



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

Volume 118

(24 September 2016 to 14 October 2016)

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 September 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Swann: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, we received a letter from you last week on the cessation of private Members' Bills. Will you bring that matter to a speedy resolution because it is frustrating some Members of my party with regard to tabling private Members' Bills? Will you look at some of the Government Members who are tabling private Members' Bills on matters that their own Government Ministers are responsible for? Rather than utilising resources, those matters could be solved in either the party's house or the Department's house.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Mr Swann. I have noted your comments.

Public Petition: Campaign against the Harsh Introduction of Equal State Pension Requirements

Mr Speaker: Mr Colin McGrath has sought leave to present a public petition. In accordance with Standing Order 22, the Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

Mr McGrath: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It may seem strange that I am presenting a petition on this issue, given that I am a 40-year-old man, but I want to petition the Assembly about the plight of the WASPI women, or, to give them their full title, the Women Against State Pension Inequality. For me, the most important element is the term "Inequality", and that is why I am raising this issue.

In 1995 and 2011, the British Government passed pension Acts that moved the retirement age for women to bring it in line with that of men.

On the face of it, that seems fair and equitable, but it masks the number of women affected and the impact that it will have on them. With the introduction of these Acts and the fact that it was not done in a more gradual, incremental and timely way, some women who were born just three years apart have to retire six years apart, whilst women who were born five years earlier only have to work an extra nine months. To add insult to this injury, whilst some of the women who were born just a few months apart are required to work many years more, they are impacted doubly: once as they are required to work extra years compared to their peers, and again because, during their additional working period, they are required to pay National Insurance. Deprived of pensions on one hand, they are forced to contribute on the other. The majority of those impacted are now in their 60s. It seems to me to be a cruel policy that merely attacks older women.

Mr Speaker, you might ask, "As long as they know and can prepare, what is the big deal?" I would agree with you but, when us men were asked to work an extra year to the age of 66, we were given six years' notice before the policy was implemented. Some WASPI women were given just one year's notice. That means that men were given six years' notice for a one-year addition whilst women were given one year's notice of a six-year extension. It hardly seems equal.

It must be remembered too that some women were often not permitted to enter company pension schemes and other benefits of employment until the 1990s. Such changes to their plans and pensions are having a major detrimental impact. Some women who have not been

working in later years and were expecting an income from the state pension are now, aged 60, 61 and 62, having to turn to jobseeker's allowance and zero-hour contracts to make ends meet. Just think how many of us knew our grandmothers when they were that age. Would we have liked them to have had to have a zero-hour contract just to survive?

To conclude, I submit this petition and ask that the House supports the Opposition day motion tabled by our Ulster Unionist friends later and sends a clear message that, if the clearing of the national debt mantra of "We are all in this together" means anything, we must do what we can to help prevent this inequality and the severe impact of these changes on Women Against State Pension Inequality.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McGrath moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: The petition will go to the Minister for Communities and the Committee for Communities.

Opposition Business

NAMA Revelations: Public Confidence

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind up. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to wind up. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive so, if amendment No 1 is made, the Question on amendment No 2 will not be put. I also advise Members that it is my understanding that there are currently no active legal proceedings in relation to the subject of this motion, and, therefore, the sub judice rule does not apply. However, there is an ongoing criminal investigation into the sale of Project Eagle, and Members will wish to avoid saying anything that might prejudice the outcome of these investigations.

Mr Smith: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations made during the recent BBC Northern Ireland 'Spotlight' broadcast on events surrounding the sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) properties; supports the investigations and inquiries being undertaken by the National Crime Agency (NCA), the Republic of Ireland and other international bodies; further notes the ongoing damage being done to Northern Ireland's international reputation, not least by the continuing failure of institutions here to examine the issue effectively; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement before the Assembly to restore the public confidence in these institutions and the inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance.

