emergency Departments and GP practices. However, more responsible use of Emergency Departments and GP Practices is encouraged through various initiatives such as the Choose Well Campaign, the Ask the Pharmacist Week, the Self Care Week and the quality and productivity service domain within the Quality and Outcomes Framework that GP Practices can contract to provide as part of their General Medical Services contract.

More responsible use of Emergency Departments and GP Practices is encouraged through various initiatives such as the Choose Well Campaign, the Ask the Pharmacist Week, the Self Care Week and the quality and productivity service domain within the Quality and Outcomes Framework that GP Practices can contract to provide as part of their General Medical Services contract.

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 appropriately. If people pick the service most appropriate to their symptoms, it means they get the right treatment and this also helps to manage finite health and social care services resources. An omnibus survey was carried out at the end of the 13/14 campaign to assess the effectiveness of the advertising across Northern Ireland. The evaluation demonstrated that:

- 87% of people felt that the advertising performed very well on 'communicating clearly';
- 77% of people felt aware of full range of medical care services; and
- 76% of people felt more able to choose appropriate medical care service.

In terms of attitude change, the evaluation demonstrated that advertising had been very successful in changing attitudes on the subjects of trying to 'use a pharmacy for quick advice on minor issues'; 'only use the GP out of hours service for urgent matters' and 'phone 999 if I had chest pains or breathing difficulties'.

The Choose Well campaign will run again this year building on the awareness raised during last year with a targeted focus on self care/pharmacy; GP Out of Hours service; Minor Injuries Units and appropriate use of Emergency Departments. It will also raise awareness around mental health and where to seek support and help. A mass public information 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 McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of (i) the day bed cost for an intermediate care bed in (a) Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle; (b) Robinson Hospital in Ballymoney; and (c) Inver Hospital in Larne; (ii) the day bed cost of an intermediate care bed in a care home with no nurses; and (iii) the cost of an acute hospital day bed and amount spent on day beds in Emergency Departments.
(AQW 38627/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) The cost per patient day in Dalriada, Robinson and Inver hospitals in 2012/13 and 2013/14 is:

	2012/13	**2013/14**
Dalriada	£267	£322
Robinson	£260	£284
Inver	£395	£310

(2013/14 costs have yet to be validated)

(ii) Although the cost of any individual residential home placement can vary significantly between different homes or different programmes of care and depends upon individual case complexity, the average cost per social care placement in residential homes in 2012/13 was:

	Per week	Per day
Statutory residential homes	£1,399	£200
Independent residential homes	£ 538	£ 77

Approximately 85% of all residential social care home packages are in the independent sector. Intermediate placements may have different cost characteristics than social care placements

(iii) The average cost per patient day in an acute hospital, across all clinical specialties, was £647 in 2012/13. The average cost per patient day in accident and emergency departments in 2012/13 was £652 and total inpatient expenditure in A&E was £4,924k. These costs include all healthcare inputs (including the cost of any operations) and overheads.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual budget of each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38660/11-15)

Mr Wells: The annual budget of each Health and Social Trust for current and capital expenditure in each of the last three years is detailed below:

Current Expenditure	**2013/14 £'m**	**2012/13 £'m**	**2011/12 £'m**
Northern HSC Trust	593.0	602.6	581.5
Belfast HSC Trust	1,178.1	1,211.1	1,128.1
Western HSC Trust	530.8	513.0	491.6
Southern HSC Trust	532.4	534.2	507.7
NIAS	67.2	61.7	60.7
South Eastern HSC Trust	522.0	521.9	510.0

Capital Expenditure	2013/14 £'m	2012/13 £'m	2011/12 £'m
Northern HSC Trust	21.0	35.5	21.5
Belfast HSC Trust	55.9	55.5	79.0
Western HSC Trust	38.1	144.9	36.4
Southern HSC Trust	45.5	26.8	20.7
NIAS	4.2	3.9	3.4
South Eastern HSC Trust	46.6	23.5	24.5

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38666/11-15)

Mr Wells: No DHSSPS employee is paid below £7.20 per hour;

No Health and Social Care (HSC) employee is paid below £7.20 per hour.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37834/11-15, to detail the range of measures which are in place to minimise medicines and supplies wastage in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38675/11-15)

Mr Wells: Each of the HSC Trusts has a number of measures in place to minimise medicines wastage. These include, for example, a One Stop Dispensing system whereby a patient's own drugs are assessed and if suitable for use will be used during the hospital stay. On discharge the medicines will, if appropriate, be returned to the patient. Trust dispensed medicines not required by the patient at discharge are returned to the hospital pharmacy and are assessed for reuse. If is safe to do so they can be put back into stock and be used again. Hospital pharmacies also have measures in place to manage their stock of medicines to ensure that the volume of medicines passing their expiry date is kept to a minimum.

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. It is hoped to issue the framework for consultation early in the New Year.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to the establishment of an acute coronary care unit at South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen.
(AQW 38678/11-15)

Mr Wells: There is an acute coronary care unit in the South West Acute Hospital.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether beds have been closed in Loane House or recommendations made to divert patients to other facilities from 1 May to 31 October 2014; and if so, why this was permitted prior to the closure of the consultation.
(AQW 38707/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has not closed any beds in either Loane House or Lurgan Hospital. During the summer period this year there were a number of empty beds in both hospitals due to decreased demand, however at no time were beds closed to admissions.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the differing levels of support available for patients with prostate cancer in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38714/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) commissions a range of treatment from HSC Trusts for patients with prostate cancer. The specific treatment and support will vary according to the individual patient and the stage or severity of their disease. Treatments include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy as well as follow up, palliative and supportive care.

It is the responsibility of the HSCB and HSC Trusts to ensure that prostate cancer services are up to modern quality levels. Trusts continue to work closely with both the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure that regional and national recommendations for improving services for prostate cancer are supported.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he or his officials have had any discussions in relation to relocating General Practice services currently located in Bangor town to the site of Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38726/11-15)

Mr Wells: While the South Eastern Local Commissioning Group has agreed that there should be a primary care "hub" to serve the population of Bangor and this is reflected in the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) for the Primary Care Infrastructure Development Programme, the location of any such "hub" has not yet been determined.

The SIP is currently under consideration and along with meeting other capital priorities will be dependent on the outcome of future budget exercises and confirmation of value for money.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, have provided to support programmes which train people with a disability on issues related to sexual health and general wellbeing.
(AQW 38733/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not held centrally. Health and Social Care organisations commission a range of services for people with a disability and a range of programmes to promote sexual health and wellbeing, many of these services are accessible to people with a disability. Examples of specifically funded relevant services include: a funding allocation of £57,160 in 2013/14 to support the Family Planning Association's 'Just Ask' programme, which aims to improve the sexual health of people with learning difficulties; funding of approximately £10,000 for the "Health for Youth through Peer Education" group to deliver sexual health programmes to 122 young people with learning disabilities studying at Belfast Metropolitan College; and funding of £5,000 to deliver a training programme on 'Personal and Sexual Relationships' to staff working with those with a learning disability.

Furthermore, in line with the objectives of my Department's Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2015, the Public Health Agency is leading on action to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are considered in the design and development of health promotion programmes and campaigns. Trust-funded programmes include, for example, staff working with adults with a learning disability and assisting them in accessing a range of health and wellbeing programmes such as sports and healthy cookery programmes.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessments or assumptions have been made of the additional impact of patients staying longer in the Ulster Hospital, as a result of the temporary closure of twenty beds in Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38742/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is putting additional measures in place at the Ulster Hospital to address the increase in demand that happens naturally over the winter period and these additional measures will help to absorb any impact felt from the temporary bed reductions in the Bangor Hospital.

My priority is to ensure that the services provided continue to be safe and effective and the SEHSCT has provided assurances that their services will remain so.

The Trust will ensure that they closely monitor all plans and their impact on an ongoing basis.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessments or assumptions have been made of the additional cost to the Ulster Hospital as a result of displacement arising from the temporary closure of the twenty beds at Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 38743/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Trust has assessed that on average, 10 to 12 patients who no longer require an acute hospital bed, but who do require a few days to complete their treatment, are transferred from Ulster Hospital to Bangor Community Hospital per week. The Ulster Hospital has put a range of measures in place to help manage this change, including:

- Using winter pressures funding to provide additional temporary beds which will address increases in winter activity;
- Piloting a frail elderly assessment facility to improve management of this group of patients through the hospital system; and
- Continuing with ongoing work to improve efficiency of both hospital and community services to deal with year on year increases in demand.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the funding consequences of the current austerity measures for the various diabetes care and support programmes; and how a common standard of service will be assured.
(AQW 38748/11-15)

Mr Wells: The increasing number of people diagnosed with diabetes presents a challenge to Health and Social Care to ensure that services are in place that support high quality treatment and care for those living with the condition. Patient education programmes, both condition-specific and generic, continue to be provided during the current year to support people with long term conditions.

Existing Diabetes services for both children and adults, such as the CHOICE structured patient education programme, will continue to be funded. In addition the HSCB has recently approved funding for a series of Integrated Care Partnership initiatives to improve care for diabetes patients across Northern Ireland. A range of initiatives is currently planned across LCG areas, including:

Diabetic and pre diabetic case finding and management in primary care in Southern Trust; and

Implementation of diabetic foot care pathway in the Western Trust.

Proposed service developments for 2015/16 and beyond will however be subject to further scrutiny and consideration in the context of their relative priority in comparison to other service proposals and the overall funding position in the next financial year.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many foot protection teams are operative in each Health and Social Care Trusts in regard to treatment for patients with diabetes; and whether there is a common standard of provision across Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38749/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are currently no dedicated foot protection teams for clients with diabetes within the HSC Trusts. Podiatrists in Northern Ireland work with clients with a wide range of conditions, including diabetes. All podiatry services follow agreed care pathways for the treatment of clients with diabetes and access to podiatry is prioritised and based on clinical need. Some podiatrists work with clients as part of a multi-disciplinary team, while others work as part of a virtual team to ensure the needs of diabetic clients are met as deemed necessary for the stage of their condition.

The headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE) numbers of podiatrists employed by each Health and Social Care Trust is shown in the table below.

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast HSC Trust	66	53.3
Northern HSC Trust	60	47.5
South Eastern HSC Trust	40	32.3
Southern HSC Trust	38	28.9
Western HSC Trust	37	32.0
Total	**241**	**194.1**

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel & Subsistence system

Notes:

1. These figures are as at 31st March 2014, and exclude bank staff, members of staff with a WTE of less than 0.03, and those on career breaks.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a complete breakdown of contingency plans spread across all Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 38752/11-15)

Mr Wells: A list of Contingency Plan proposals, put forward by each Health and Social Care Trust (excluding NI Ambulance Service) has been included in the Publications section of the Department's website which can be accessed at

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-contingency2014-15.pdf.

These lists of proposals exclude 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 Trusts' contributions to the overall Departmental savings target of £170m.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what input the Health and Social Care Board had in determining where cuts would be made in relation to implementing contingency plans across all Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 38753/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSCB (in conjunction with the PHA) has reviewed, analysed and revised as appropriate the contingency plan proposals submitted by the Trusts, prior to consideration by the Department.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an Equality Impact Assessment was conducted in relation to the contingency plans put forward by Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure the vulnerable and disadvantaged do not face discrimination.
(AQW 38754/11-15)

Mr Wells: Trusts are carrying out equality screenings on the individual local decisions within their contingency plans. Where the evidence of a screening indicates that an EQIA is necessary it will be completed in accordance with each Trust's Equality Scheme and the Equality Commission's guidance.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that recent contingency plans announced by Health and Social Care Trusts do not unduly disadvantage new applicants seeking domiciliary care packages.
(AQW 38755/11-15)

Mr Wells: Domiciliary care packages are provided on the basis of a full professional assessment of the needs of the individual, which is carried out by fully trained health and social care professionals.

Trusts are reviewing their current domiciliary care provision to ensure the highest priority needs are met within the current resources. Day to day implementation decisions will be taken based on individual assessed need and risk assessment.

Following the conclusion of the October Monitoring Round, £8m has been allocated to Transforming Your Care implementation for 2014/15. These monies will support a range of measures which will help to meet the care needs of our growing and ageing population and enhance the provision of care closer to home, and will allow HSC Trusts to sustain increases in levels of domiciliary care provided.

The safety and quality of care provided to vulnerable people remains one of my highest priorities.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the impending cuts to the Fire Service, what action he is taking to ensure that these cuts will not negatively impact on response times.
(AQW 38756/11-15)

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.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 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 38762/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total spend by this Department on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, in the last five years, is set out in the table below, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

	2013/14 £	**2012/13 £**	**2011/12 £**	**2010/11 £**	**2009/10 £**
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust(1)					
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust(1)	132,608	130,379	129,088	129,000	126,557
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	58,898	62,730	56,169	50,026	72,658
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	31,285	27,876	27,414	27,876	31,285
Western Health & Social Care Trust	88,479	77,739	60,803	61,236	58,318
Total	**311,270**	**298,724**	**273,474**	**268,138**	**288,818**

Note (1): HSCB manages the contract for both the Belfast Trust and the South Eastern Trust; figures are therefore reported together

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to publish a strategy for children's palliative care.
(AQW 38778/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department's Strategy for Children's Palliative and End-of-Life Care in Northern Ireland is in its final drafting stage, and I am aiming to publish it by the end of this year.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can provide an assurance on the future retention of Ards Fire Station.
(AQW 38796/11-15)

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 Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can provide an assurance on the retention of three fire engines in Knock Fire Station, Belfast.
(AQW 38797/11-15)

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 McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the respite services provided by each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38811/11-15)

Mr Wells: A breakdown of the respite services provided for children and young adults with learning disabilities across the five Health and Social Care Trusts is illustrated in the table below.

Annex

HSC Trust	Respite
Belfast Trust	For children: ■ 12 Respite Beds (4 for children with challenging behaviour and 8 for children with complex health care needs in the Belfast and South Eastern Trust). ■ 30 family based placements. ■ 2,760 Short Break (social experiences) sessions per annum. ■ 2,976 In-reach Short Break sessions for children with complex healthcare needs. ■ 94 Direct Payments which deliver Short Breaks. ■ 6,648 hours Crossroads Care/ Short Breaks.
	For adults: ■ Residential Home Care. ■ Nursing Home Care. ■ Domiciliary short break. ■ Day Care. ■ Direct Payments. ■ Cash Grants (one off payment). ■ Caring Breaks. ■ Families Matter.

HSC Trust	Respite
Southern Trust	■ A statutory respite facility at Woodlawn House, Dungannon which accommodates up to 8 service users at a time. The Trust also commissions an additional 12 beds from the independent sector. Flexible respite is also provided through day care and/or day opportunities; domiciliary care is provided to carers to enable the care to attend activities which they perceive as a break from caring; cash grants are provided to carers; Direct Payments; and weekend breaks. ■ Overnight short breaks are provided through Carrickore Respite Unit in Newry (8 beds x 7 nights per week), Oaklands Respite Unit Armagh (4 beds x 7 nights per week), and contracts with Barnardos to provide short breaks in Willowgrove Banbridge (4 beds x 5 nights per week). The Trust also has a Service Level Agreement with Enable NI, which provides residential activity-based week-ends for children and young people across the Trust area. ■ A family-based service is also available whereby children can go for overnight short breaks in another person's home. ■ One day care place is provided 5 days a week in Oaklands. Willowgrove provides a Saturday Link day care service for children 5 to 15 years. ■ A Service Level Agreement with Cedar Outlook Service which provides support to young people to attend local opportunities / activities. ■ Enable NI also provides a Saturday service in 3 localities throughout the year. ■ A family-based service is also available for children to go to another person's home for day care only. ■ SELB Special Schools run summer schemes in 4 schools across the Trust area. ■ Trust staff work in partnership with a range of youth clubs and summer schemes across the voluntary and community sector and local councils to successfully include children with disabilities in their youth and summer schemes. ■ Direct Payments and Self-Directed Support ■ A hospice at home respite/short break service is also provided for children and young people with life threatening and life limiting conditions. These children can also avail of in house respite in Horizon House.
South Eastern Trust	■ Lindsay House, an 8 bedded statutory facility, provides overnight breaks for children between the ages of 5 -18 with Learning Disabilities and Challenging Behaviour for both the South Eastern Trust and the Belfast Trust. The total number of nights provided in relation to South Eastern Trust is 1,493, 55% of the facility's provision. ■ Beechfield Respite Centre is a 6 bedded facility providing a short breaks service for children and young people with a learning disability and/or physical disability, including those with complex health needs, aged between 5 and 18. The Centre is contracted to provide 1,550 overnights and 176 day care places for the South Eastern Trust through a service level agreement with Praxis Care as a registered Voluntary Home.