I am sure that we are all very aware of the live National Crime Agency investigation and the need to not say anything today that would stray into the realms of that investigation. At the same time, I believe that we cannot completely ignore NAMA and say nothing until the various criminal investigations are completed months or even years down the line. The issue has, of course, been debated at length in the Committee for Finance, which recently resolved to:

"inquire into the issues relating to the sale of the Northern Ireland loan portfolio of NAMA once clarity has been provided that, to do so, will not prejudice any investigation by the NCA into the matter."

The Committee has received further updates and guidance from the NCA and now awaits legal advice on how best to proceed.

Other investigations are under way here and in other jurisdictions. Criminal investigations are ongoing with the NCA, the PSNI and the gardaí in the Republic. Financial investigations are under way in the Republic and the USA, including the recent report on the Project Eagle sale by the Republic's Comptroller and Auditor General, which has led to the Irish Government setting up an inquiry into the

losses that NAMA incurred for the Irish taxpayer. However, to date, we have seen little action from the Northern Ireland Executive or the Assembly apart from the review undertaken by the Committee for Finance and Personnel. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the damage that this whole sorry episode has done to Northern Ireland's political and business reputation requires more than just kicking the problem into touch and citing ongoing investigations as a reason for inaction. That is why we have chosen this issue for our first Opposition day motion. We want to provide the First Ministers with an opportunity to address the public confidence issue that is obviously at large as a result of the ongoing investigations of and revelations about NAMA and has been compounded by the actions of some during the Assembly's one attempt to investigate.

I will start with the report produced by the Committee for Finance and Personnel in March 2016. The report concluded by saying:

“the Committee is concerned that different aspects of the Project Eagle controversy could be seen as having caused reputational damage to DFP, the Northern Ireland Executive”.

It goes on to say:

“It is therefore imperative that the lessons identified to date are acted on as applicable.”

In the six months since that report was published, what actions have been taken to ensure that mistakes relating to NAMA are not repeated? For example, the lessons identified to date in the report from the Committee stated that future ministerial nominations should be made only with the advice of senior departmental officials; that robust systems should be put in place to ascertain any financial or other interests of future similar ministerial appointments; that processes should be put in place to ensure that there are no future gaps in information relating to crucial meetings; and that independent expert advice should be available when Ministers are taking policy positions on matters that are of systematic importance to the economy. That recommendation does not seem to have progressed if Brexit is an example, but I am happy to be corrected.

Can the Chamber and, more importantly, the Northern Ireland public receive reassurance today that the lessons identified in the Committee report have been implemented? Furthermore, what actions have the Government taken to date to fix the reputational damage? I have yet to see much evidence, hence this debate provides an ideal opportunity for the First Ministers to make crystal clear what actions are being taken to rebuild confidence and trust following these scandals.

Of course, there are also many questions about the Committee report. It was a partial investigation at best as many witnesses declined to give evidence or provided only written evidence. The review had to work within the parameters of tight terms of reference that were developed so that it would not stray into areas outside its competence, so focus was primarily on the role of the Department of Finance and Personnel. The review was further hindered by NAMA's refusal to provide oral evidence as, in its opinion, it was accountable only to the Oireachtas and not Stormont. The Committee for Finance and Personnel did, of course, not accept this interpretation and found

its refusal to provide evidence as “particularly unhelpful”. The report identified 18 key witnesses — individuals and organisations — that had either been unable to or refused to provide oral evidence. Many of these would be essential witnesses in establishing the full truth.

The Finance and Personnel Committee was unable to come to any real conclusion due to the scope, timing and lack of participation by key witnesses and so could not provide any boost to public confidence. In fact, the subsequent revelations about witness coaching within the Committee have only eroded public confidence even further. What credibility does the Committee's report now have, considering the allegations relating to the then Committee Chair and others? That is another reason why confidence-building measures are needed now from the Government, as the Assembly's only attempt to provide scrutiny on this issue has only added fuel to the fire of public discontent.