HSC Trust	Respite
Western Trust	■ Transitional Care Unit Altnagelvin. ■ Patients' homes. ■ Schools and children's hospice. ■ Residential respite beds Avalon House, Omagh. ■ Children's Respite Cottage, Londonderry. ■ Host care provision. ■ Domiciliary Care. ■ Contracted out services also provide an element of respite; ■ Statutory Residential Respite is provided at the Adult Respite Cottage (Londonderry); Beltany House (Omagh); Melvin Lodge Lakeview. ■ In private residential and nursing homes within the Trust area. ■ Overnight and day respite is provided by 21 Host Carers. ■ Respite for individuals with complex health care needs is provided at Lakeview Hospital. ■ By Direct Payments, recurring and one-off direct payments are made directly to parents/carers within available funding.
Northern Trust	A Sharing the Care scheme provides home or family based short breaks for children with disabilities. This scheme currently has 134 approved carers, with 132 children placed for day or overnight care. Residential short breaks are provided by Whitehaven (6 beds) and Rainbow Lodge (3 beds). Whitehaven currently caters to the respite needs of 54 children, whilst Rainbow Lodge caters for 22.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can confirm that The Cottages adult respite facility in Derry City will remain operating as a residential facility.
(AQW 38812/11-15)

Mr Wells: I can confirm that the Adult Respite Cottage will remain operational as a residential respite facility for adults with a learning disability.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether care parents and carers of children with complex disabilities is a 'life-saver' to the Health Service and should have fair access to respite facilities.
(AQW 38813/11-15)

Mr Wells: I readily acknowledge the very significant role that families and carers have, along with healthcare professionals, in caring for children with complex disabilities. Clearly fair access to respite services provides a vital level of support to carers and this presently take place on the basis of individually assessed need.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety To detail the number of (i) Health Service; and (ii) privately operated care homes in East Londonderry, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38823/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not held centrally and was therefore requested from the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). Their response can be found in the table below.

Table 1. Number of Registered Cares Homes in the East Londonderry Constituency by Sector[1]

Date	Sector	Nursing Homes	Residential Care Homes	Total
Nov-12	Private	12	6	18
	Statutory	0	2	2
Nov-13	Private	12	7	19
	Statutory	0	2	2
Nov-14	Private	11	7	18
	Statutory	0	1	1

1 RQIA does not record information by parliamentary/ NI Assembly constituency area. Therefore, the breakdown provided is based on town and postcode information.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how often the Regulation Quality and Improvement Authority (RQIA) are required to complete individual inspections of private care homes; and for his assessment of the rationale behind care homes being given prior notice of impending RQIA inspections.
(AQW 38825/11-15)

Mr Wells: Under the Regulation and Improvement Authority (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, RQIA is required to conduct a minimum of two inspections in every 12 month period at nursing, residential care and children's homes. These inspections may be announced or unannounced.

Whilst the majority of RQIA's inspections are unannounced, announced inspections provide RQIA an opportunity to receive information from the service in advance of inspection, which is then validated through inspection. These also provide friends, family members, residents/patients and visiting professionals an opportunity to be present in the home during an inspection and to share their experiences of the service with the inspector.

Where RQIA is following up concerns or disclosures, including those raised by whistleblowers, the associated inspections are unannounced.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the assessment process for patients with Dementia who require to be located in a care home with Elderely Mentally Interferred provision, to ensure that they are placed in the most appropriate environment to cater for their individual needs.
(AQW 38828/11-15)

Mr Wells: All people with dementia are given a person centred assessment. Decisions relating to the most appropriate placement for an individual are based on professionally assessed need. A medical recommendation is sought from a Consultant Psychogeriatrician to decide whether the older person would need to be placed in an EMI Residential or EMI Nursing Home in order to meet their assessed needs.

Many people with dementia may be suitably placed in general nursing and residential settings and that the guiding principle is one of least restriction. Over time, people's care needs may alter and a transfer to a different setting may have to be considered. This again will be on the basis of professionally assessed need and any move will be fully discussed at a formal Care Management review with the individual and family.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasons for the cancellation of the pilot project of self-referral to physiotherapy, given its importance to Transforming Your Care.
(AQW 38836/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board is working with providers to address increasing waiting times for physiotherapy and other Allied Health Profession services. When the current waiting time challenge has been addressed, the HSCB has indicated that it will seek to immediately introduce the proposed self-referral arrangements for physiotherapy.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10910/11-15, for an update on the status of Bangor Hospital Diabetes Clinic.
(AQW 38881/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that Bangor Hospital Diabetes Clinic runs every Wednesday and alternative Thursdays. There are currently no plans to change this service.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the level of prescription drug use; and to outline the steps his Department is taking to address prescription drug addiction.
(AQW 38888/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of prescription items recorded per head of population in Primary Care in Northern Ireland is higher than in England and Scotland but is lower than the figures for Wales.

The Health and Social Care Board has put a range of measures in place to tackle prescription drug addiction. For example, the Board has established a Prescription Drug Misuse Group which was set up to share information and best practice in relation to the management of patients prescribed drugs which have the potential for abuse. Medicines Management Advisers address the issue of medicines with the potential for addiction or abuse in their regular visits to GP practices. The Board has also developed Prescribing Audits, Reviews and Guidelines to support GP practices in reducing the inappropriate prescribing of analgesics.

Each of the five Health and Social care Trusts has Community Addiction teams and substitute Prescribing Teams in place to work with patients who require support to withdraw safely from prescribed medication.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed establishment of primary care talking therapies hubs in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38889/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board is at the start of a five year plan to establish Primary Care Talking Therapies Hubs across each Trust area. The 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. The Hubs are being developed around General Practice and when fully developed will improve access to earlier support and care.

An initial investment of £1.4m has been made to support the establishment of the Hubs, which will extend the range and scope of psychological therapies available across mental health services.

A pilot in west Belfast demonstrated real benefits to this approach, and is now being rolled out across the city. All other Trusts are in the process of applying the lessons learned from this pilot in order to bring these benefits to all parts of Northern Ireland.

It is intended to strengthen the links between these developing Primary Care Talking Therapy Hubs and existing Family Support Hubs, which will create real opportunities to strengthen both family and community-based approaches to good mental health and wellbeing.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in receipt of (i) residential care packages; (ii) meals service care packages, and (iii) home help care packages, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 38890/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Information on the number of residential care packages in effect in the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust at the end of each quarter in the last three years is detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Residential Care Packages in Effect at

31 Dec 2011	31 Mar 2012	30 Jun 2012	30 Sep 2012	31 Dec 2012	31 Mar 2013	30 Jun 2013	30 Sep 2013	31 Dec 2013	31 Mar 2014	30 Jun 2014	30 Sep 2014
961	1,012	1,025	1,012	1,000	969	957	958	960	942	937	939

Source: CC7 community information return

Information on care packages is available on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/residential-nursing-care-packages.htm

(ii) Information is available on the number of persons receiving a meals on wheels service in the Northern HSC Trust at 31 March in each of the last three years, as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Persons Receiving Meals on Wheels at 31 March 1, 2

2012	2013	2014
696	565	437

Source: KMW2 community information return

1 Figures include services provided by private contractors.

2 Figures include the provision of frozen meals.

This information is published annually in the 'Statistics on Community Care for Adults in Northern Ireland' bulletin which can be found on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/meals-on-wheels.htm

(iii) It is assumed that the term home help in the question relates to domiciliary care. Information is available on the number of persons receiving domiciliary care in the Northern HSC Trust during a survey week in September in each of the last three years, as detailed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Clients Receiving Domiciliary Care during a survey week in September in

2011	2012	2013
4,231	4,623	4,778

Source: CC7b community information return

This information is published annually in the 'Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland' bulletin which can be found on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/domiciliary-care.htm

Information relating to the survey week in September 2014 will be published on 12th February 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to encourage a culture of awareness and early intervention in mental ill-health in young people, in order to promote alternatives to pharmacological interventions.
(AQW 38891/11-15)

Mr Wells: A Regional Model for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was published by my Department in 2012. It focuses on early intervention and is currently being implemented. Progress includes the recent establishment of Primary Mental Health Teams in each Trust area to promote the emotional health of children, young people and families in the community. These teams identify mental health and developmental problems in children and young people early in their development and work across boundaries to develop a coordinated response for children's mental health between agencies.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) commissions and supports a range of services to promote better mental health at an individual and community level. This activity includes the design and delivery of mental health public information campaigns, often with a focus on young people, to address mental health stigma, improve awareness of mental health issues, and encourage help seeking behaviour.

Recent investment has also been focused on the establishment of Primary Care Talking Therapy and Wellbeing Hubs across the region in order to improve access to low intensity psychological care and help deliver more effective intervention at an early stage which, in turn, should reduce reliance on pharmacological interventions.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will ensure that dementia patients with challenging behaviour will continue to be cared for at Ash Villa at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital; and that dementia patients with less challenging behaviour, or who are being assessed, will be cared for in separate but suitable accommodation within the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in line with current provision in Oak Villa.
(AQW 38896/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust have advised me that they are driving forward the reform and modernisation of their Older People's Mental Health services. The main aims of the reform programme include the prevention of unnecessary hospital admissions and maintaining older people in their home as long as possible, in keeping with both the regional Dementia Strategy and Transforming Your Care.

As part of this work, the Trust have introduced a community-based challenging behaviour service, which has led to a significant reduction in occupancy rates and demand for in-patient beds at the Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospital. On the 14th October 2014, the occupancy rate in the in-patient dementia challenging behaviour facility (Ash Villa) was 20% (4 patients and 16 vacancies).

To meet the changing needs of patients and carers, it is proposed that the Assessment Centre at Oak Villa will transfer to Ash Villa where the number of assessment beds will increase from 10 to 12 beds, with staffing levels adjusted accordingly.

Ash Villa has a more spacious environment, in keeping with dementia design principles and will improve the patient experience for those who require hospital admission.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any lessons which he may have learned from his visit to Cuba as the then Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; and whether, in his capacity as Minister, he will apply any of the lessons learned, including how to achieve better health outcomes whilst protecting front line services.
(AQW 38897/11-15)

Mr Wells: A report on the study visit to Cuba, undertaken by the then Chair and myself as Deputy Chair of the Health Committee, is contained in the Health Committee's Review of Health Inequalities report dated January 2013. This report with its nine recommendations in turn helped to inform the development of the strategic framework for public health "Making Life Better."

Whilst the broader socio- economic contexts, cultures and health systems of Northern Ireland and Cuba differ, some general comparisons with the Cuban system are reflected in the strategic direction provided by both Making Life Better and Transforming Your Care, for example – the emphasis on giving every child the best start, greater focus on prevention and early intervention, shifting services from hospitals to more treatment and support in primary care and local communities.

The health and social care system is a key health determinant, and a key lesson from Cuba is the need to maximise the potential of the front line health and social care workforce in relation to public health. This is reflected in Making Life Better which has "prevention embedded in services" as one of the key long term outcomes.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to ensure the new neonatal ward in Antrim Area Hospital meets Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority standards for infection control.
(AQW 38919/11-15)

Mr Wells: The project planning team for the new extension to the Neo Natal unit in Antrim Area Hospital has included advice and expertise from the Infection Control Nursing Team and Clinical Neonatologists. Plans for the unit have included, at all stages of the design and construction, recommendations from the Regional Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) Report following the Public Enquiry in to the spread of Pseudomonas in Belfast and Altnagelvin.

The existing unit has been, and continues to be, audited internally against these standards by the Infection Control Team and validated externally by the RQIA Hygiene Inspection Team. This RQIA audit tool provides on-going clinical and environmental standards that will be transferred to the new build.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have had a urological diagnostic biopsy procedure cancelled at the Causeway Hospital in November 2014 due to a surgeon not being available to carry out the procedure; and to detail what he is doing to address this.
(AQW 38920/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that earlier this month due to unexpected staff leave 12 diagnostic biopsy procedures were cancelled. The Trust will be advising these patients when their appointments will be rescheduled as soon as possible. The Northern Trust is currently working in partnership with the Western Trust to create further capacity for Northern Trust urology patients to avoid any future cancellations.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any changes in the Minor Aliments Scheme in the last three years.
(AQW 38924/11-15)

Mr Wells: The operation of the Minor Aliments Scheme is the responsibility of the Health and Social Care Board. I have been advised that within the last three years, the scheme has been extended to include the treatment of Cold Sores, Mouth Ulcers and Inflammation, Oral Thrush and the removal of Ear Wax.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, considering the recent report highlighting that the use of anti-depressant drugs are the highest in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK; what action his Department will take to promote alternatives to drug therapy.
(AQW 38926/11-15)

Mr Wells: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines state that psychological therapies are an effective way of managing depression and anxiety – conditions for which antidepressants are commonly prescribed. In line with this, the Psychological Therapies Strategy, published in 2010, recommended that psychological therapies should be a core component of mental health services. At present, around £6.5m is invested on dedicated psychological therapies. Recent investment has been focused on the training of existing staff in psychological therapies and the establishment of Primary Care Talking Therapies Hubs.

Primary Care Talking Therapies Hubs bring together GPs, Mental Health Clinicians and Third Sector Providers into a single service consortium. These primary care hubs will improve access to low intensity psychological care and help to deliver more effective intervention at an early stage with the aim of reducing reliance on pharmacological interventions. The HSC Board is committed to incrementally developing these hubs as a new way of working over the next three years.

It is important, however, to prevent people from developing a mental illness in the first place. Much of the work being undertaken by the Public Health Agency to promote positive mental health in childhood will help prevent the onset of mental illness in adolescence and adult life. This includes parenting programmes for vulnerable families, together with school-based interventions to promote empathy, eliminate bullying, and develop stronger mental resilience.

Finally, my Department also provides funding, through the mental health promotion and suicide prevention strategies, to provide non-pharmacological support and recovery services for people who are in psychological crisis, including a number of mental health awareness and support initiatives for young people in each Trust area.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce universal alcohol screening for people who attend appointments with healthcare professionals.
(AQW 38927/11-15)

Mr Wells: Research has shown that screening and brief interventions for alcohol misuse in healthcare settings is effective in helping individuals to reduce their consumption and harm, and therefore supporting the roll-out of these is a key outcome in my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2. The Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board lead on the implementation of this outcome and they have indicated that, rather than a universal programme of screening, international best practice is now indicating that targeted approaches are more effective.

I have already put in place a clinical priority for the provision of brief interventions for alcohol misuse in Primary Care settings. This has led to almost 80,000 people being screened for alcohol misuse in 2012/13 and 2013/14, and those that are identified as having a problem are then provided with a brief intervention or referral to appropriate services.

My Department is also supporting the roll-out of Substance Misuse Liaison Services in acute hospitals. These help to identify those who attend with conditions that are not necessarily alcohol related but where substance misuse is the underlying

cause and provide them with appropriate support to change their behaviours. It is anticipated that the additional funding for this service will enable work to be undertaken on screening within Emergency Departments, although the budget position is limiting potential roll-out.

All pregnant women are asked about alcohol intake at their booking clinic and given advice regarding alcohol in pregnancy. If a woman reveals excess alcohol consumption she will be referred to the appropriate services. The Public Health Agency is also developing a screening and brief intervention programme in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and this is expected to begin in early 2015.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the policy on vacancy control in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 38932/11-15)

Mr Wells: Recruitment matters and associated policies are the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts, as employers.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that all vacant posts require to be examined in light of the current financial position. All posts assessed as business critical will be approved and will be processed through normal recruitment, all other posts will either be delayed or remain unfilled.

The Trust has provided an assurance that in all circumstances it will prioritise the filling of vacancies to ensure that patient/client care is not compromised.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average bed occupancy rate in (i) Ards Community Hospital; and (ii) Bangor Community Hospital, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38933/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the average bed occupancy rate in Ards Community Hospital and Bangor Community Hospital is published on an annual basis in the Northern Ireland Hospital Statistics: Inpatient and Day Case Activity publication (Table 2a) and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/hospital-activity/inpatient-and-day-case-activity.htm

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many jobs have been filled by the South Eastern Health Trust in each of the last twelve months, broken down by (i) Administrative and non-medical jobs; and (ii) medical jobs.
(AQW 38934/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is shown in the table below. Please note that the 'jobs filled' column includes appointees, promotees and those appointed from waiting lists.

	Number of posts filled (medical)	Number of posts filled (non-medical)
Nov-13	1	40
Dec-13	1	15
Jan-13	5	90
Feb-14	6	49
Mar-14	3	84
Apr-14	1	32
May-14	7	127
Jun-14	0	40
Jul-14	6	28
Aug-14	3	24
Sep-14	0	3
Oct-14	0	0
Total	**33**	**532**

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many job vacancies have occurred in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last twelve months, broken down by (i) administrative or non-medical jobs; and (ii) medical jobs.
(AQW 38935/11-15)

Mr Wells: The numbers of medical and non-medical posts advertised in each of the last twelve months are shown in the table below.

	Number of Medical Posts advertised	Number of Non-Medical Posts advertised
Nov-13	3	20
Dec-13	0	15
Jan-13	3	14
Feb-14	7	37
Mar-14	5	28
Apr-14	5	30
May-14	5	44
Jun-14	7	39
Jul-14	11	26
Aug-14	7	50
Sep-14	7	35
Oct-14	10	21
Total	**70**	**359**

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) when he sought Executive agreement to commission and fund the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to develop an e-safety strategy and action plan; (ii) what response he has received; and (iii) what deadline he has set for implementation to commence.
(AQW 38953/11-15)

Mr Wells: In accordance with the protocol governing the confidentiality of Executive business, I am unable to respond to the questions asked. I look forward to progress on this issue shortly.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the training provided to Emergency Department staff in recognising the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.
(AQW 38956/11-15)

Mr Wells: There is no specific training for Emergency Department staff with regard to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, as part of professional development, staff working in Emergency Departments can access a number of courses relating to Mental Health, including the provision of psychological care for people with PTSD.