12.15 pm

Since the publication of the Committee's report in March 2016, there have been even more revelations. As mentioned, we have seen the alleged involvement of the former Chair of the Committee and others in the coaching of witnesses, Mr McKay's resignation from the Assembly and the investigations into the affair by Stormont and now the PSNI. We have also had yet another 'Spotlight' investigation with even more revelations, and we are still nowhere near the completion of the investigatory process. Who knows what is yet to be revealed? What can be said with confidence is that many of what were initially painted as wild allegations have been shown to be credible. Six months after the publication of the Committee's report, we are no further on. Worse, more allegations and layers of scandal have been revealed to damage even further the reputation of the political institutions and the business culture in Northern Ireland.

As 'The Irish Times' said in its commentary in reference to the recent Comptroller and Auditor General's report:

“the agency's operations in the North were unique — it didn't consult Merrion Street when selling property in Dublin, or Downing Street when selling property in London.

The reason that — as is plain from the report — Project Eagle did not proceed according to Nama's regular procedures is that in the intersection between business and politics, as in so many other things, the North is different. Exactly how different may take several inquiries to establish.”

That is why we brought the motion today. It is also why I cannot support the Sinn Féin amendment, which bizarrely excludes the reference to the reputational damage and the failure to effectively examine the issues involved. Does Sinn Féin honestly believe this whole episode has not damaged the reputation of the institutions involved? Does it think the Northern Ireland Government and Assembly have effectively managed the process? Does Sinn Féin believe the process has not had a detrimental impact on public confidence? Maybe it, like some others, would prefer that it would all just go away. Should NAMA, Project Eagle and witness coaching be forgotten until the criminal and other investigations are completed, many months or probably years down the line? Certainly not according

to Sinn Féin in the Irish Parliament. Mr Adams has said that Sinn Féin has raised the issue of NAMA 34 times in the Dáil. Mr Adams certainly thinks there is a reputational issue here, if not with other 'Spotlight' investigations.

The question is this: have the Government taken effective and appropriate actions to improve public confidence in the wake of revelation after revelation on NAMA? I think not, and I believe the Northern Ireland public want reassurance that there will be no repeat of those scandals. They want to see confidence-building measures that improve transparency and accountability, and they want to hear that the full truth will be uncovered, however politically inconvenient it may be. Local and international business and investors need to hear that Northern Ireland is a clean place to do business and invest in and that any corruption, either financial or political, will not be tolerated. That is why we need a full and proper statement from the First Ministers on those issues.

I understand that much cannot be said about the details of live criminal investigations. However, First Ministers, the public need to hear from you nonetheless, or do you abdicate leadership on this to the BBC, with the public having to await the next instalment of 'Spotlight' or hope that light will be shed from investigations in other jurisdictions? Surely that would be unacceptable in any democracy worth the name.

Mr O'Dowd: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "properties;" and insert

"supports the criminal investigations being undertaken by law enforcement agencies; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement emphasising their support, and that of the Executive, for all efforts to uncover the truth around the sale of the Project Eagle portfolio and committing to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations."

From the outset, I will not name individuals, not only having taken guidance from the Speaker but because I do not believe in trial by media, even if it suits me politically to involve myself in it. I believe in the rights all citizens have to be heard in a trial before their peers. That is where the investigation needs to be brought. It needs to be followed through the criminal investigatory powers on both sides of the border, and if someone has been found to have acted wrongly, or there is evidence that someone has been found to have acted wrongly, they should be brought before a court.

That is where the trial should take place. During Mr Smith's contribution, I was not sure whom he wants to hold to account or why he wants to hold individuals or bodies to account. He seems more fixated on the Executive than on NAMA and the alleged wrongdoings. I think that he has missed the direction. If we are to ensure that wrongdoings around NAMA are held to account and there is a full and proper investigation into what happened in and around Project Eagle, regardless of who you are, what you are or who you think you are, you will be held to account.