If an acute episode occurs during a patient's attendance at an Emergency Department the action taken will include consultation with colleagues in Mental Health and referral to Mental Health teams for further assessment and follow-up.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of the significant demand for, and usage of, palliative care beds at Tyrone County Hospital; and whether his Department will intervene to ensure that the number of palliative care beds will be retained at ten and not reduced to six.
(AQW 38976/11-15)

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 a range of contingency proposals to achieve financial break even. Each Trust has provided assurances that their services will remain safe and effective.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that its decision to temporarily reduce the number of beds in the palliative care ward in Tyrone County Hospital from ten to six reflects current usage.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the financial commitment his Department will undertake in relation to implementing the recommendations in the Marshall Report.
(AQW 38982/11-15)

Mr Wells: A Response Team is being established to consider the recommendations from the Marshall report in detail. As part of that consideration, I have asked for an assessment of the cost of delivering those recommendations, which relate to Health and Social Care.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has entered into discussions with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to determine the likelihood of temporary reductions in services at Downe Hospital becoming permanent; and if so, for an assessment of his findings.
(AQW 39021/11-15)

Mr Wells: There has been ongoing dialogue between officials of my Department and the South Eastern Trust since the Trust announced it's contingency plans, which includes the reduction in beds at Downe Hospital. The contingency plans are to apply until the end of March 2015. In the interim consideration will be given to plans for 2015/2016 in the context of the overall budgetary position.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Western Health and Social Care Trust is conducting a consultation on the proposed redesign of older people's mental health inpatient and day care services in the southern sector, when staff were informed on 18 November 2014 that the Ash Ward is closing on 7 December 2014, regardless of the consultation.
(AQW 39051/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised me that the consultation document for staff affected by the proposed redesign of older people's mental health services includes a proposed date of 7th December 2014 for change of use for Ash Villa.

As this consultation process does not close until 3rd December 2014, the Western Trust cannot make any further comment until after this time.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, since admissions ceased at Dalriada Hospital, how many extra beds have been used at (i) Causeway Hospital; and (ii) Altnagelvin Area Hospital; and to detail the extra cost these admissions have entailed compared to if they had been admitted to Dalriada Hospital.
(AQW 39052/11-15)

Mr Wells: It has not been possible to identify how many extra beds have been used at (i) Causeway Hospital or (ii) Altnagelvin Area Hospital since admissions ceased at Dalriada. However, we do know that there have been no patients transferred from Dalriada Hospital to either Causeway Hospital or Altnagelvin Area Hospital since 1st November 2014.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when local charities will receive outstanding infrastructural funding.
(AQW 39072/11-15)

Mr Wells: Due to financial pressures, the allocation of core funding made to voluntary and community organisations earlier this year has been less than had been allocated in previous years. The interim letter of offer made it clear that any additional funding depended on the absence of any other constraint, whether of a policy, financial or other nature.

Now that the budget for 2014/15 is agreed, I hope to be able to make and communicate a final decision on core grant funding to voluntary and community sector organisations shortly.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any plans for the future of Slievemore Nursing Unit in Derry.
(AQW 39083/11-15)

Mr Wells: My predecessor asked the Western Trust to engage in a mediation process with the families of patients in 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 ongoing and to maintain the confidentiality of discussions between the Trust and patients' families, I am unable to comment further until the process is complete.

I understand that the Trust will make a statement about the outcome of this process in due course.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of how budget constraints will impact the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS); and what communication he has had with the NIFRS regarding the constraints.
(AQW 39093/11-15)

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% .

NIFRS has been asked to risk assess and prioritise their savings proposals to minimise the impact on service delivery.

My officials are engaged in ongoing communications with NIFRS.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of recorded incidences in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) East Londonderry, which have been attended by the Fire and Rescue Service, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 39094/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of mobilisations by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue in Northern Ireland and East Londonderry in each of the last three years was:

	Northern Ireland	East Londonderry
2013/14	24,049	1,186
2012/13	24,308	1,232
2011/12	27,150	1,478

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the use of electronic cigarettes; and to detail what impact the growing use of electronic cigarettes is having on the prevalence of smoking of traditional cigarettes.
(AQW 39108/11-15)

Mr Wells: There have been relatively few studies into the health effects of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and those studies that have been undertaken have provided inconsistent and contradictory results. Furthermore, due to the relatively recent development and use of e-cigarettes, there are no research findings on their long-term health impact. Therefore, no firm conclusions can be drawn on the safety of these products and they cannot be regarded as safe, even though they may be less harmful than tobacco cigarettes.

The e-cigarette market is currently unregulated; this is a concern because the use of those products could cause nicotine addiction in children. Consequently, to prevent children and young people from accessing these products, my Department has included provisions in the draft Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which will provide regulation-making powers to prohibit the sale of e-cigarettes to under 18s.

There are currently around 2.1 million e-cigarette users in the UK. The first results of the 2013/14 Northern Ireland Health Survey show that one-third (33%) of current smokers or recent ex-smokers had used e-cigarettes. Of those respondents, 12% said that e-cigarettes had helped them to quit smoking, while 44% used them to reduce the number of traditional cigarettes smoked.

However, the evidence remains clear that a combination of specialist smoking cessation services and licensed nicotine replacement therapy is the most effective means of quitting smoking.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) when; and (ii) how he became aware of each Health and Social Care Trust's financial contingency plan for the remainder of 2014/2015.
(AQW 39109/11-15)

Mr Wells: 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 Health and Social Care Trusts on 27 October.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why dementia care was downgraded in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital.
(AQW 39149/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised me they are driving forward the reform and modernization of their Older People's Mental Health Services. The main aims of the reform programme include the prevention of unnecessary hospital admissions and maintaining older people in their home as long as possible in keeping with both the Regional Dementia Strategy and Transforming Your Care.

An alternative community based challenging behaviour service which has been in place in the southern sector of the Trust since June 2012 has led to a significant reduction for the need for inpatient beds.

To meet the changing needs of patients and carers, it is proposed that the Assessment Centre at Oak Villa will transfer to Ash Villa where the number of assessment beds will increase from 10 to 12, with staffing levels adjusted accordingly.

Ash Villa has a more spacious environment, in keeping with dementia design principles and will improve the patient experience for those who require hospital admission.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) patients who are booked in to the MS Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital from January to March 2015, whether their bookings are secure; and to clarify what is deemed a new admission.
(AQW 39308/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust advise that for those patients who had already been booked in for respite care at the MS Respite Centre after the temporary closure of the unit, suitable alternative arrangements are being identified. These include the use of direct payments, local independent sector provision for individuals, or local bed-based group provision to facilitate groups of friends. In-reach services provided to service users whilst they receive respite at Dalriada, such as podiatry, dentistry, and physiotherapy will continue to be provided in the alternative setting decided upon.

There will be no new admissions to the MS Respite centre itself after 30 November 2014 however respite services to MS patients will continue to be provided and everyone who requires respite will receive it.

Department of Justice

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of staff employed in his Department broken down by grade; and (ii) the total salary for each grade, for each financial year since 1 April 2010.
(AQW 35513/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am writing to correct an error contained in my answer of 19 September 2014 to an Assembly question which you tabled in relation to the number of staff employed in my Department broken down by grade, namely AQW/35513/11-15. Our response referred to 2471.43 staff in the DOJ and its Agencies at 12 April 2010. This should have read 2372.93 staff.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice how much it costs to have a PSNI presence at the Short Strand, Belfast.
(AQW 38608/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI has advised that officers are policing the East Belfast interface on a nightly basis, but has not been able to provide a cost breakdown in the allocated timeframe. At present, however, the area is covered each evening by one sergeant and five constables. That is being kept under review and can fluctuate depending on the circumstances.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37316/11-16 whether he will investigate this further and raise the matter with the Public Prosecution Service and the PSNI with a view to establishing how much income in total was gained, including what was paid by those to whom the workers were suppled.
(AQW 38642/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is clear to me from the exchanges I have had with the PSNI and the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority that the issue of income and assets was considered.

A meeting took place on 20 November between my Department, PSNI, Gangmasters Licensing Authority and the Public Prosecution Service to discuss a range of general issues relating to this type of case.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how a person deemed dangerous under the 2008 NI Act is managed and monitored in the community; (ii) how their management differs from non-dangerous categorised offenders; and (iii) which agencies are involved in monitoring and management, including who takes the lead role.
(AQW 38644/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offenders sentenced under provisions in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 are supervised on release by Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) in accordance with the offender's licence requirements.

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.

Those who have been convicted of offences which meet the eligibility criteria for assessment and risk management under the multi –agency Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI), are also assessed and reviewed by the Local Area Public Protection Panels which may comprise agencies listed in Article 49(1) of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

In those PPANI cases, PBNI will remain as the lead agency until the expiry of the licence period. If, at that point, an individual continues to be subject to sex offender notification or Sexual Offences Prevention Order requirements, PSNI will become the lead agency for ongoing risk management.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many new intake prison officers were employed in each month of the last two years.
(AQW 38647/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total number of new prison grade staff employed in the last two years is 331 broken down as follows:

Month Appointed	Custody Prisoner Officer	Prisoner Custody Officer	Custody Prisoner Officer	Prisoner Custody Officer
	2012/2013		2013/2014	
November	60	-	-	-
December	-	-	-	20
January	39	-	-	20
February	42	-	-	18
March	20	-	-	8
April	19	-	-	-
May	34	-	-	-
June	15	-	-	-
July	-	-	-	-
August	-	-	-	-
September	-	-	-	-
October	-	36	-	-
Totals	**229**	**36**		**66**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.
(AQW 38654/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice does not have an Equality Unit. Statutory and other equality responsibilities and duties are co-ordinated for the DOJ by the Information Services Division. The DOJ's Personnel and Office Services Division leads on diversity for the Department. Equality issues will also feature in day to day HR operational matters. Equality and diversity issues are therefore delivered by a number of staff alongside other duties. An estimated figure of £40k per year would cover the staffing costs to deliver on our equality commitments.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice how many ex-serving soldiers are currently serving prison sentences in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38684/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently four sentenced prisoners in custody, who have self -declared their previous occupation, recorded on the Prison Record Information System as "Protective Service – Armed Forces". The system does not record whether or not the prisoners are ex serving soldiers.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) his Department; and (ii) each of his Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38700/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into existence on the 12 April 2010 and information can only be provided from this date.

The information requested can be found in the table attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Number of full time equivalent staff employed in Department of Justice, Agencies and Arms Length Bodies since 12 April 2010

Organisation	Number of FTE Staff at 12 April 2010*	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2011	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2012	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2013	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2014
DOJ and Agencies*	2372.93	2326.50			
DOJ Core			527.06	545.96	521.59
NI Prison Service			447.41	455.73	434.97
NI Prison Service – Prison Grades	1853.29	1775.99	1516.36	1501.2	1465.72

Organisation	Number of FTE Staff at 12 April 2010*	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2011	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2012	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2013	Number of FTE Staff at 1 April 2014
NI Courts & Tribunal Service			693.56	707.39	689.87
Forensic Service NI			200.6	196.62	218.41
Youth Justice Agency			328.84	332.1	316.46
Compensation Agency**			62.1	N/a	N/a
Criminal Justice Inspection NI	15	15	15	14	13.2
NI Legal Services Commission	156	158	153	142	137
NI Law Commission	13.4	13.2	15.2	11	8.3
State Pathologist's Department	12	13	12	11	12
PSNI (Support Staff)	2436.75	2421.5	2387.25	2382.75	2361.25
PSNI (Regular Officers)	7311	7195.25	7137.75	6944	6762.75
PSNI (Full time Reserve)	382	224			
PSNI (Police Officers Part Time)	703	650	580	535	499
NI Policing Board	55	55	50	46	45
Office of the Police Ombudsman ***	142	144.2	135	154	147.9
Probation Board NI	409.04	404.36	394.43	412.69	386.19
NI Police Fund	4.46	4.46	4.46	4.06	4.05
RUC George Cross Foundation	2	2	2	2	2
Police Rehabilitation & Retraining Trust	54.9	56.5	56.5	42.6	38.7
Independent Assessor for PSNI Recruitment Vetting	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Monitoring Board	0	0	0	0	0
NIPS Sports Association	1	1	1	1	1
Prisoner Ombudsman	Counted in core figures.				

* Breakdown of DOJ & Agency staff not available at 12 April 2010 or 1 April 2011.

** Compensation Agency became part of DOJ Core on 1 April 2013.

*** This includes staff in the Historical Investigations Directorate.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the Sexual Offences Prevention Orders terms imposed on John McDermott following his release from prison and sex offender categorisation.
(AQW 38709/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Data Protection Act 1998 gives individuals certain rights in relation to personal information held on them by public authorities. The information regarding sex offender classification cannot be provided as disclosure of sensitive personal data would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders (SOPOs) are civil orders applied for to the court by police. Information about SOPOs is therefore a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to date in legal aid in respect of the case of 14/10965 at Dungannon Crown Court and formerly at Dungannon Magistrates Court, including any mixed committal proceedings, broken down by solicitor and counsel.
(AQW 38710/11-15)

Mr Ford: Case 14/10965 does not refer to a case listed in Dungannon Crown Court. It appears that the appropriate case is 14/109656.

To date, no costs have been paid in respect of the Crown Court proceedings.

In respect of the magistrates' court proceedings, a total of £2,998.14 has been paid to five solicitors. Whilst legal aid was extended to allow representation by junior counsel at the magistrates' court, no costs have yet been paid. Legal aid was granted to a total of nine separate solicitors and nine junior counsel were instructed in the course of the proceedings in the magistrates' court.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice (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 38737/11-15)

Mr Ford: The percentage of cash Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) spent on salaries, including national insurance and pension costs, in the Department of Justice in 2013-14 was 71.4%. This includes Executive Agencies but excludes Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies. Judicial salaries and temporary agency staff costs are included in the calculation.

An exercise has been commissioned across the Core Department and its four agencies in relation to paybill budget reductions and associated reductions in posts and people. In addition to asking for robust estimates of anticipated staff surpluses by grade and the timescales for staff to be released to inform planning for a Northern Ireland Civil Service wide voluntary exit scheme, a number of other measures are also being carefully considered. The measures include permanent suppression of funded vacancies, postponement of recruitment and promotion and reduction of overtime costs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37422/11-15, whether he will bring forward legislation to revise the criteria for leave to proceed with a judicial review, particularly given the costs in legal aid, and with closer scrutiny paid to the validity of a case at the earliest possible stage in proceedings in all instances.
(AQW 38780/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no plans to revise the criteria for leave to proceed with judicial review, which are set by both statute and case law. It is for the judge dealing with the application to scrutinise the validity of the leave application and whether the applicant has presented an arguable case.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many new intake prison officers have (i) resigned; (ii) been dismissed; and (iii) gone on long term sick leave, in each month of the last two years.
(AQW 38781/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total number of Custody Prison Officers (CPO) and Prisoner Custody Officers (PCO) who have resigned in the last 24 months is 64.

Three CPO's were dismissed and 91 CPO's and PCO's have been on long term sickness absence during the last two years.

The table below details the sickness absence and resignation figures for the period between 1 November 2012 and 31 October 2014.

Date November 12 – October 14	CPO		CPO		PCO		PCO	
	No. Resigned		No. commenced long term sickness absence		No Resigned		No. commenced long term sickness absence	
	12/13	13/14	12/13	13/14	12/13	13/14	12/13	13/14
November	3	2	0	7	0	0	0	0
December	0	5	1	2	0	0	0	0
January	1	3	0	7	0	2	0	0
February	2	0	1	4	0	0	0	1
March	0	4	1	8	0	0	0	1
April	0	6	0	3	0	0	0	0
May	5	3	1	7	0	1	0	0
June	0	5	0	6	0	0	0	1
July	4	3	5	12	0	1	0	1
August	0	3	2	6	0	0	0	1
September	2	6	4	5	0	0	0	1

Date November 12 – October 14	CPO		CPO		PCO		PCO	
	No. Resigned		No. commenced long term sickness absence		No Resigned		No. commenced long term sickness absence	
	12/13	13/14	12/13	13/14	12/13	13/14	12/13	13/14
October	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0

* Absences lasting 20 working days or more are considered to be long term

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the seizure and forfeit of an uninsured vehicle goes along with court penalties and not instead of reduced penalties or as financial mitigation toward these penalties.
(AQW 38782/11-15)

Mr Ford: Police powers to seize uninsured vehicles and court powers to deal with the offence of driving without insurance are separate provisions in law. Police may seize an offender's vehicle where proof of insurance cannot be provided and may issue an endorsable fixed penalty notice. If a vehicle is seized and a fixed penalty notice issued then the offender must pay the release fee (if the offender wishes the vehicle to be returned) as well as the fixed penalty sum.

Alternatively the offence can be prosecuted in Court. Driving without insurance attracts a sentence of between 6 and 8 penalty points; a fine of up to £5000; and/or 6 months imprisonment on summary conviction, with a discretionary disqualification from driving.

If a vehicle has been seized the release fee does not reduce the fixed penalty sum nor any fine imposed by the Court.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Justice 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 38804/11-15)

Mr Ford: Expenditure on interpreting services is not always recorded in a way that makes it possible to separate potential sign language expenditure from other interpreting expenditure without incurring disproportionate cost.

Identified expenditure on interpreting services for the Department of Justice (DOJ) including its Executive Agencies but excluding its Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies since its formation in April 2010 is shown in the table below.

The table also includes the amounts recouped from the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) under a scheme called 'Access to Work'. This scheme provides financial support to enable people with disabilities to gain work or remain in employment. Under the scheme the DOJ can recover the costs of sign language interpreters from DEL.

Financial Year	Spend £	Recouped from DEL £	Net Spend £
2010/11	14,573	(6,945)	7,628
2011/12	19,041	(3,638)	15,403
2012/13	19,644	(3,995)	15,649
2013/14	8,269	(840)	7,429
Total	**61,527**	**(15,418)**	**46,109**

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice what information his Department holds on the number of illegal immigrants convicted in local courts of criminal offences; and what liaison his Department maintains with the Immigration Office on the illegal immigrants that are subsequently deported.
(AQW 38817/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prosecution and conviction datasets held by the Department of Justice do not currently contain information in relation to the immigration status of the defendant.

The deportation of illegal immigrants is a reserved matter and as such my Department does not have any liaison with United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) on this issue.

UKVI is, however, represented on the Immigration and Human Trafficking sub-group of the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) and the Department does maintain close liaison with UKVI in the context of the work of that sub-group, whose main focus is tackling human trafficking.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people, including young people, have been categorised as dangerous as per the 2008 NI Act; and to list each conviction that led to this categorisation.
(AQW 38834/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since the commencement of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 there have been 31 indeterminate custodial sentences and 200 extended custodial sentences on the basis of the dangerousness of the offender.

Across the same period, four discretionary, and 71 mandatory life sentences have also been imposed.

Provision of information on the charges relating to each of these convictions would incur disproportionate costs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the reasons for the bar on an appeal of the sentence handed to Dwayne Mullan.
(AQW 38843/11-15)

Mr Ford: Section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 allows the Director of Public Prosecutions to seek leave from the Court of Appeal to review a sentence as being unduly lenient.

The legislation applies to cases in which sentences have been passed on people convicted of offences heard only on indictment (that is, by a Judge and jury at the Crown Court); or cases in which sentences have been passed on people convicted of other offences specified in orders under section 35 of the 1988 Act.

I am in the process of reviewing the legislation in this area and plan to issue a consultation document in the New Year.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37161/11-15, to provide a copy of any reports on this matter, or place a copy in the Assembly Library.
(AQW 38849/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Youth Justice Agency is currently reviewing this case and is due to report to me shortly. Following this, I will write to you regarding this matter.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice whether he was (i) aware of; and (ii) gave permission for the contract by which drug testing is conducted in prisons was continued beyond its expected end date of September 2013.
(AQW 38872/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of the drug testing contract was a matter for the Scottish Prison Service. NIPS was informed of the contract extension and was agreeable to this. This contract has now been issued for re-tender.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice when Section 30 of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 will be implemented.
(AQO 7053/11-15)

Mr Ford: I remain keen to give effect to the will of the Assembly that, under Section 30 of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, police widows remarrying after 1 January 1989 should retain, or have reinstated, their pensions.

My officials are continuing to work to urgently resolve some outstanding matters, including eligibility, financial implications and affordability. While I am not yet in a position to give a definite timescale for resolution, I am working with a view to commencing payments at the very earliest opportunity.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the use of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy.
(AQO 7054/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Royal Prerogative of Mercy is an ancient power originally exercised by the reigning monarch to enable the withdrawal of the death penalty, but today Government Ministers exercise the prerogative to show mercy towards an offender by mitigating or removing the consequences of his conviction by way of ‘pardon’.

I have not used the Royal Prerogative.

Generally requests may be made by prisoners who believe they are wrongly convicted. The use of the prerogative would only be a real possibility if new evidence came to light which demonstrated conclusively that a prisoner did not commit the offence and if the criminal justice system itself failed to deliver a just outcome in those circumstances.

Any modern use in such cases would more than likely come on the advice of the Criminal Cases Review Commission, which is empowered by section 16 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 to recommend the use of the prerogative or to respond to requests from me on issues relating to it.

Prisoners may also request a remission pardon to reduce their sentence, perhaps due to a mistake surrounding their release date. In such cases I would weigh a duty to ensure the full completion of every sentenced prisoner’s term of imprisonment against the reasonable expectations of each individual prisoner and his family.

Relevant factors would include the length of time the prisoner was misled as to his release date, the length of time by which a sentence would be reduced if the prerogative was granted and the plans he and his family had made based on the original release date.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice what savings will be realised annually by closing Holywood PSNI station to the public.
(AQW 39156/11-15)

Mr Ford: Management of the police budget and police estate are operational matters and therefore the responsibility of the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Policing Board. I must respect the operational autonomy and independence of the Chief Constable.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, for an update on the answer to AQO 6558/11-15, in light of any legal advice received.
(AQW 37158/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department has received legal advice on this issue. My Department will continue to inspect roads and footways as per the normal inspection regime and defects will be recorded as normal. However, due to the current financial constraints, defects may not be repaired as quickly as normal with repairs being prioritised on the basis of safety.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what cash reserves are held by the Belfast Port Authority.
(AQW 38169/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Belfast Harbour Commissioners indicate a current cash balance of £10 million. It is anticipated that this money will fund a number of Harbour development schemes, subject to Board approval.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether signage must be in place to highlight fixed speed detection cameras.
(AQW 38266/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There is no legal requirement to place signage to indicate that speed cameras are ahead.

However, the current practice is to provide signs for reasons of visibility, to give motorists the opportunity to slow down and observe the speed limits at the locations in question. This is in line with the overall intention of providing safety cameras, which is to change driver behaviour by reducing speed and thereby reducing the number and severity of collisions.

Where signs are provided, they must either comply with the Traffic Signs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997, or be authorised for use in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of compensation claims for (i) personal injury; and (ii) damage to motor vehicles in the last ten years.
(AQW 38277/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the cost of compensation for (i) personal injury: and (ii) damage to motor vehicles, in the last ten years, are set out in the table below:

	Personal Injury	**Vehicle Damage**
2004/2005	£1,567K	£154K
2005/2006	£1,629K	£162K
2006/2007	£1,332K	£136K
2007/2008	£1,942K	£136K
2008/2009	£1,635K	£166K
2009/2010	£1,674K	£215K
2010/2011	£1,921K	£314K
2011/2012	£1,926K	£345K
2012/2013	£1,882K	£128K
2013/2014	£2,084K	£231K

	Personal Injury	Vehicle Damage
Total	**£17,590K**	**£1,987K**

The amount of expenditure paid in any specific year does not necessarily relate to claims received in that year, as there may be a time delay between the date a claim is received and the date it is settled.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to resurface roads in (a) Silverstream Crescent; (b) Silverstream Drive; and (c) Silverstream Avenue, Bangor.
(AQW 38345/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Unfortunately, my Department's programme of works has been curtailed due to budgetary constraints arising from the outcome of the June and October monitoring process which is administered by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Whilst Silverstream Crescent, Silverstream Drive and Silverstream Avenue, Bangor are not currently included in my Department's 2014/15 resurfacing programme for the North Down area, this programme may be subject to change if additional funding becomes available.

Should additional funding become available, my officials will continue to assess the relative priority of these locations alongside others when identifying schemes to be brought forward into the works programme.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what additional preparations have been made in advance of any exceptionally severe weather this winter to ensure smooth traffic flow on the salted road network.
(AQW 38547/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is well prepared for the coming winter. All salt stocks have been replenished, staffing arrangements are in place and pre-season checks on all winter service equipment have been undertaken. TransportNI has approximately 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads and contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

In addition, my Department holds an additional resilience salt stock of around 50,000 tonnes, at strategic locations as a contingency against prolonged spells of severe wintry weather. My Department has also enhanced its contractual arrangements to increase the supplementary stocks of salt available during the winter period, if necessary.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) why employees within NI Water, who were moved from the Civil Service, have not yet had their equal pay claims met; (ii) how many staff are affected; and (iii) why resolution of their claims is being linked to the NIO/PSNI/DOJ issue.
(AQW 38593/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by NI Water that (i) qualifying NI Water employees have had equal pay claims settled and paid during 2013 following completion of negotiations with NIPSA, and (ii) NI Water has settled with 298 former and existing employees. In reference to (iii), there is no direct link to the NIO/PSNI/DOJ issue.

You will be aware that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has circulated a paper to Executive colleagues in which he has outlined a recommendation which, if agreed by the Executive, will result in a successful resolution for the PSNI/NIO staff excluded from the NICS Equal Pay settlement.

This has not yet been considered by the Executive.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many disabled parking bays there are in North Down.
(AQW 38637/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently 98 accessible parking bays in North Down.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any road safety reports or assessments that his Department has commissioned or produced on the A29.
(AQW 38640/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials have carried out assessments on the A29 Armagh Keady Road, at the locations listed below, as part of normal reviews of collision data received from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, or in response to representations:

- Bachelors Walk junction
- Dundrum Road/Tassagh Church Hall
- Girvan's Bridge
- Beechill/Ballyards
- No.119 Keady Road

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any road safety concerns over the A29 that were raised with his Department over the last six years.
(AQW 38641/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has received representations and taken the following actions at the locations listed below on the A29 Armagh Keady Road in the last 6 years:

Year	Location	Action Taken
2009	Bachelors Walk junction	Additional signs provided.
2012	Dundrum Road/Tassagh Church Hall	Road realignment scheme completed.
2012	Girvan's Bridge	Additional chevron signs, high visibility bend warning signs and edge of carriageway studs provided.
2012	Beechill/Ballyards	A technical review was carried out which indicated that any potential improvement scheme would be significant in terms of cost. Additional high visibility warning signs with reduce speed now plates were then provided. A request to reduce the speed limit was assessed but did not accord with current policy. Details of concerns about speeding were passed on to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.
2013	Bachelors Walk junction	Road widened, superelevation improved, carriageway markings and road studs provided.
2013	119 Keady Road	Request for vehicle restraint received and assessed but relevant criteria not met.
2014	200 Keady Road	Commitment given to review and assess this location.

I would also advise that reviews of the route are carried out as and when collision data is received from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what replanting scheme is planned to replace hedgerows and native trees removed during the current A8 dual carriageway project.
(AQW 38645/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The replanting for the A8 Dual Carriageway scheme includes new and replacement hedgerows, trees and shrubs. The purpose of this planting is to integrate the scheme into the landscape and to provide visual mitigation, where appropriate.

The hedgerow specification follows the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's guidance and, as of mid-November 2014, approximately 20,000 linear metres of the total anticipated 54,000 linear metres of hedgerow had been planted.

In addition, a mixture of native woodland and shrub planting will be provided along the scheme.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38668/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: No Northern Ireland Civil Service employee in my Department, paid on either the Industrial or Non-Industrial pay scales, earns less than £7.20 per hour.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development when he first became aware of any significant increase in the anticipated expenditure, beyond the £22m estimate, in relation to the passing loop provision on the Londonderry to Coleraine railway line.
(AQW 38728/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I outlined in my statement to the Assembly on 3 November 2014 and in my responses to the Committee for Regional Development on 12 November and at Oral Question Time on 18 November 2014, my Department was alerted to the situation regarding escalation in the cost estimates for Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Londonderry project at the end of June 2014. That was confirmed in late July by the Translink board. In early August I commissioned a special review, or project assessment review (PAR), which was completed during September. Its recommendations were made available to me by the end of September, and I had to conclude on those and agree necessary actions with Translink. We were then in a position to inform the House which I did in my statement of 3 November.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development what strategies have been put in place by his Department to address the transport needs of people with a disability, to enable full participation within the community.
(AQW 38732/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department published the Accessible Transport Strategy in 2005. This is a 10 year strategy to address barriers to older people and people with disabilities in using public transport and in travelling.

The Strategy has been implemented via a series of Action Plans, the fourth and latest of which covers the period 2012-2015.

I am committed to bringing forward a new Accessible Transport Strategy and work has already started to engage with representatives of the age and disability stakeholders in developing this.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria used to determine installing a dropped kerb.
(AQW 38740/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Dropped kerbs, along with appropriate tactile paving, are provided at all at-grade crossing points in all new works including footway resurfacing/reconstruction schemes.

On existing footways where new works, including maintenance, are not planned, provision of crossing points and graded access can be considered as part of a pedestrian route strategy.

Dropped kerbs are also provided along with general on-street accessible parking bays to allow wheelchair users to move from the footway to the carriageway in the vicinity of their vehicle. Blue Badge Holders, who have had an application for an accessible parking bay outside or near to their home approved, can also request a dropped kerb. This will be considered where the applicant is dependent upon the use of a wheelchair and there are no other dropped kerbs in the vicinity or, exceptionally, where an applicant, who is not dependent on the use of a wheelchair, can provide evidence of severe mobility difficulty.

Requests for dropped kerbs or graded pedestrian accesses, which are not covered by the above, will only be provided after assessing the level of provision in the general vicinity and where it is considered that a number of people would benefit from such provision.

Fuller details of the Department's approach to providing dropped kerbs can be viewed by accessing our 'Provision of Dropped Kerb' policy document via the following link http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=9159

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development what factors officials in Transport NI considered prior to the commencement of the current road works on Sandown Road, Belfast, due to conclude at the end of November 2014.
(AQW 38745/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: When assessing any street, including Sandown Road, for resurfacing, a number of criteria are taken into consideration. These include the general condition of the existing surfaces, the volume and nature of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, enquiries from members of the public and elected representatives, and public liability claims.

When planning the works, my officials will consider what traffic management arrangements are most appropriate and how each element of the scheme is to be programmed and implemented. This is done in liaison with the appointed contractor, the PSNI and other service providers, such as Translink and the statutory utility companies. In addition, they write to the residents in the area that are likely to be affected by the works. Traffic management arrangements are also updated on the Trafficwatchni website and details are provided to the media.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Regional Development how many light bulbs for street lights are currently stockpiled in the Western Division.
(AQW 38761/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's TransportNI currently has 1,214 bulbs (lamps) in stock within the Western Division area.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of parking tickets issued in the vicinity of the Clogher livestock mart, Co. Tyrone, on each Saturday in the last twelve months.
(AQW 38816/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are three locations in Clogher where Parking restrictions are enforced, only two of which Station Road and Tullybroom Road, are in the vicinity of the livestock market.

During the period 1 November 2013 to 31 October 2014, there were 28 Penalty Charge Notices issued on Station Road, and 22 on Tullybroom Road. More detailed analysis is set out in the table below.

	PCNs Issued			PCNs Issued	
Saturdays	**Station Road**	**Tullybroom Road**	**Saturdays**	**Station Road**	**Tullybroom Road**
2 Nov 2013	0	0	3 May 2014*	0	0

Saturdays	PCNs Issued		Saturdays	PCNs Issued	
	Station Road	Tullybroom Road		Station Road	Tullybroom Road
9 Nov 2013*	0	0	10 May 2014	0	0
16 Nov 2013*	9	8	17 May 2014	0	0
23 Nov 2013	0	0	24 May 2014	0	0
30 Nov 2013	0	0	31 May 2014*	0	0
7 Dec 2013*	0	0	7 Jun 2014*	0	0
14 Dec 2013	0	0	14 Jun 2014	0	0
21 Dec 2013	0	0	21 Jun 2014	0	0
28 Dec 2013	0	0	28 Jun 2014*	1	0
4 Jan 2014	0	0	5 Jul 2014	0	0
11 Jan 2014*	0	0	12 Jul 2014	0	0
18 Jan 2014*	2	3	19 Jul 2014	0	0
25 Jan 2014	0	0	26 Jul 2014	0	0
1 Feb 2014	0	0	2 Aug 2014	0	0
8 Feb 2014*	7	3	9 Aug 2014	0	0
15 Feb 2014*	0	0	16 Aug 2014*	0	0
22 Feb 2014	0	0	23 Aug 2014	0	0
1 Mar 2014	0	0	30 Aug 2014	0	0
8 Mar 2014*	0	0	6 Sep 2014	0	0
15 Mar 2014	0	0	13 Sep 2014	0	0
22 Mar 2014	0	0	20 Sep 2014	0	0
29 Mar 2014	0	0	27 Sep 2014*	4	3
5 Apr 2014*	5	3	4 Oct 2014	0	0
12 Apr 2014*	0	0	11 Oct 2014*	0	0
19 Apr 2014	0	0	18 Oct 2014	0	0
26 Apr 2014	0	0	25 Oct 2014*	0	2

Please note * indicates Saturdays when Traffic Attendants were deployed at Station Road and Tullybroom Road.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current level of leakage from the water infrastructure system; and how this compares with three years ago.
(AQW 38870/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water's Annual leakage figures are assessed at the end of each financial year and placed in the public domain after they have been audited by the Reporter and submitted to the Utility Regulator.

The level of leakage for 2010/11 was 176.97 Ml/d. The current level of leakage, i.e. relating to 2013/14, is 167.21 Ml/d. This exceeded the target of 169 Ml/d set by the Utility Regulator.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the extent of parking in south Belfast and the impact of recent and repeated flooding in the streets around the Lisburn Road, whether he will consider the potential for clearing gullies during off peak times.
(AQW 38980/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Wherever possible, TransportNI aims to complete its gully emptying operation during normal working hours.

However, in areas where there is difficulty in accessing the gullies due to the presence of parked cars, consideration is given to attending the sites during off-peak times. In such circumstances TransportNI seeks the co-operation of local residents to keep the street clear of parked cars and then programmes the work to be completed at off-peak times, generally beginning at approximately 6am. Department for Social Development

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he has taken to ensure the continuation of neighbourhood renewal programmes beyond their current remit.
(AQW 36773/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The Executive had decided that from 1 April 2015 responsibility for urban regeneration and community development would transfer from the Department for Social Development to the new Councils which are being established as part of the Reform of Local Government.

This was to have been achieved by conferring DSD's regeneration powers to the Councils, so a draft Regeneration and Housing Bill was prepared for consideration by the Executive and subsequent introduction to the Assembly. The Executive has just now agreed for the Regeneration Bill to proceed to Introduction, but unfortunately, this agreement has come too late for the legislation to get through the Assembly as originally planned for. As a result, the Executive has decided that the best course of action is to defer the transfer of powers and responsibilities for one year until April 2016.

The Department is still fully committed to the Reform of Local Government and the transfer of those key powers and responsibilities to the new Councils. However, the Executive's decision means that the Department will continue to be responsible for administering urban regeneration and community development in 2015/16.

Therefore my officials are continuing to review all existing Neighbourhood Renewal contracts. The outcome of these reviews will enable my Department to take informed decisions about arrangements for 2015/16.