As Mr Smith said, we have argued the point strongly since 2009 in the Oireachtas. The then senator Pearse Doherty said, when NAMA was proposed, that it was unworkable and would not achieve its stated objectives. Later, we went much further than many by calling for the suspension of NAMA transactions until after a full commission of inquiry

into its activities on both sides of the border. We should not believe that Project Eagle is the only project or portfolio about which there are questions. Much of the work of NAMA has been called into question by different people, including us, since 2009.

The introductory ramble on the NAMA website reads as follows:

"The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) was established in 2009 as one of a number of initiatives taken by the Government to address the serious crisis in Irish banking which had become increasingly evident over the course of 2008 and early 2009.

NAMA is an unusual corporate entity — "

— that is true —

" — in that it began its life with a very large balance sheet and has been given the task of managing that balance sheet down to zero as soon as it commercially practicable."

One would imagine that "commercially practicable" means that it makes a return for its investors, and, in this case, the investors are the taxpayers: the man and woman burdened with a €64 billion debt as a result of the banking crisis in the South and the collapse of the property market. Although the role of NAMA changed slightly in the year following its formation in 2009, when the IMF came in, its project was and should have been to protect the interests of the ordinary man and woman on the street. That it has failed to do miserably.

There is much speculation about who made money out of Project Eagle. Individuals, organisations and companies have been named, but we can be sure of one thing, and that is who did not make money out of Project Eagle: the ordinary man and woman on the street most certainly did not make money and, in fact, lost money.

One of the areas that requires to be examined in relation to Project Eagle is this: why did NAMA decide to sell the Northern loan book off as one? Why, according to the C&AG's report, did it not even consider breaking the portfolio up into different lots in an attempt to enhance the profit margins? It appears from the C&AG's report that there was no recorded discussion of that possibility at NAMA board meetings. That is an important question: why did NAMA not look after the interests of the ordinary man and woman by ensuring that maximum value was obtained on the Northern loan book? However, it went much further than that. It gave a 10% discount to the bidder on the Northern loan book, as revealed, again, in the C&AG's report, which also revealed that there is no recorded discussion on why that 10% discount was given.

Estimates are that, on the Northern loan book alone, £220 million was lost — £220 million of citizens' money. That in itself deserves a commission of inquiry.

When you bring in all the other elements to it — the media investigations and speculation, the Finance Committee's report and other issues that have come to light — it is clear that something stinks at the heart of NAMA. The question today is this: how do we get to the heart of NAMA and what went on in Project Eagle? If someone, individuals or a group of individuals came together and conspired to defraud the taxpayer, how do we hold them to account?

Mr Smith outlined the history of the previous Committee report. He admitted that that report was shackled because of the tight confines in which it was working. Is there any suggestion that it will not work within the same tight confines in the future? We have an ongoing NCA investigation. The NCA recently briefed the Committee in person and in writing. It is clear that it has a high-level serious investigation going on into that matter. The Finance Committee is shackled in that regard. NAMA refused to attend the last hearings of the Finance Committee. Is there anything to suggest that NAMA will attend a future hearing? I think that it should, but I do not believe that it will. What do we want to do? Do we want to set up a Finance Committee inquiry for the sake of doing so? I have no doubt that there will be great effort from the Committee members and staff, but will it result in those responsible for wrongdoing around Project Eagle being brought to account? I do not believe so.

Our amendment sets out a way forward. The proposer of the motion is reading too much into our leaving out "reputational damage" etc. A motion before the Assembly is about what actions you are going to take. It is not a history tale or —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: One moment.

It is not about setting out what happened in the past or what the impact of what happened in the past will be; it is about what actions the Assembly wants to take in the future. Our amendment sets out quite succinctly the actions that should be taken in the future. It is about ensuring that there is an inquiry on both sides of the border, in cooperation with the institutions on either side of the border, ensuring that those who have information bring it to the ongoing criminal investigations on either side of the border, and ensuring that those responsible are held to account.

I give way to the Member quickly.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. The Comptroller and Auditor General's report is clear that one of the issues with Project Eagle was political considerations. As I understand it, the Member's amendment is effectively just leaving it to the criminal investigations. Does he not accept that we need political investigation into the issue, with North/South cooperation and full buy-in from all parties?

Mr O'Dowd: Let me clarify that point for the Member: of course political goings-on around NAMA and Project Eagle need to be investigated. The last line of our amendment states:

"for all efforts to uncover the truth around the sale of the Project Eagle portfolio and committing to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations."

The commission of inquiry in the South will investigate all ongoing investigations. What was the role of the politicians in all parts of this island in relation to Project Eagle? There is no hiding place for investors, bankers, politicians or anyone in regard to Project Eagle.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr O'Dowd: I come back to my opening comments: this crime has been committed against the ordinary man and woman on the street. For that reason alone, everyone in

the House should support inquiries across the island of Ireland to ensure that those responsible are brought to account and to ensure —

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

Mr O'Dowd: — that the NAMA loan portfolio returns profit for citizens who have been paying for it.

Ms Hanna: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "effectively; " and insert

"recommends consideration of the creation of a joint investigation team of the National Crime Agency and An Garda Síochána into allegations of criminal conduct in relation to the National Assets Management Agency; calls for full cooperation in the production of papers and attendance of persons at parliamentary inquiries or commissions of investigation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland around the work of the National Assets Management Agency; and further calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement before the Assembly to restore the public confidence in these institutions and the inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance."

I commend the Ulster Unionist Party for proposing this motion on the first Opposition day of the session and Mr Smith for a very comprehensive outline of the issue. Our amendment is intended to strengthen it, particularly by reflecting new information that has come into the public domain since the motion was tabled. It addresses specifically the North/South dimension and the report of the Irish Comptroller and Auditor General.

12.30 pm

We will not support the Sinn Féin amendment because we do not feel that it goes far enough. We hope that our amendment includes all the key elements of what it proposes but enhances the detail. At this stage, we feel that we have to start to flesh out the "how" and not just the "why" of the issue. I am not speaking for the Ulster Unionist Party, but, to pick up on your question on whom we seek to hold to account, it is the agency that you mentioned and the Executive as well because there are serious concerns around due diligence in the appointment of people to relevant boards and the fact that there is the impression that people may have used this ministerial approval as licence to tout themselves as fixers.

Project Eagle, the sale of NAMA's Northern loan portfolio, is the biggest property deal in the history of Northern Ireland and has been a cause of concern for considerably over a year, yet there has been very little movement. It has now become clear that the Irish taxpayer has had to bear an enormous loss of about €220 million, which is £180 million. That is by far the biggest loss on any of the NAMA portfolios. There are many questions to be asked about why this portfolio had to be sold as a single lot when others were not and who exactly was driving that sale. Some of those issues are teased out in the C&AG report.

I want to turn briefly to the revelations in the BBC 'Spotlight' programme. It is a matter of regret that there is an impression that the Assembly is leaving its scrutiny role and efforts that it should be able to undertake to the media. It is also a matter of regret that we are discussing the issue only now and not last week or just after the

programme was aired as a Matter of the Day or Question for Urgent Oral Answer.

It is further regrettable that the then Minister of Finance, Mr Sammy Wilson, when asked about the issue, chose to shoot the messenger and go with a reflex attack on BBC 'Spotlight'. I do not think that it does him any credit to have referred to the makers of this programme as a bunch of biased bigots and amateurs. That is shooting the messenger and ignoring serious public concerns. I hope that Members opposite can confirm whether that is a corporate view.

The deputy First Minister could give us some clarification, too. It is reported in the 'Irish Times' of 17 September that a record exists of a conference call in early January 2014, including the DUP and Sinn Féin, where they were as one in telling Dublin that they jointly supported the PIMCO deal and that Mr McGuinness quipped to the Finance Minister, Minister Noonan;

"Now, Minister, it's time you stood up for the Ulstermen."