My officials will continue to work closely with the Councils to assist them in putting in place effective arrangements to meet the needs of their communities when the transfer of powers and responsibilities takes place April 2016.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current waiting time for a family seeking to remain together in social housing in (i) Belfast City; and (ii) Lisburn City council areas.
(AQW 37424/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Member has clarified that this question is about the average waiting times in the Belfast and Lisburn Council areas by all household groups. The Housing Executive has provided the information as follows: -

Table 1 attached sets out details of the waiting list and average waiting times in the Belfast and Lisburn Council areas by all household groups as at the end of September 2014. The table gives details of the mean average calculation and the median average calculation by household group. It is felt that the median average calculation gives a better perspective.

It should also be noted that how long an applicant is on the waiting list depends on a number of factors, including their level of points, their areas of choice and the availability of the type of accommodation they require. In light of this the Housing Executive has also provided details of allocations for both the Belfast and Lisburn Council areas at Table 2 attached, which gives an indication of the limited number of properties that become available in these areas.

Table 1 – Waiting List at 30 September 2014

Local Government District	Household Type	Number	Mean average Months on the WL as at 30 Sept 14	Median average Months on the WL as at 30 Sept 14
Belfast	Elderly	1217	62.2	37.0
	Large Adult	129	50.1	26.0
	Large Family	532	31.1	19.0
	Single	5186	28.1	17.0
	Small Adult	416	34.4	21.0
	Small Family	2731	32.3	21.0
	Total	**10211**	**34.0**	**20.0**
Lisburn	Elderly	346	60.3	40.5
	Large Adult	39	62.0	39.0
	Large Family	121	26.0	14.0
	Single	1138	26.9	15.0
	Small Adult	150	33.2	20.5
	Small Family	713	27.1	18.0
	Total	**2507**	**32.4**	**18.0**

Table 2 – Allocations at 30 September 2014

Local Government District	Household Type	Number	Mean average Months on the WL at the point of Allocation	Median average Months on the WL at the point of Allocation
Belfast	Elderly	249	22.8	9.0
	Large Adult	19	17.8	14.0
	Large Family	132	22.6	16.0
	Single	1156	19.6	13.0
	Small Adult	90	22.6	13.0
	Small Family	714	23.6	16.0
	unknown	<5	16.0	16.0
	Total	**2361**	**21.4**	**13.0**
Lisburn	Elderly	56	23.0	10.0
	Large Adult	9	24.7	24.0
	Large Family	58	21.5	13.5
	Single	202	20.2	13.0
	Small Adult	30	24.4	18.5
	Small Family	255	21.3	13.0
	unknown	<5	1.0	1.0
	Total	**611**	**21.3**	**13.0**

<5 are cases where numbers are less than 5

The average waiting time in relation to social housing may be calculated by an analysis of mean and median average months, both for the waiting list at a snapshot in time and for those applicants who have been successful in receiving an allocated property over a selected period of time. The mean is the arithmetic average. The median is a measure of central tendency. The reason that both mean and median averages are provided is that the mean may be skewed by applicants who have been on the waiting list for a number of years. Social housing is allocated according to greatest housing need, and table 2 shows the waiting time for those in sufficient need to receive an allocation over the year to 30 September 2014.

Council Areas

- Belfast Local Government District is made up of Belfast South, Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast West and Shankill NIHE Local Offices.
- Lisburn Local Government District is made up of Lisburn Antrim Street and Lisburn Dairyfarm NIHE Local Offices.

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.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current level of level of unoccupied social housing in Lagan Valley.
(AQW 38011/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at 30 September 2014 the level of their unoccupied stock in Lagan Valley was 29 as detailed in the table below: -

NIHE Office	Awaiting Imminent Relet	Difficult to Let	Undergoing Major Repairs/ Improvements/ Decanting	Pending sale	Pending Demolition
Lisburn Antrim Street	4	1	12	6	0
Banbridge	0	2	3	0	1
Total	**4**	**3**	**15**	**6**	**1**

Housing Associations	Awaiting Imminent Relet	Difficult to Let	Awaiting Major Repair
Total	**16**	**19**	**4**

Housing Associations have advised that the current level of their unoccupied stock in their ownership is as follows: -

In addition, there is currently one Supported Living Unit vacancy which requires the approval of an admissions panel before it can be relet.

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Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of money spent on response and planned maintenance as part of the heating contract in the last twelve months of the Egan Major Heating Contract; and the first twelve and subsequent twelve months in the New Engineering Contracts for heating awarded in 2012, broken down by contract area. **(AQW 38039/11-15)**

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the new contracts for heating installation and services became operative in June 2012. The tables below provide details of the expenditure as follows:-

- Table 1 – Last 12 months of Egan Major Heating Contract
- Table 2 – First 12 months of new contract
- Table 3 – Second 12 months of new contract

Table 1 - Last 12 months of Egan Major Heating Contract (01/07/11 – 24/06/12)

	Response £'000	Planned £'000	Servicing £'000	Total '000
Belfast	2,092	5,930	1,373	9,395
South East	1,894	8,137	1,606	11,637
South	1,421	4,150	1,296	6,867
North East	1,732	6,689	1,200	9,621
West	1,292	5,790	1,193	8,275
Total	**8,431**	**30,696**	**6,668**	**45,795**

Table 2 - First 12 months of new Contract (25/06/12 – 25/06/13)

	Response £'000	Planned £'000	Servicing £'000	Total £'000
Belfast	434	3,540	1,675	5,649
South East	700	4,496	1,054	6,250
South	320	3,804	174	4,298
North East	857	2,458	1,896	5,211
West	549	3,182	966	4,697
Total	**2,860**	**17,480**	**5,765**	**26,105**

Table 3 - Second 12 months of new Contract (26/06/13 – 25/06/14)

	Response £'000	Planned £'000	Servicing £'000	Total £'000
Belfast	490	9,260	927	10,677
South East	618	3,868	652	5,138
South	401	8,083	417	8,901
North East	1,080	3,228	956	5,264
West	656	4,366	724	5,746
Total	**3,245**	**28,805**	**3,676**	**35,726**

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Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what public funding has been spent on An Droichead's neighbourhood renewal project to date; and to outline the reasons for transferring this designated neighbourhood renewal site to a school.
(AQW 38114/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) provided support for An Droichead's Gnolann Project as follows:

- 2009/10 £ 90,000
- 2010/11 £128,835
- 2011/12 £ 460
- Total £219,295

This funding was used to procure consultancy support for this project.

The Department of Social Development (DSD) provided no funding for this project.

The Department of Education (DE) contacted my Department in December 2013, through the Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) to advise that the accommodation at Scoil an Droichid was no longer fit for purpose and two of the existing classrooms at Scoil an Droichid had been deemed unsuitable for use from a health and safety perspective with extensive structural work required to repair the roof.

Given the extent of the work required, it was suggested that the only way forward was to replace the defective mobiles with new steel framed modular accommodation. As a result of the restriction within the site, DE identified a potential location for the new mobiles on the adjoining DSD site at 20-32 Ormeau Road. Use of this site would allow the school to continue to operate with minimal disruption.

My officials considered the proposal and advised that in view of the health and safety issues pertaining to the existing mobiles the Department would agree to dispose of the site to the Department of Education.

This will bring the site into active use and will provide significant benefits to the school's existing accommodation and improve options for its future development.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of successful applications to the (i) Warm Homes; and (ii) Warm Homes Plus schemes to date, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 38438/11-15)

Mr Storey: At 31st October 2014 the Warm Homes Scheme had assisted 49,109 households with energy efficiency improvements. 42,797 households have been assisted with Warm Homes measures and 6,312 households have been assisted with Warm Homes Plus measures. A breakdown by parliamentary constituency is not available, however the table below provides a breakdown by council area.

Warm Homes Scheme Completions by Council Area between 1st July 2009 and 31st October 2014

Council Area	Warm Homes	Warm Homes Plus
Antrim Borough Council	1,046	155
Ards Borough Council	1,502	225
Armagh City and District Council	1,653	212
Ballymena Borough Council	1,334	329
Ballymoney Borough Council	765	67
Banbridge District Council	1,082	121
Belfast City Council	4,422	816
Carrickfergus Borough Council	785	134
Castlereagh Borough Council	1,126	103
Coleraine Borough Council	1,383	209
Cookstown District Council	1,391	185
Craigavon Borough Council	2,358	452
Derry City Council	3,283	865
Down District Council	1,684	196
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	1,579	200

Council Area	Warm Homes	Warm Homes Plus
Fermanagh District Council	2,249	335
Larne Borough Council	760	95
Limavady Borough Council	1,360	95
Lisburn City Council	2,015	250
Magherafelt District Council	1,195	89
Moyle District Council	481	57
Newry and Mourne District Council	2,606	295
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1,751	169
North Down Borough Council	1,298	287
Omagh District Council	2,005	254
Strabane District Council	1,684	117
Total	**42,797**	**6,312**

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Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of boiler replacements carried out under the (i) Boiler Replacement Scheme; and (ii) Boiler Scrappage Scheme to date, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 38440/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Boiler Replacement Scheme was launched in September 2012, up until 31st October 2014, NI Housing Executive has funded the installation of 16,445 new energy efficient boilers. The table below provides details of the completions by each Council area, as the Housing Executive does not have figures broken down by constituency.

Council Area	Completions
Antrim Borough Council	385
Ards Borough Council	569
Armagh City and District Council	624
Ballymena Borough Council	648
Ballymoney Borough Council	241
Banbridge District Council	426
Belfast City Council	2,524
Carrickfergus Borough Council	279
Castlereagh Borough Council	707
Coleraine Borough Council	420
Cookstown District Council	300
Craigavon Borough Council	757
Derry City Council	1,106
Down District Council	542
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	420
Fermanagh District Council	432
Larne Borough Council	274
Limavady Borough Council	316
Lisburn City Council	1,052
Magherafelt District Council	587
Moyle Dictrict Council	164

Council Area	Completions
Newry & Mourne District Council	1,476
Newtownabbey Borough Council	784
North Down Borough Council	724
Omagh District Council	397
Strabane District Council	291
Total	**16,445**

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Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the monies allocated to improving energy efficiency in social housing in each constituency since 2011/12.
(AQW 38488/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate this expenditure by Parliamentary Constituency. However, they have provided the tables attached detailing expenditure on improving energy efficiency in Housing Executive homes by Regional Office for the last three years. They advise that this expenditure relates to double glazing, heating and external insulation projects.

Belfast Region

Office	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
North Belfast	1,498,368	1,676,295	2,707,666
East Belfast	1,186,663	971,002	762,267
South Belfast	923,301	1,069,454	558,719
West Belfast	1,705,333	1,359,321	2,791,067
Shankill	691,516	725,359	1,543,106
Regional Total*	**6,005,182**	**5,801,430**	**8,362,825**

South Region

Office	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Cookstown	264,362	423,933	595,875
Omagh	715,625	596,735	379,421
Banbridge	508,853	282,702	824,857
Portadown	1,654,821	1,166,816	244,993
Ards	1,649,319	2,729,033	1,506,262
Bangor	1,277,025	710,382	1,333,748
Lisburn - Dairy Farm	782,454	1,866,705	593,831
Lisburn - Antrim St	1,582,133	2,313,972	1,743,494
Lurgan	438,105	2,005,111	2,428,795
Armagh	1,258,718	1,494,978	1,040,518
Newry	416,855	1,266,784	1,126,033
Downpatrick	1,361,945	1,258,141	927,031
Castlereagh	1,626,433	330,808	933,723
Dungannon	1,096,503	464,306	539,449
Fermanagh	454,417	795,098	850,241

Office	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Regional Total*	**15,087,568**	**17,705,502**	**15,068,271**

North Region

	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Antrim	881,903	146,614	431,807
Ballymena	2,120,145	2,161,728	902,789
Coleraine	476,817	862,264	1,224,226
Carrickfergus	701,444	115,922	729,714
Larne	678,562	109,045	628,217
Ballymoney	359,400	472,911	440,085
Ballycastle	231,028	22,958	222,826
Waterside	1,767,043	1,161,538	776,601
Collon Terrace	961,817	564,901	239,917
Waterloo Place	1,331,268	793,668	943,621
Magherafelt	417,462	517,761	337,966
Limavady	570,482	868,986	847,891
Strabane	356,600	320,864	19,943
Newtownabbey 1	275,747	974,856	2,255,849
Newtownabbey 2	1,167,690	1,102,740	527,763
Regional Total*	12,297,408	10,196,755	10,529,214

Total*	**33,390,157**	**33,703,688**	**33,960,310**

* Totals rounded to nearest £.

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Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development what annual budget is set aside by his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, for translation and interpreter services for foreign nationals.
(AQW 38509/11-15)

Mr Storey: In the 2014/15 financial year, the Social Security Agency allocated a total of

£37,000 to its operational business areas for the purpose of providing translation and interpretation services, if required, to benefit claimants whose first language is not English. The SSA is the only departmental business area that allocates budget for this specific purpose.

The Housing Executive's annual budget for Communication Support Services in 2014/15 is £40,000, which is to provide linguistic and disability (or other, for example, age) related communication support to staff. There is no delineation between linguistic support and disability support, but in recent years a significant proportion of the budget has been to support linguistic communications.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many boilers he estimates will be replaced by 31 March 2015 as a result of the Boiler Replacement Scheme.
(AQW 38565/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Boiler Replacement Scheme was launched in September 2012 and is due to end on 31 March 2015. The aim of the scheme was to assist 24,000 private homeowners to replace old and inefficient boilers over the period of the scheme. As at 31st October 2014 the Housing Executive has issued 21,550 approvals for boiler replacements and 16,445 households have had new boilers installed. This has proven to be a very popular scheme and I expect over 24,000 approvals to be issued by 31st March 2015, however, the onus is on householders to then go ahead and replace the boiler.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing units are planned for Dromore, County Down in the next five years.
(AQW 38589/11-15)

Mr Storey: There are currently no social housing schemes programmed for Dromore, County Down in the next five years.

However, a need for the provision of six units for older people has been identified. Housing Associations are currently exploring the potential to purchase a number of existing properties for social housing in order to meet housing need.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many temporary staff are currently employed by the Housing Executive; and of these employees, to detail the community background, broken down by (a) number; and (b) percentage.
(AQW 38625/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that it currently employs a total of 86 temporary staff. The community background number and percentage is detailed in the table below.

Religion	Number	Percentage
Protestant	41	47.7
Roman Catholic	42	48.8
Not Known	3	3.5
Total	**86**	**100**

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how many immigrants currently claim benefits.
(AQW 38687/11-15)

Mr Storey: The payment of benefits in Northern Ireland is administered via IT systems which are owned and maintained by the Department for Work and Pensions. As these systems do not have the facility to record the nationality of claimants, the requested information is therefore not available.

In support of changes made to the Regulations introduced for European Economic Area nationals and returning UK nationals claiming income based Jobseekers Allowance from 1 January 2014, the Social Security Agency is currently gathering clerical information on the number of applications for income based Jobseekers Allowance from European Economic Area nationals. Based on the current data available, 2,168* European Economic Area nationals claimed income based Jobseekers Allowance during the period 1 January 2014 to 30 September 2014. During this period a total of 892 European Economic Area nationals had their claim to Jobseekers Allowance disallowed:

- 773 claimants were disallowed having failed the Habitual Residence Test which required them to prove that they have a right to reside in the UK and also be habitually resident, and
- 119 claimants were disallowed having failed a Genuine Prospect of Work Assessment, a further change to Home Office Immigration regulations introduced in July 2014.

*The Department for Social Development's Analytical Services Unit is unable to provide the statistics that have been requested. The details provided have been taken from clerical data collected by Decision Makers during the dates stated. The management information provided is limited to standard reports with no facility to interrogate the system.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how many immigrants currently claiming benefits send their payments outside of Northern Ireland.
(AQW 38692/11-15)

Mr Storey: The payment of benefits in Northern Ireland is administered via IT systems which are owned and maintained by the Department for Work and Pensions. As these systems do not have the facility to record the nationality of claimants, the information requested is therefore not available.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how many immigrants have been refused benefits, including housing, since immigration reforms.
(AQW 38693/11-15)

Mr Storey: Changes to Home Office Immigration regulations were first introduced in Northern Ireland in January 2014. While the current social security IT systems functionality does not record the nationality of claimants, limited statistics on the number of European Economic Area nationals claiming benefit have been captured clerically. No statistics are available for non European Economic Area nationals.

From January to September 2014, a total of 2,168 European Economic Area nationals claimed income based Jobseeker's Allowance. During this period a total of 892 European Economic Area nationals had their claim to Jobseekers Allowance disallowed:

- 773 claimants were disallowed having failed the Habitual Residence Test which required them to prove that they have a right to reside in the UK and also be habitually resident, and
- 119 claimants were disallowed having failed a Genuine Prospect of Work Assessment, a further change to Home Office Immigration regulations introduced in July 2014.

A further measure which restricted access to Housing Benefit for European Economic Area nationals with Jobseeker residency status was introduced in April 2014. Since 1st April, 129 housing benefit claims have been made ineligible on the grounds that the claimant was a Person from Abroad.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) his Department; and (ii) each of his Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 38696/11-15)

Mr Storey: The number of full time equivalent staff for the Department for Social Development and its arm's length bodies for the years requested are shown in the table below:

Year	Number of Full Time Equivalent staff		
	Department for Social Development	Charities Commission for Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
2010	7261.04	0	3184
2011	6903.63	5	3124
2012	6824.98	13	3100
2013	6904.97	14	2994
2014	6910.02	25	3125

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints his Department have received regarding breaches of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
(AQW 38724/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has not received any complaints regarding breaches of the Caravans Act 2011. However, issues around the sale of caravans on residential sites have been raised, by elected representatives.

Where there is evidence that a person who lives in a caravan as their main residence is being harassed or threatened with illegal eviction, the person can approach the Council which may instigate court proceedings. Caravan site owners and caravan owners can agree to the use of an arbitrator where they cannot settle disputes or to take court action via the County Court.

To date since the introduction of the Caravan Act seven cases spanning four council areas have been reported by residents in relation to eviction and harassment. None of these seven cases required prosecution by the councils.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the range of options available to people with a disability who are seeking to live independently within their community.
(AQW 38729/11-15)

Mr Storey: There are a range of options available that my Department funds to enable people with a disability to live independently within their community. They include:

Disabled Facilities Grants

Within the private sector, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) can offer a Disabled Facilities Grant to home owners, landlords and private sector tenants. The grant process begins with a recommendation from an Occupational Therapist from the Health and Social Services Board recommending works which would benefit the disabled applicant to remain at home; such works may include ramped access to the dwelling, replacing a bath with a suitable shower facility, extending the dwelling to incorporate a downstairs bedroom and bathroom. The maximum grant available is £25,000 although this can be extended to £50,000 with the approval of the NIHE where the works are deemed necessary.

In the 2013/14 financial year, the NIHE approved 1,177 Disabled Facilities Grants, completed 1,113 and spent £10.84m and continues to be committed to enabling persons with a disability to remain in their home.

Supporting People

The Supporting People (SP) programme came into effect in Northern Ireland on the 1st April 2003. It provides a single funding framework, for a range of housing support services, aimed at helping vulnerable people to live independently in the

community. These include people with disabilities or who are vulnerable due to old age, learning disabilities or mental health needs.

Supporting People funded services enable the client to live independently in their own home by supporting them with a range of eligible housing related tasks. These include advice on security and safety in the home, maintaining the physical environment of the home, building on life skills, personal budgeting, benefits advice and Debt counselling.

Social Security Agency

The Social Security Agency provides a range of help through the benefits system to support people with disabilities to help them live independently in the community.

Community Care Grants which are available under the Discretionary Social Fund scheme are primarily intended to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community. In the 2013/14 year the Agency made 20,121 Community Care Grant awards with a total expenditure of £13.69m. Claimants who are receiving Income Support, Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance, State Pension Credit because they are moving out of care can be considered for a Community Care Grant. There is no requirement to repay a Community Care Grant.

Employment and Support Allowance provides financial help to people who are unable to work because of illness or disability. It also provides personalised support to those who are able to work by giving them access to a specially trained Employment Service Adviser and a wide range of further services including employment, training and condition management support. This is to help people manage and cope with their illness or disability at work. The amount of Employment and Support Allowance a person is entitled to depends on their individual circumstances.

Disability Living Allowance is a tax-free social security benefit for people 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 consists of two separate components. The mobility component is payable at higher / lower rate. The care component can be payable at three different rates, high, middle and low. People can be receiving either the mobility component or care component or a combination of both. At May 2014 there were 198,310 recipients of Disability Living Allowance.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the measures his Department is taking to ensure that additional strains are not placed on people with a disability through the Severe Disability Premium which will be introduced by Universal Credit.
(AQW 38731/11-15)

Mr Storey: Currently there are seven different components within the system of benefits and Tax Credits associated with disability. These are paid at different rates, have different qualifying conditions and are for different purposes. A claimant qualifies for the Severe Disability Premium if they are in receipt of a qualifying benefit and satisfy certain conditions.

The current proposals for the introduction of Universal Credit will see the reform system of multiple disability premiums and additions in Tax Credits and create a much simpler and fairer system for claimants that will ensure support is targeted to those that need it most.

Disabled claimants will be supported through two elements under Universal Credit, the limited capability for work element and for more severely disabled claimants, the limited capability for work and work related activity element. Furthermore my Department aims to raise the level of support for those who have been assessed as having a limited capability for work and work related activity that is currently provided to reflect the extra costs of longer durations on benefit.

Under Universal Credit a disabled person will also be eligible for a higher earnings disregard when working out their Universal Credit payment to reflect a claimant's personal circumstances.

Those claimants who are subject to migration onto Universal Credit will also be eligible for Transitional Protection. Transitional Protection is a commitment to ensure that no one moving directly onto Universal Credit will experience a reduction in the benefit they are receiving, where their circumstances remain the same at the point of change. This will also apply to those claimants receiving the Severe Disability Premium.

The Welfare Reform Bill also includes provision to exclude some groups of claimants from the benefit cap - it is intended that this will include households in receipt of the limited capability for work and work related activity element of Universal Credit. This is in recognition of the additional financial costs that can arise from disability.

A package of measures has been designed to ameliorate the worst impacts of Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland. My predecessor listened to the concerns expressed by different groups in Northern Ireland about the impact of welfare reform and the package of measures was developed with the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Treasury. This package is the envy of both Scotland and Wales.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social 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 38738/11-15)

Mr Storey: On average there are 7,000 staff employed in DSD. Salary costs account for approximately 39% of the total resource DEL cost. My Department is still working through the impacts of the budget reductions for 2015/16. Any staff

reductions required to enable the Department to live within its 2015-16 budget will be managed in line with NICS policies, including the voluntary exit scheme announced by the Executive.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38161/11-15, to detail (i) data sets used; (ii) filters applied; and (iii) other additional factors used.
(AQW 38751/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information to determine those individuals to be targeted is obtained from the benefit payment system for State Pension. To that broad base of State Pension claimants, the following filters are applied to select those potentially missing out on benefit.

To include claimants:

- getting Housing Benefit, but not getting State Pension Credit/Income Support;
- not getting State Pension Credit/Income Support, with/without a partner;
- getting State Pension Credit but not getting Attendance Allowance/Disability Living Allowance;
- not getting Attendance Allowance/Disability Living Allowance; and
- with an appointee, but not getting Attendance Allowance/Disability Living Allowance and no disability premiums in payment.

Other factors used were:

- age; people aged 74 or over were selected, and
- lack of an occupational pension.

Co habiting couples getting Attendance Allowance, not getting Carers Allowance and not receiving a disability premium were also included.

The focus of the targeted exercises is those older people not getting the main older people benefits of State Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance. The criteria are developed using learning from previous uptake work and knowledge of benefit interdependencies.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Loughview Estate in Holywood in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38838/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there is currently no maintenance schemes planned for the Loughview estate in the next three financial years. However, the Housing Executive has also advised that:

- All dwellings in Loughview estate have either oil or gas.
- Kitchens are between six and twelve years old.
- All double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.
- An External Cyclical Maintenance scheme has just started which will also finish this year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Kilcooley Estate in Bangor in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38839/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes in the Kilcooley estate in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	External Cyclical Maintenance	125
	Kitchens	176
2016/17	External Cyclical Maintenance	308
	Kitchens	224
2017/18	-	Nil

The Housing Executive has also advised that all it dwellings in the Kilcooley estate have either gas or oil heating and confirms that any remaining double glazing will be completed during the current financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Rathgill Estate in Bangor in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38840/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes in the Rathgill estate in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	External Cyclical Maintenance	220
	Kitchens	37
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	Kitchens	42

The Housing Executive has also advised that all its dwellings in Rathgill estate have either gas or oil heating and any remaining double glazing will be completed during the current financial year.

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 Storey: 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

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Whitehill Estate in Bangor in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38842/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes in the Whitehill Estate in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	-	Nil
2016/17	External Cyclical Maintenance	179
2017/18	External Cyclical Maintenance	92

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- all its properties in Whitehill estate have either oil or gas;
- all kitchens are between six and twelve years old; and
- all double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his 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 38862/11-15)

Mr Storey: No Department for Social Development (DSD) employee, paid on the Non Industrial pay scales, is paid below £7.20 per hour.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his plans for new build social housing and co-ownership, assuming the final allocation of funding announced in the draft budget for his Department remains unchanged.
(AQW 38866/11-15)

Mr Storey: The draft budget for 2015/16 announced earlier this month indicated general provision for both new build social housing and co-ownership housing within the overall Departmental Budget. The exact amount of individual allocations,

within the overall allocation for the Department, is still under consideration and will be reviewed in the context of the financial constraints we all have to face.

Once the specific allocations for new build social housing and co-ownership are agreed, I will be ensuring that appropriate key performance targets are set for 2015/16.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for Conlig in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38911/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes planned for Conlig in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	Kitchens	44
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	External Cyclical Maintenance	66

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- All housing executive properties in Conlig have either gas or oil heating (apart from those who refused a change from Economy 7).
- All double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Breezemount Estate in Bangor in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38912/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes planned for the Breezemount estate in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	-	Nil
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	External Cyclical Maintenance	108

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- All Housing executive properties in the Breezemount estate have either gas or oil heating.
- Kitchens are between six and ten years old.
- All double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Strand in Holywood in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38913/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes planned for the Strand, Holywood in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	External Cyclical Maintenance	71
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	-	Nil

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- All Housing Executive properties in the Strand, Holywood have either gas or oil heating.
- Any remaining double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.
- All kitchens are between six and twelve years old.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Springwell Estate in Groomsport in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38914/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes planned for the Springwell estate in the next three financial years.

Year	Scheme	No. of dwellings
2015/16	Kitchens	19
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	ECM*	37

* External Cyclical Maintenance scheme

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- All Housing Executive properties in the Springwell estate have either gas or oil (apart from some who refused a change from Economy 7.
- Any remaining double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.
- All kitchens are between six and ten years old.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Churchill area of Bangor in the next three financial years.
(AQW 38915/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes planned for the Churchill area of Bangor in the next three financial years.

Year	Scheme	No. of dwellings
2015/16	-	Nil
2016/17	ECM*	28
2017/18	-	Nil

* External Cyclical Maintenance scheme

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- All Housing Executive properties have either gas or oil (apart from some who refused a change from Economy 7.
- All double glazing has been completed.
- Kitchens are two years old.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's proposals to secure the future of Aughnacloy street market and to mitigate the potential reduction in footfall in Aughnacloy should the market close; and whether he has had any engagement with Monaghan County Council on this matter.
(AQW 38955/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department for Social Development urban regeneration is not responsible for taking forward regeneration proposal for towns with a population of under 4,500 persons. The population of Aughnacloy is 801 persons and it is defined by NISRA as a rural settlement and therefore falls under the remit of DARD.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's review of the provision of bungalows within the social housing programme.
(AQW 38968/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has been taking forward a review for the provision of bungalow accommodation.

My Department's officials have engaged with the Housing Executive on this matter and I expect to receive firm proposals for consideration by the end of the calendar year.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Social Development when the Collaboration Agreement was signed between the relevant private parties and his Department in relation to the Northside Project.
(AQW 38978/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Northside Regeneration Scheme has the potential to significantly change Belfast City Centre for the better: it will see an area of the city which is run-down and neglected, transformed in terms of architecture, services and connections to

the neighbourhoods around it. It is also important to recognise the boost this scheme will give to the local economy: up to £300 million will be invested and a possible 1500 jobs created. The Collaboration Agreement which is an early step in the relationship between my Department and Northside Regeneration Limited (NRL) (the Developer) was signed on 4 September 2014.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the number of properties under the ownership of his Department that are situated within the Northside Project site.
(AQW 38979/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department owns 2 sites situated within the Northside Regeneration Scheme development area: an area between Carrick Hill and Stephen Street and another area bordering Clifton Street/Regent Street and Stanhope Street.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties in the Northside Project site it is envisaged will be compulsory purchased.
(AQW 38981/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has no plans to vest any properties in the Northside Project site. A decision to vest properties and businesses to progress a comprehensive development is only taken as a last resort. It is always my Department's preference that land and properties if required would be transferred by voluntary agreement or sale between the relevant parties.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many people lost their entitlement to Incapacity Benefit between 2007 to 2011.
(AQW 38985/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below shows the total number of claims where entitlement to Incapacity Benefit ceased between January 2007 and December 2011. For some claimants Incapacity Benefit may have ceased on more than one occasion.

Year	Number of Claimants leaving Incapacity Benefit
2007	30,860
2008	23,290
2009	18,660
2010	9,080
2011	13,590

* The figures provided have been derived from scans of the Department's Matching Intelligence Database Analysis and General Matching Service systems and include cases where a claimant has been found fit for work, has failed to attend a medical assessment or has not provided the required information. The figures also include claims where entitlement has ceased following changes in a claimant's circumstances including when a claimant returns to work, claims an alternative benefit or the death of a claimant.

The figures include a number of claims where the claimant was not receiving payment of Incapacity Benefit but a weekly National Insurance credit.

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 Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the potential for a crisis in the private rented sector should the value of residential property rise and private landlords sell their houses resulting in private tenants facing eviction and a shortage of alternative rented accommodation; and to detail (i) what discussions he has had with the sector on this matter; and (ii) what plans he has in place to deal with it.
(AQW 38996/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Repossessions Taskforce's evidence paper illustrated that house prices in Northern Ireland remain nearly 50 per cent below their 2007 peak. A return to unsustainable house prices is neither expected nor desired.

The Housing Strategy underlines my Department's commitment to help create the right conditions for a stable and sustainable housing market. Flowing from the Strategy, my officials are examining the opportunities and barriers to entering and remaining within the private rented sector, examining the regulatory regime and looking at options for initiatives and incentives which will help grow and improve the sector. The Department will consult with interested parties as proposals are developed.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development when the Community Investment Fund will open for applications.
(AQW 39144/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department for Social Development has no plans to open the Community Investment Fund for applications.

In light of the deferral of Reform of Local Government it is intended to consider existing projects for funding in 2015/16, subject to budget availability.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr A Maginness asked the Assembly Commission, following the introduction of new laptops for Members, will the IS office be developing a series of training courses to assist Members in furthering their skills.
(AQO 7098/11-15)

Ms Ruane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Le deireannas, ghlac Oifig na gCóras Faisnéise (CF) seacadadh ar ríomhairí glúine nua le haghaidh Comhaltaí agus a bhfoireann. Tá an Oifig CF ag cumrú na ngléasanna úra agus is gairid go mbeidh sí ag cur tús leis an bhfeidhmiú céimneach leis an gcéad dhá ghrúpa píolóta, lena n-áirítear baill de Choimisiún an Tionóil agus foireann Tacaíochta na bPáirtithe. Cuirfear tús an leis an bpríomh-fheidhmiú céimneach do Chomhaltaí ina dhiaidh sin.

Information Systems (I.S.) Office has recently taken delivery of the new laptop computers for use by MLAs and their staff. I.S. Office is currently configuring the new devices and will shortly commence the rollout with two initial pilot groups including Assembly Commission Members and Party Support staff. The main rollout to Members and staff will commence thereafter.

Members should already be familiar with the operating system as the new laptops use the same Windows 8 technology as the tablet computers issued in 2013. As with the tablet computer rollout, IS Office will provide short one-to-one training sessions for MLAs and staff as part of the handover of the new equipment.

I.S. Office has also identified relevant internet-based training material, and links to these websites will be included in the initial training sessions and in the handover guidance.

Cuireann CF treoracha traenála céim ar chéim i gach Feidhmchlár Deisce de chuid Microsoft Office, agus tá siad seo ar fáil ar inlíon an Tionóil (AssISt). Tugann na treoracha seo comhairle ar bhun-fheidhmeanna Word, Exel, PowerPoint agus Outlook; is féidir teacht orthu ó gach ríomhaire Tionóil, lena n-áirítear oifigí toghlaigh. Má shíleann Comhaltaí nó foireann an Tionóil go bhfuil cúrsaí struchtúrtha eile ag teastáil uatha, ba chóir dóibh fáil i dteagmháil leis an Oifig CF sa chéad ásc.

I.S. Office provides step-by-step training guides in all of the Microsoft Office Desktop Applications and these are available on the Assembly intranet (AssISt). These guides provide advice on the basic functions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook and can be accessed from all Assembly computers including constituency offices. Should Members or staff feel that they require further structured training courses they should contact I.S. Office in the first instance.