That is all very heart-warming, but I would be grateful to hear the deputy First Minister's response and recollection of that conference call and precisely which Ulstermen he wanted stood up for, especially in the light of the fact that, not very long after that reported conversation, PIMCO, probably acutely aware of the consequences of the racketeering provisions of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in the US, itself scotched the deal, possibly on the basis of the fixer fee to be paid to London lawyers and a few select Ulstermen.

For over a year, the Administrations in Belfast and Dublin have effectively adopted a "nothing to see" approach, which has eroded public confidence in the will and ability to cast light on the murky corners of this issue. Some useful work was done by the predecessor Committee for Finance and Personnel in the last mandate, but, of course, that has been undermined by allegations of coaching in the inquiry.

We in the SDLP welcome the change in approach from the Dublin Government, which previously appeared ambivalent about the legitimate interest of the Assembly in Project Eagle. I hope that they will now give the Assembly its proper place, as I do not think that they did in parts of the last year. The reporting of relevant persons to the standards in public office authorities, as well as the acknowledgement of the content of the C&AG report, are a welcome change in approach.

It is the form and remit of the inquiry that we wish to explore in more detail in the debate and through our amendment. There is real public concern about political interference from whatever direction and foot-dragging in the running of investigations to date. Of course criminal investigations must be allowed to proceed completely unhindered, but we cannot be expected simply to mark time until that happens without taking steps to repair the reputational damage to this region as an open and transparent place in which to do business. There are numerous precedents — Lawrence, Hillsborough, Hart to name just three — for public and criminal inquiries to run in parallel. Suggesting otherwise could be perceived as another foot-dragging exercise.

Our specific proposals are outlined in brief in the text of the amendment, and I will explore them further now. They

address the explicit cross-border nature of the matter, and if ever there was a North/South issue, it is this. We are trying to bridge the jurisdictional issues for the law enforcement agencies and anybody else with an interest. The situation is that very many of the questions are here in the North but the answers are in the South. The massive loss to the taxpayer has been borne in the South, but we have suffered the reputational damage and the public confidence damage.

I will take each of our proposals in turn. We are recommending that there be a joint investigation team between the NCA and an Garda Síochána. Provision exists for joint law enforcement teams under the Criminal Justice (Joint Investigation Teams) Act 2004 in the Republic and should be used. There are investigations open in the UK, the Republic and the US. We have to ensure maximum communication between them. If they are sought, we have to ensure that prosecutions are able to take place in the most suitable jurisdiction and that nobody is able to use the existence of a border to evade justice.

A second requirement is for legislation for joint North/South inquiries. We have a draft Bill to amend the flawed Westminster Inquiries Act 2005 to make exactly that provision. We have worked closely with colleagues in Irish Labour, who have drafted complementary legislation amending the Irish Commissions of Investigation Act 2004. That will not entirely fix the framework for this scenario, but it will allow us to future-proof other public confidence issues.

A memorandum of understanding will be required to ensure full cooperation in the production of papers and the attendance of persons at parliamentary inquiries or commissions of investigation. That is designed to address the specific concerns that Mr O'Dowd correctly raised about people who have potentially dodged or may dodge an investigation. It is a requirement on both Governments, their Departments, their agencies and relevant financial regulatory bodies to cooperate as required.

It is not enough just to nod this through, to do the hand-writing or to call for a weak statement. A statement on the issue should have been made a long time ago. Rightly or wrongly, there is a public perception that the Assembly is at best inert and, at worst, complicit when it comes to getting to the truth of the issue. The motion, with our amendment, charts a course on how we can finally have action and not just talk on this.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I speak on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party but alongside that in my role as Chairperson of the Finance Committee, which is referenced in the motion.