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 Education

In Bound Volume 95, page WA 53 please replace AQW 33093/11-15 with:

Public Bodies: Appointments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education to detail the community background of the appointments he has made in the last two years to public bodies sponsored by his Department.
(AQW 33093/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The community backgrounds of those I have appointed to public bodies sponsored by my Department in the last two years are as follows:

Community Background	Number
Protestant	14
Roman Catholic	16
Neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic	2
Not Known	2
Total	**34**

In Bound Volume 96, page WA 186, please replace AQW34209/11-15 with:

Special Educational Needs

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding provided per pupil under Article 60 for Special Educational Needs, broken down by school.
(AQW 34209/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The detail of funding provided per pupil under Article 60 for Special Educational Needs is listed, by each ELB, in the tables below in respect of the 2013-14 financial year:

BELB	No of Pupils in each School	Delegated Budget Allocated from ELB £'000	Funding per Pupil £'000
Belfast Hospital School	72	12	0.17
Cedar Lodge	193	86	0.45
Clarawood	19	29	1.53
Fleming Fulton (see note 1)	127	327	2.57
Greenwood Assessment Centre	52	25	0.48
Harberton	206	109	0.53
Mitchell House	83	53	0.64
Park	126	84	0.67
Oakwood School & Assessment Centre	107	48	0.45
Glenveagh	189	105	0.56

BELB	No of Pupils in each School	Delegated Budget Allocated from ELB £'000	Funding per Pupil £'000
St Gerard's ERC	223	122	0.55
Total	**1397**	**1000**	**0.72**

NEELB	No of Pupils in each School	Delegated Budget Allocated from ELB £'000	Funding per Pupil £'000
Rosstulla	170	167	0.98
Thornfield	87	122	1.40
Castle Tower	268	266	0.99
Hillcroft	112	166	1.48
Kilronan	83	148	1.78
Riverside	48	76	1.58
Roddensvale	95	107	1.13
Sandelford	155	217	1.40
Jordanstown (see note 2)	51	150	2.94
Total	**1,069**	**1,418**	**1.33**

SEELB	No of Pupils in each School	Delegated Budget Allocated from ELB £'000	Funding per Pupil £'000
Ardmore House(see note 3)	2	57	28.50
Beechlawn	159	119	0.75
Brookfield	136	58	0.43
Killard	179	120	0.67
Longstone	145	115	0.79
Clifton	144	102	0.71
Tor Bank	159	122	0.77
Parkview	169	84	0.50
Knockevin	91	119	1.31
Totals	**1,190**	**896**	**0.75**

SELB	No of Pupils in each School	Delegated Budget Allocated from ELB £'000	Funding per Pupil £'000
Sperrinview	102	126	1.24
Lisanally	100	140	1.40
Ceara	122	122	1.00
Donard	76	77	1.01
Rathore	156	135	0.87
Total	**556**	**600**	**1.08**

WELB	No of Pupils in each School	Delegated Budget Allocated from ELB £'000	Funding per Pupil £'000
Arvalee School	103	191	1.85
Belmont School	129	192	1.49
Foyle View School	120	178	1.48
Knockavoe School	116	137	1.18
Rossmar School	88	151	1.72
Willowbridge	130	246	1.89
Total	**686**	**1,095**	**1.60**

Notes

1. Fleming Fulton provides the use of its swimming pool to other schools. The extra costs associated with maintaining a swimming pool have been provided for in BELB's funding; however this means the funding per pupil is higher.
2. Jordanstown was built for 100 pupils. Only 51 pupils were in attendance in 2013-14; resulting in higher costs per pupil. The school caters for children with sensory impairments. As such the ratio of teaching staff to pupils is higher due to higher/complex needs.
3. Ardmore House Pupil numbers can range from 0 – 12 at any point in time. At the time of the October 2013 Census Ardmore House had 2 pupils explaining higher funding per pupil.

Department for Social Development

In this Bound Volume, page WA 57 please replace AQW 37513/11-15 with:

Coleraine Housing Schemes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant AQW 36466/11-15, to detail the size of the dwellings that will be completed in Coleraine in the next two years.
(AQW 37513/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The size of the dwellings that will be completed in Coleraine Town in the next two years are as follows;

Scheme	Housing Association	Units	One bed	Two bed	Three bed	Four bed	Completion year
55 Mountsandel Road, Coleraine	Fold	5	0	5	0	0	2014/15
Harpurs Hill, Coleraine	Triangle	20	4	8	8	0	2015/16
Society Street, Coleraine	Fold	22	12	10	0	0	2015/16
31a Hazelbank Road, Coleraine	Apex Housing	11	0	7	4	0	2016/17

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

In Bound Volume 98, page WA 148 please replace AQW 36715/11-15 with:

Regeneration of Ebrington Site

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on progress in the regeneration of Ebrington.
(AQW 36715/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Ebrington Development Framework, completed in March 2014, outlines how the Ebrington site will integrate with the city, ultimately supporting an additional 1,800 jobs in the city and additional GVA of £42m. The framework will be submitted for outline planning permission in autumn 2014.

Ebrington Square is a key shared space in the city, with over 600,000 people attending events in the space, including Peace One Day concert, Clipper festival concerts, One Big Weekend and, most recently, MTV Crashes.

To date, Ilex has completed the development at Ebrington Square, the “Peace Bridge”, and Building 79 for the City of Culture headquarters. Building 80/81 temporarily housed the Turner Prize 2013, and Ilex is now progressing with the fitting out of one floor for the Creative Industries Hub. A managing operator has been appointed for the Hub.

The following projects are being taken forward in 2014/15:

Project	**Building**	**Timescale**
DOE office accommodation	Building 71	October 2014
Underground car park/enabling platform		October 2014
Commercial activity	Building 70	December 2014/January 2015
Ilex office accommodation	Building 83	January/February 2015
Cafe/allied retail	Building 57/59	March/April 2015
Creative Hub	Building 80/81	Quarter 1 2015
Hotel development	TBC	Issue to market December 2014/January 2015

Ilex has received over 106 expressions of interest in the site, with 56 formal written submissions and has engaged commercial property consultants to advertise market opportunities.

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 3 November 2014

The Assembly met at noon, the Deputy Speaker Mr Beggs in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

The Deputy Speaker informed Members that the Speaker's Office had received a letter from Mr Alex Maskey giving notice that he intends to resign as a Member of the Assembly with effect from 12.00 midnight on Monday 03 November 2014. The Deputy Speaker advised that the Speaker's Office had notified the Chief Electoral Officer, in accordance with Section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3. Public Petition

3.1 Public Petition – Rail the Way for Armagh

Mr Dominic Bradley was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding a rail link between Portadown and Armagh.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Meeting held in Education Sectoral format

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting held in Education Sectoral format, following which he replied to questions.

4.2 Statement – Public Expenditure: Budget 2015-16

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, made a statement regarding the draft Budget 2015-16, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

5.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

6. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

6.1 Multiple Sclerosis Respite Unit – Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Daithí McKay.

7. Assembly Business (cont'd)

7.1 Motion – Extension of Sitting on Monday 03 November 2014

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 3rd of November 2014 be extended to no later than 9.00pm.

Mr R Swann

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

8.1 Statement – Coleraine to Londonderry Rail Track Phase 2 Project

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding the Coleraine to Londonderry Rail Track Phase 2 Project, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

8.2 First Stage – Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA 41/11-16)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, introduced a Bill to provide for the operation of a food hygiene rating scheme in Northern Ireland.

The Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA 41/11-16) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

9. Committee Business

9.1 Motion – Review of Waiting Times for Elective Care

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's review of waiting times for elective care; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to prioritise and tackle this issue.

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

10. Private Members' Business

10.1 Motion – Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month and that the disease is the cause of approximately 6 per cent of all cancer deaths across Northern Ireland; regrets that only approximately 10 per cent of pancreatic cancer patients undergo curative surgery as most patients are not diagnosed until the cancer is too far advanced for such treatment; acknowledges that 40 per cent of patients visit their GP three or more times before being referred to hospital and that many patients begin treatment for other illnesses before they are diagnosed correctly; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work with service providers and relevant professional bodies to introduce new, improved and robust pancreatic cancer referral guidelines and to promote training and support for GPs and other health professionals to boost early diagnosis rates, reduce misdiagnosis and to ensure that pancreatic cancer survival rates are improved across Northern Ireland.

Mr T Buchanan
Ms P Bradley

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

11. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.52pm.

Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Deputy Speaker

3 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 22 October - 03 November 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

Department for Regional Development Resource Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (DRD).

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Resource Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (DHSSPS).

Department of Health, Social Services HSC Pension Scheme Resource Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (DHSSPS).

Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Deregulation Bill 2014 (DETI).

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2014 (OFMDFM).

Commission for Victims and Survivors Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (OFMDFM).

National Museums NI Annual Report and Accounts 2013/14 (DCAL).

The North South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended

31 December 2012 (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on Tackling Social Housing Tenancy Fraud in Northern Ireland 2014 (NIA 197/11-16) (PAC).

Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly and the Appropriate Committees 2014 (NIA 201/11-16) (ESR).

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2014 No. 261 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S. R. 2014 No. 262 The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Amendment No.3) (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S. R. 2014 No. 263 The Jobseeker's Allowance (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DSD).

S. R. 2014 No. 267 The Health and Social Care (Disciplinary Procedures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S. R. 2014 No. 268 The A3 Portadown Road, Richhill (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S. R. 2014 No. 272 The Latt Road, Jerrettspass, Newry (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S. R. 2014 No. 273 The A21 Ballygowan Road, Saintfield (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

For Information Only:

S. R. 2014 No. 266 The Brucellosis Control (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DARD).

S. R. 2014 No. 269 The Waiting Restrictions (Larne) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S. R. 2014 No. 270 The Waiting Restrictions (Lurgan) (No. 2) Order (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) (DRD).

S. R. 2014 No. 271 The Roads (Classification) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Public Expenditure: 2014-15 October Monitoring Round (DFP).

Budget 2014/15: Update of Oral Statement made on 14 October (DHSSPS).

Consultation on - 'The International Working Group's recommended future model for delivering Congenital Cardiac Services for the population of Northern Ireland' (DHSSPS).

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on Council Charters and Status - Local Government (Transitional, Incidental, Consequential and Supplemental Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

Consultation on NITPS Transitional and Consequential Provisions to be made under the Public Services Pensions (NI) Act 2014 (DE).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 November 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 New Member

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that he had been notified by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Alex Maskey had been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the West Belfast constituency to fill the vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Ms Sue Ramsey.

Mr Alex Maskey signed the Roll of Members on 04 November 2014 in the presence of the Deputy Speaker, Mr Beggs. The Principal Deputy Speaker confirmed that the Member had signed the Roll and had entered his designation of identity.

2.2 New Member

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that he had been notified by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir had been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Belfast constituency to fill the vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Mr Alex Maskey.

Mr Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir signed the Roll of Members on 04 November 2014 in the presence of the Deputy Speaker, Mr Beggs. The Principal Deputy Speaker confirmed that the Member had signed the Roll and had entered his designation of identity.

2.3 Committee Chairperson Nomination

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that, with effect from 04 November 2014, Mr Alex Maskey had been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development and confirmed the appointment.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – Advisory Group Report on the Strategic Development of Irish-medium Post-primary Education

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding the Advisory Group Report on the Strategic Development of Irish-medium Post-primary Education, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Legislative Consent Motion – Childcare Payments Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Childcare Payments Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 12.35pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

4.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

5. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

5.1 Legislative Consent Motion – Childcare Payments Bill (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/230)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/230) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

A single debate ensued on all five motions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Prayer of Annulment motion regarding The Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/230) was **negatived**. (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Prayer of Annulment motion regarding The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231) was **negatived**. (Division 2).

The Question being put, the Prayer of Annulment motion regarding The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232) was **negatived**. (Division 3).

The Question being put, the Prayer of Annulment motion regarding The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233) was **negatived**. (Division 4).

The Question being put, the Prayer of Annulment motion regarding The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234) was **negatived**. (Division 5).

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

6.2 Motion – BBC Spotlight Programme 14 October 2014

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the contents of the investigation by the BBC Spotlight programme broadcast on Tuesday 14 October into allegations of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Provisional IRA and covered up within the IRA, implicating senior members of Sinn Féin; notes Ms Jennifer McCann's admission that she was informed about the abuse that Ms Maíria Cahill suffered, yet inexplicably did not report it to the lawful authorities; further notes that Ms McCann, in her role as junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, has responsibilities in relation to policy relating to historical institutional abuse and children; and calls for a full inquiry into the junior Minister to establish any impropriety as well as any breach of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Mr S Wilson
Ms P Bradley

6.3 Amendment

Proposed:

Proposed: Insert after 'Sinn Féin;':

'believes that the scale of the abuse perpetrated by members of the republican movement needs to be determined with accountability, both by those responsible and those with knowledge, and that victims be given individual and emotional support;'

Mr A Attwood
Mr C Eastwood

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **carried** (Division 6).

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 7)

7. Adjournment

Mr Alex Easton spoke to his topic regarding a new school build at St Columbanus' College, Bangor.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 9.58pm

Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Deputy Speaker

4 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 1

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/230)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/230) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 26
Noes: 69

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan, Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 2

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/231) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 27
Noes: 68

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan, Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 3

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/232) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 27
Noes: 68

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan, Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 4

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/233) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 27
Noes: 68

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan, Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 5

Motion – Prayer of Annulment – The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234)

Proposed:

That the Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Appropriate Amount) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S.R. 2014/234) be annulled.

Mr B McElduff
Mr C Boylan
Mr I Milne

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 27
Noes: 68

AYES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan, Mr McElduff.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 6

Motion – BBC Spotlight Programme 14 October 2014 – Amendment

Proposed:

Proposed: Insert after 'Sinn Fein;':

'believes that the scale of the abuse perpetrated by members of the republican movement needs to be determined with accountability, both by those responsible and those with knowledge, and that victims be given individual and emotional support;'

Mr A Attwood
Mr C Eastwood

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 68
Noes: 27

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness, Mr Rogers.

NOES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney, Ms Ruane.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 November 2014
Division 7

Motion – BBC Spotlight Programme 14 October 2014

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the contents of the investigation by the BBC Spotlight programme broadcast on Tuesday 14 October into allegations of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Provisional IRA and covered up within the IRA, implicating senior members of Sinn Féin; believes that the scale of the abuse perpetrated by members of the republican movement needs to be determined with accountability, both by those responsible and those with knowledge, and that victims be given individual and emotional support; notes Ms Jennifer McCann's admission that she was informed about the abuse that Ms Maíria Cahill suffered, yet inexplicably did not report it to the lawful authorities; further notes that Ms McCann, in her role as junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, has responsibilities in relation to policy relating to historical institutional abuse and children; and calls for a full inquiry into the junior Minister to establish any impropriety as well as any breach of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 68
Noes: 27

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

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 O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney, Ms Ruane.

The Motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 4 November 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

Draft S.R. 2014/xxx The Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Greater Ballysillan Masterplan (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 5 November 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	
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14				
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			
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14							
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							

2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
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			
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 10 November 2014

The Assembly met at noon, the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Alex Maskey be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir replace Mr Chris Hazzard as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and that Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir replace Mr Raymond McCartney as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Ms C Ruane

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried**.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 First Stage – Pensions Bill (NIA 42/11-16)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey, introduced a Bill to make provision about pensions and about benefits payable to people in connection with bereavement; and for connected purposes.

The Pensions Bill (NIA 42/11-16) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

3.2 Second Stage – Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 39/11-16)

The Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, moved the Second Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 39/11-16).

Debate ensued.

The Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 39/11-16) passed Second Stage without division.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion – Amend Standing Order 71

Proposed:

Leave out Standing Order 71 and insert –

'71. Oath

Where an oath is to be administered it shall be in the following form -

"I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest, and that I will give the Committee/ Assembly all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities";

but where the person giving the evidence objects to being sworn, he or she shall be permitted to make a solemn affirmation in the following form -

"I, _____ do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest, and that I will give the Committee/Assembly all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities".'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.2 Motion – Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel on its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues, to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

Chairperson, Committee for Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried**.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) 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 McCann, also answered a number of questions.

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 Ebola – Testing for Suspected Cases

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.45pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Principal Deputy Speaker

10 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 5 - 10 November 2014

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 42/11-16).

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Draft Budget 2015-16 (DFP).

Departmental Resource Accounts 2013/14 (DEL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on The Future Impact of Borrowing and Private Finance Commitments and Belfast Metropolitan College's Titanic Quarter PPP Project (NIA 202/11-16) (Public Accounts Committee).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/265 The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOJ).

S.R. 2014/275 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DSD).

S.R. 2014/276 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

For Information Only

S.R. 2000/393 The Rules of the Supreme Court (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No.3) 2000 Correction (DOJ).

S.R. 2008/479 The Rules of the Supreme Court (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No.3) 2008 Correction (DOJ).

S.R. 2009/264 The Rules of the Supreme Court (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No.3) 2009 Correction (DOJ).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

The Regeneration and Housing Bill (DSD).

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on Planning Reform and Transfer to Local Government (DOE).

Consultation on a draft Adult Safeguarding Policy (DHSSPS).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

Labour Relations Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2013 -2014 (DEL).

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 November 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Second Stage – Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA Bill 41/11-16)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, moved the Second Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA Bill 41/11-16).

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 10.55am to facilitate Members wishing to mark Armistice Day.

The sitting resumed at 11.05am, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA Bill 41/11-16) passed Second Stage without division.

2.2 Consideration Stage – Work and Families Bill (NIA 34/11-15)

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, moved the Consideration Stage of the Work and Families Bill (NIA 34/11-15).

Six amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 1 to 4 stand part of the Bill.

Debate ensued.

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 5, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 6 to 20 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 21 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 21, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 22 to 24 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

After debate, Amendment 6 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 1, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 2 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.

The Work and Families Bill (NIA 34/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker.

2.3 Further Consideration Stage – Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16)

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16).

Eighteen amendments were selected for debate.

Clauses

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark Durkan.

3.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 Further Consideration Stage – Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16) (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 2, amending Amendment 1 to Clause 2, was **negatived** (Division).

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 2 was **made** without division.

As Amendment 1 was **made**, Amendment 3 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 2 was **made** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 6 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 7 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

Schedules

After debate, Amendment 9 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 10 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 11 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 12 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 13 to Schedule 1 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 14 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 15 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 16 to Schedule 1 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 17 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

Long Title

After debate, Amendment 18 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

The Education Bill (NIA Bill 38/11-16) stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

5. Adjournment

Ms Bronwyn McGahan spoke to her topic regarding the proposed closure of Loane House, Dungannon.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.56pm

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Principal Deputy Speaker

11 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

11 November 2014
Division

Further Consideration Stage – Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16) – Amendment 2

Proposed:

As an amendment to the amendment to Clause 2, page 1, line 12, tabled by the Minister of Education on 03/11/14, after "promote" insert "integrated and".