I believe that everyone in the House wants to get to the truth around the allegations. Furthermore, I want to see justice done if or when wrongdoing is identified. There is no condition or reservation in that aim. I have said that repeatedly to the Committee, and, from our discussions thus far, it is clear that there is eagerness across all parties on the Committee to do what we can to support and help in the process of getting to the truth and getting justice.

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

The Committee received a confidential briefing from the National Crime Agency at a special meeting on 11 July 2016. On the back of that briefing, we had written and oral legal advice over the summer. In addition, we wrote with urgency to the National Crime Agency following the

'Spotlight' programme. We received a detailed response and, on the back of that, are awaiting further legal advice.

The United Kingdom's National Crime Agency advised us in the strongest possible terms that the Committee should not conduct further investigations into the matter, given the stage of its investigations. Not only did it issue that advice but the agency requested strongly that we did not, indicating that, in its view, there could be a serious risk to the investigation. That is why it is disappointing and surprising that, despite the clear advice and request from the United Kingdom's key criminal investigative body, the National Crime Agency, the Ulster Unionist Party has continued to make public comment, calling for the Committee and the Assembly to examine the issues immediately, and brought forward this motion, seemingly seeking to disregard that advice and request.

Based on the advice that we received, I believe that similar advice will have been received by the Ulster Unionist Party on bringing a motion on NAMA to the House. Mr Smith, one of its signatories, sits on the Finance Committee.

He has received those confidential briefings and legal advice. He has received the request in the strongest terms. Yet, despite this, he has made public comment showing that he does not seem to care about that request, indicating that the Ulster Unionist Party wishes to ignore the advice of the National Crime Agency and blunder forward. I find this approach bizarre and perverse.

We have heard much about public expectation and building confidence; we need to step back and fully consider the current situation. There is a serious criminal investigation ongoing. As public and elected representatives, we have a duty to do what we can to scrutinise. Furthermore, one of our key roles is to help and support people as much as we can. However, there is a critical question to be asked.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Little Pengelly: I am sorry, no, I am going to continue. Can our inquiries or debates help the quest for truth or justice? Only if the answer to that is yes should we continue. To debate, work, and inquire and add no value is pointless. Worse than that, to debate, inquire and cause the investigation harm would be disgraceful and the exact opposite of what we are elected to do. We have strong advice that further inquiries by the Committee or the Assembly would, in fact, potentially damage or harm the investigation by the National Crime Agency. In that context, why would the Ulster Unionist Party or, for that matter, anyone else want to create a new Assembly or Committee inquiry at this time?

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Little Pengelly: Sorry, I am going to continue. Why would they want to take any action? What value do they believe that Philip Smith or Claire Hanna would add that the National Crime Agency cannot add? Perhaps they would provide news headlines or a bit of self-publicity or party publicity.

There are very good reasons why the NCA and any police force are set up the way they are. They are independent because it is deemed that, for these type of matters, public confidence is best served by independence from political interference or influence. The Assembly and Committees are not independent; they represent a range of political interests. The National Crime Agency has full investigatory

powers and we, in the Assembly and Committees, do not. Our powers are limited for a reason. The Assembly and Committees do not investigate crimes and it was never intended that they would do so. The NCA has skills and training on objectivity and on the value and weight of evidence. It represents an independent and robust body with full investigatory powers. The Committee has agreed that an appropriate and prudent way forward is to listen to the National Crime Agency. Mr Smith and the Ulster Unionist Party want to disregard that request and advice.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member's time is coming to a close.

Mrs Little Pengelly: As Chairperson of the Committee, I, and the DUP, will not disregard that advice. We will listen to it. This should not be about grabbing the headlines but supporting the pursuit of truth and justice.

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

Mr Allister: On a point of order, I understood that there are obligations on us all, when we rise to speak on an issue, that we declare any relevant interests. We have just heard a speech from Mrs Pengelly, who is the wife of Richard Pengelly who was at the heart of the Department which made some dodgy recommendations in respect of NAMA and who also served as a special adviser to the First Minister, who has also been implicated in these matters. Should there not have been a declaration of interest by Mrs Pengelly before she embarked on her excursion of deflection?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Now that you have raised these matters, I will refer them to the Speaker for determination.