Mr T Lunn
Mr C Lyttle
Ms A Lo

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 21
Noes: 76

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Ramsey.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Hazzard and Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Work and Families Bill
Marshalled List of Amendments
Consideration Stage
Tuesday 11 November 2014 [Annotated]

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 6 November 2014 and selected for debate

Amendment 1 *[Made without division]*
Clause 5, Page 16
Leave out lines 6 and 7

Minister for Employment and Learning

Amendment 2 *[Made without division]*
Clause 5, Page 17
Leave out lines 22 and 23

Minister for Employment and Learning

Amendment 3 *[Made without division]*
Clause 5, Page 20
Leave out lines 43 and 44

Minister for Employment and Learning

Amendment 4 *[Made without division]*
Clause 5, Page 22
Leave out lines 13 and 14

Minister for Employment and Learning

Amendment 5 *[Made without division]*
Clause 21, Page 61, Line 31
Leave out 'a statutory provision' and insert 'Northern Ireland legislation or an Act of Parliament'

Minister for Employment and Learning

Amendment 6 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 73, Line 26
Leave out head (b) and insert -

'(b) in paragraph (4), for 'paragraph (5)' substitute 'paragraphs (5) and (5A)',
(c) in paragraph (5), after sub-paragraph (b) insert—
"(c) an order under Article 85ZS(6) or 107AB(4);",
(d) after paragraph (5), insert—
"(5A) An order under Article 85ZS(6) or 107AB(4) shall not be made unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly."'

Minister for Employment and Learning

Education Bill
Marshalled List of Amendments [Annotated]
Further Consideration Stage
Tuesday, 11 November 2014

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 6 November 2014 and selected for debate

Amendment 1 *[Made without division]*
Clause 2, Page 1, Line 12
Leave out subsection (3) and insert -
'(3) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education.'

Minister of Education

Amendment 2 *[Negatived on division]*
As an amendment to the Amendment to Clause 2*, page 1, line 12, tabled by the Minister of Education on 03/11/14*
'After 'promote' insert 'integrated and' '

Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Chris Lyttle
Ms Anna Lo

Amendment 3 *[Not called]*
Clause 2, Page 1, Line 13
After 'promote' insert 'integrated and'

Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Chris Lyttle
Ms Anna Lo

Amendment 4 *[Made without division]*
Clause 2, Page 1, Line 14
Leave out subsection (4) and insert -
'(4) It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools.'

Minister of Education

Amendment 5 *[Made without division]*
Clause 5, Page 2, Line 21
Leave out from 'which amends' to end of line 24 and insert 'unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.'

Minister of Education

Amendment 6 *[Made without division]*
Clause 6, Page 2, Line 35
At end insert -
'(2) Other words or expressions which are defined in Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 have the same meaning in this Act as in that Order.'

Minister of Education

Amendment 7 *[Made without division]*
Clause 7, Page 2, Line 39
At end insert -
'(za) section 2(3);'

Minister of Education

Amendment 8 *[Made without division]*
Clause 7, Page 3, Line 2
At end insert -
'(c) paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 1.'

Minister of Education

Amendment 9 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 3, Line 24
Leave out '11' and insert '12'

Mr Chris Hazzard
Ms Maeve McLaughlin
Mr Pat Sheehan

Amendment 10 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 3, Line 30
Leave out '3' and insert '4'

Mr Chris Hazzard

Ms Maeve McLaughlin
Mr Pat Sheehan

Amendment 11 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 3, Line 34
Leave out sub-head (iii) and insert -
'(iii) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of integrated schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;
(iv) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of voluntary grammar schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;
(v) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of controlled grammar schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests; and
(vi) 1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of Irish Medium schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests.'

Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr John McCallister
Mr Steven Agnew [R]

Amendment 12 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 6, Line 37
Leave out from 'will' to end of line 38 and insert 'shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(3).'

Minister of Education

Amendment 13 *[Not moved]*
Schedule 1, Page 6, Line 38
At end insert -
'(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the different school sectors of the Education system.'

Mr John McCallister

Amendment 14 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 6, Line 38
At end insert -
'(2A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (2) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority.'

Mr John McCallister

Amendment 15 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 6, Line 39
Leave out from 'will' to end of line 40 and insert 'shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(4).'

Minister of Education

Amendment 16 *[Not moved]*
Schedule 1, Page 6, Line 40
At end insert -
'(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the different school sectors of the Education system.'

Mr John McCallister

Amendment 17 *[Made without division]*
Schedule 1, Page 6, Line 40
At end insert -
'(3A) The membership of the standing committee referred to in sub-paragraph (3) shall, as far as practicable, be representative of the membership of the Authority.'

Mr John McCallister

Amendment 18 *[Made without division]*
Long Title
After 'Authority;' insert 'to confer power on the Department of Education to make grants to sectoral bodies;'

Minister of Education

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 11 November 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

Legislative Consent Memorandum Pension Schemes Bill (DOJ).

Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Serious Crime Bill (DOJ).

Serious and Organised Crime: An Inspection on how the Criminal Justice System deals with Serious and Organised Crime in Northern Ireland 2014 (DOJ).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/274 The Attorney General's Human Rights Guidance (Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service – Support for Victims and Witnesses) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (AGNI).

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 12 November 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	
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14			
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		
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							

2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
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			
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 17 November 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 Colum Eastwood replace Mr Seán Rogers as a member of the Committee for Education.

Mr P Ramsey
Mrs K McKevitt

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion – Committee Membership

That Mr Maurice Devenney replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Ministerial Statement

3.1 Statement – British Irish Council meeting held in Environment Sectoral format

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan, made a statement regarding the British Irish Council meeting held in Environment Sectoral format in Douglas on Wednesday 15 October, following which he replied to questions.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Motion – Pensions (2012 Act) (Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the Pensions (2012 Act) (Consequential and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Final Stage – Education Bill (NIA Bill 38/11-16)

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, moved that the Final Stage of the Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Education Bill (NIA 38/11-16) passed Final Stage.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – Health Budget

Proposed:

That this Assembly rejects the maladministration of the preceding Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with regard to his departmental budget which has led to recent announcements from Health & Social Care Trusts regarding reductions in frontline services; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure adequate Equality Impact Assessments are established as a matter of priority before any final decisions are made.

Ms M McLaughlin
Mr C Hazzard
Mr D McKay
Ms R McCorley

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 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.

6.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion – Health Budget (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Principal Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 2).

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.47pm.

Mr John Dallat MLA
Deputy Speaker

17 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

17 November 2014
Division 1

Motion - Health Budget – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Insert after 'frontline services;':

'believes that a contributory factor has been the failure of the Northern Ireland Executive to properly fund and implement the strategic plan Transforming Your Care and that the Trusts' announcements are inconsistent with that plan;'

Mr F McKinney
Dr A McDonnell
Mr P Ramsey
Mr A Maginness

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 29
Noes: 57

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGimpsey, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Ramsey, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

17 November 2014
Division 2

Motion - Health Budget

Proposed:

That this Assembly rejects the maladministration of the preceding Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with regard to his departmental budget which has led to recent announcements from Health & Social Care Trusts regarding reductions in frontline services; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure adequate Equality Impact Assessments are established as a matter of priority before any final decisions are made.

Ms M McLaughlin
Mr C Hazzard
Mr D McKay
Ms R McCorley

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 30
Noes: 33

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Dickson, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Hazzard and Mr McKay.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr McCallister, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 12 - 17 November 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

Ilex Annual Report and Financial Accounts for Year ended 31 March 2014 (OFMDFM).

Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Modern Slavery Bill (DOJ).

Laying of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland Fourth Annual Report 2013/14 (OFMDFM).

Child Maintenance Service Annual Report on Decision Making 01 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 (DSD).

Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14 (DCAL).

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service – Trust Statement 2012-2013 (DOJ).

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31.3.2014 (DFP).

InterTradeIreland 2013 Annual Review of Activities and Annual Accounts (DETI).

5. Assembly Reports

Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly and the Appropriate Committees (NIA 203/11-16).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 277/2014 The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Proposed Policy on Cost Control Arrangements and Draft Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

Consultation on Consequential Amendments to the Teachers' Superannuation Regulations (NI) 1998 as a Result of Public Service Pensions Reform (DE).

Service Framework for Children and Young People – Consultation (DHSSPS).

Consultation on Draft Standards for Supported Lodgings for Young Adults (Aged 16-21) in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS).

9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Screen Commission Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DCAL).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 18 November 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. Speaker's Business

2.1 Royal Assent

The Deputy Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 17 November 2014 to the Legal Aid and Coroners' Court Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

3. Ministerial Statements

3.1 Statement – Review of Youth Training - Publication of Interim Report

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding the Review of Youth Training, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement – Report by the Independent Child Sexual Exploitation Inquiry (The Marshall Report)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, made a statement regarding the Report by the Independent Child Sexual Exploitation Inquiry (The Marshall Report), following which he replied to questions.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

4.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey.

4.3 Assembly Commission

Questions were put to, and answered by, Members of the Assembly Commission.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

5. Executive Committee Business

5.1 Second Stage – Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 42/11-16)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey, moved the Second Stage of the Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 42/11-16)

Debate ensued.

The Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 42/11-16) passed Second Stage without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion – Commonwealth Youth Games

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the success of the Olympic Games in London 2012 and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014 and the impact hosting these games has had to positively transform those cities; and calls on the Executive to develop a bid for Northern Ireland to host the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2021 with a view to a future bid to host the Commonwealth Games.

Miss M McIlveen
Mr W Irwin
Mr D Hilditch
Mr W Humphrey

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

6.2 Motion: Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland's Report 'Appreciating Age'

Proposed:

That this Assembly welcomes the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland's Report, 'Appreciating Age', which places an economic value on the wide and varied contributions made by the over 60s across Northern Ireland; acknowledges the positive contributions made by older people through caring, childcare, volunteering, replacement parenting and working; and will seek to challenge negative perceptions around older age in order to make Northern Ireland a better place to grow old.

Mr P Ramsey
Mr R Swann
Mr S Dickson
Ms C Ruane
Mr P Weir

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Mr Paul Girvan spoke to his topic regarding the fish kill in Six Mile Water.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.37pm

Mr John Dallat MLA
Deputy Speaker

18 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 18 November 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

Legislative Consent Memorandum Concerning the Extension to Northern Ireland of Certain Provisions in the Westminster Deregulation Bill (DETI).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/278 The Penalty Charges (Additional Contraventions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (DRD).

S.R. 2014/279 The Penalty Charges (Prescribed Devices) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (DRD).

S.R. 2014/280 The Health and Safety (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2014 (DETI).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

The Work of the Unscheduled Care Task Force (DHSSPS).

Líofa Website (DCAL).

8. Consultation Documents

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Northern Ireland 2013 (DHSSPS).

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.

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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 19 November 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	18.03.14 & 19.03.14			
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			
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	20.01.15					

2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
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			
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 24 November 2014

The Assembly met at noon, the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – Putting Patients First

Ms Maeve McLaughlin was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding the delivery of health care.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Roads and Transport)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Roads and Transport) following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Road Safety)

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Road Safety) following which he replied to questions.

3.3 Further Consideration Stage – Work and Families Bill (NIA 34/11-15)

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Work and Families Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Work and Families Bill (NIA Bill 34/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with Section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3.4 Motion – The Child Support Fees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the Child Support Fees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.5 Motion – The Child Support (Ending Liability in Existing Cases and Transition to New Calculation Rules) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the Child Support (Ending Liability in Existing Cases and Transition to New Calculation Rules) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion – Public Accounts Committee Reports and Memoranda of Reply

Proposed:

That this Assembly takes note of the following Public Accounts Committee Reports:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012 (NIA 131/11-15);

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects (NIA 136/11-15);

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand (NIA 153/11-15);

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (NIA 162/11-15);

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff (NIA 163/11-15);

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint (NIA 172/11-15);

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre (NIA 173/11-15);

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report (NIA 181/11-15);

and the following Department of Finance and Personnel Memoranda of Reply:

Report on the NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012;

Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects;

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand;

Report on The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute;

Report on PSNI: Use of Agency Staff;

Report on NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud & DRD: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint;

Report on Account NI: Review of a Public Sector Financial Shared Service Centre;

Report on Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report.

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) 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 First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

6. Committee Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion – Public Accounts Committee Reports and Memoranda of Reply (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Private Members' Business

7.1 Motion – Anniversary of the Murder of Paul Quinn

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the seventh anniversary of the murder of Paul Quinn; notes that the Independent Monitoring Commission states that current and former members of the Provisional IRA were responsible for the murder; demands that the leadership of the Provisional movement discloses all information regarding the murder of Paul Quinn to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána; condemns the Sinn Féin leadership for its false accusations against Paul Quinn; and further demands that Sinn Féin apologises to his family for making such accusations.

Mr D Bradley
Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Maginness

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

7.2 Motion – Contribution made by the Post Office Network

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the important contribution made by the post office network to communities and the local economy; recognises the need for increased support from the Executive to ensure the viability of the network in the future; urges the Executive to take action to help sustain these vital services with the availability of more public services through the post office network and establish a post office diversification fund, similar to those which have existed in other regions; and supports the Keep Me Posted campaign which champions the principle that consumers and businesses have a right to choose how they receive bills and statements without being penalised for requesting such information in paper format.

Mr C Lyttle
Mr D Bradley
Mrs P Cameron
Mr S Agnew
Mr D Kinahan
Mr C Boylan

Debate ensued.

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 6.32pm.

Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Deputy Speaker

24 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 November 2014
Division 1

Motion – Anniversary of the Murder of Paul Quinn

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the seventh anniversary of the murder of Paul Quinn; notes that the Independent Monitoring Commission states that current and former members of the Provisional IRA were responsible for the murder; demands that the leadership of the Provisional movement discloses all information regarding the murder of Paul Quinn to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána; condemns the Sinn Féin leadership for its false accusations against Paul Quinn; and further demands that Sinn Féin apologises to his family for making such accusations.

Mr D Bradley
Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Maginness

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 64
Noes: 24

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, 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, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness, Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, 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 Boylan, Mr Sheehan.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 19 - 24 November 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

The Annual Report on Decision Making and Financial Accuracy 1 January to 31 December 2013 Department for Social Development (DSD).

Legislative Consent Memorandum: Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill (DETI).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on Review into Electricity Policy, Part III, Grid Connections (NIA 196/11-16) (Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/283 The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DARD).

S.R. 2014/284 The Guarantees of Origin of Electricity Produced from High-efficiency Cogeneration (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DETI).

S.R. 2014/285 The Products Containing Meat etc. Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2014/286 The Food Hygiene and Official Feed and Food Controls (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2014/287 The Fish Labelling (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2014/288 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No.4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2014/XXX The Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DETI).

For Information Only:

S.R. 2014/281 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Fivemiletown) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S.R. 2014/282 The Parking Places on Roads (Lurgan) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Proposed Londonderry Harbour (Variation of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) – Consultation Paper (DRD).

Final Regulatory Impact Assessment on Relaxation of Brucellosis Pre-Movement Testing Controls (DARD).

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure 2015/16 Draft Budget Consultation (DCAL).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 November 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 Motion – The draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46(1)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46(1)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – Closure of MS Respite Centre at Dalriada Hospital

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the decision to close the Regional Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre at Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle until March 2015 and transfer the service to the independent sector; further notes the importance of appropriate respite provision for patients and their families; believes the decision to be entirely wrong and one which makes no financial sense; fears the decision will result in the permanent closure of the centre; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reverse the decision and immediately reinstate the service at Dalriada Hospital.

Mr R Swann
Mrs J Dobson
Mr M McGimpsey

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion – Prison Service Staff Safety

Proposed:

That this Assembly condemns the targeting of Northern Ireland Prison Service employees by dissident republicans; calls upon the Minister of Justice to reject any proposal that compromises the security of HMP Maghaberry, the safety of prison staff or concedes to the demands of republican prisoners in Roe House; and further calls for a review by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, working with the Prison Officers and Prison Governors Association, to address concerns about staffing levels across all grades in each prison establishment in Northern Ireland.

Mr P Givan
Mr S Douglas
Mr P Frew
Mr E Poots

3.3 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out from the first 'calls' to 'further' and insert:

'notes the Stocktake document, published on 12 November 2014 by the Independent Assessment Team, on the separated prison regime in Maghaberry Prison; and'

Mr A Maginness
Mr P Ramsey

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

4.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion – Prison Service Staff Safety (Cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment fell (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was carried (Division 2).

6. Adjournment

Mr Stewart Dickson spoke to his topic regarding Cherry Tree Nursing Home, Carrickfergus.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.58pm

Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Deputy Speaker

25 November 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 November 2014
Division 1

Motion - Prison Service Staff Safety – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out from the first 'calls' to 'further' and insert:

'notes the Stocktake document, published on 12 November 2014 by the Independent Assessment Team, on the separated prison regime in Maghaberry Prison; and'

Mr A Maginness
Mr P Ramsey

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 33
Noes: 53

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne, Mrs McKevitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 November 2014
Division 2

Motion - Prison Service Staff Safety

Proposed:

That this Assembly condemns the targeting of Northern Ireland Prison Service employees by dissident republicans; calls upon the Minister of Justice to reject any proposal that compromises the security of HMP Maghaberry, the safety of prison staff or concedes to the demands of republican prisoners in Roe House; and further calls for a review by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, working with the Prison Officers and Prison Governors Association, to address concerns about staffing levels across all grades in each prison establishment in Northern Ireland.

Mr P Givan
Mr S Douglas
Mr P Frew
Mr E Poots

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 54
Noes: 33

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Byrne, Mrs McKevitt.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 25 November 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

   Review of Topical Questions (NIA 209/11-16) (Committee on Procedures).
6. Statutory Rules
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 26 November 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	18.03.14 & 19.03.14			
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		
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	20.01.15					

2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
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			
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.