Dr Farry: Following on from the previous Member, it is worthwhile picking up on the point and, indeed, the frustration that was being felt on other Benches. While this is a criminal matter and primacy needs to be given to criminal investigations, not all aspects of public disquiet in relation to the NAMA affair pertain to purely criminal matters. There are issues regarding good governance, how decision-making recommendations were formulated and how public appointments were taken forward that need to be thoroughly investigated, not least to ensure that proper lessons are learnt for the future.

While we need to take huge care to ensure that this debate and any other discussion in this Building or outside does not compromise any criminal investigations, it is quite legitimate that we are here today discussing this, indeed it is a debate that should have happened much sooner. If it were not for the election, there would have been a debate around the report, albeit it is a flawed report now, from the outgoing Finance Committee.

There are elements of the motion and the amendments that we can identify with. While Members have alluded to other issues that are not, strictly speaking, recommendations in the motions, we express disappointment that there is not a specific call in any of them for a proper public inquiry to take place in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland or that there is consideration for something to happen on an all-island basis.

12.45 pm

I appreciate that it has been mentioned as part of a range of options, but we would have gone some way to restoring public confidence today if there had been a clear, unambiguous acknowledgement by the Assembly of the need for a public inquiry to fully address the issues and, in doing so, respect the primacy of the format of the ongoing criminal investigations, whether by the NCA, an Garda Síochána, the US Securities and Exchange Commission or the FBI. If an inquiry is established, it could make a judgement call on whether it could proceed in looking additionally at non-criminal matters or whether it should wait until the conclusion of the criminal investigation.

The important message to get out is that, aside from the criminal investigation, there is a much wider issue that needs to be properly investigated. Those who think that it can simply be channelled into the criminal sphere and left to run its course are missing the bigger picture that goes to the heart of public accountability, value for money, good governance and how we conduct our business. This is only one example of an emerging and consolidating trend from government where there are genuine issues around problems with openness, transparency and accountability. Indeed, we will return to it with an Alliance Party motion, hopefully next week.

It is also important that we recognise that if the Assembly does wish to investigate the matter, there will be limitations to that investigation. We have already had difficulties with the Finance Committee, and there are serious question marks over its report and the attempted coaching of at least one witness that we are aware of so far. There were, already, wider issues around its ability to ensure that the full range of people appeared before it to give evidence and to ensure that it had that fully rounded process.

There is also a point about the willingness of the members of political parties who sit on Committees to challenge what is said by Ministers from their own party or, indeed, by civil servants from Departments that are led by their party. Until we have scrutiny Committees where people are prepared to move beyond the purely party political, Back Bench scrutiny is always going to be limited in that regard. There are many, many other examples of that in the Assembly.

I also want to put on record my defence of my colleague Judith Cochrane, who came under considerable criticism last year, when she urged caution on hearing evidence from Jamie Bryson; I believe that what she said at the time and her position, as well as that of others who voiced similar concerns, has now been well vindicated.

Finally, we recently saw an attempt, somewhat belatedly, by the Government in the Republic of Ireland to reach out to opposition parties to try and formulate a consensus on the best way forward. It strikes me that we are looking at a whole range of different ways forward here, but nothing is coming together. We need to see political parties sitting down together —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Dr Farry: — to work out the best way of establishing trust and confidence. My party leader has written to the other party leaders to ask for a meeting; however, nobody has

yet taken that initiative forward. It is important that all the parties sit down —

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

Dr Farry: — and find out what the best way forward is.

Mr Maskey: I follow on from my colleague John O'Dowd in making a number of points about the motion tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party. First, the motion is simply too narrow because it only calls for a joint statement by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which is supposed to inspire confidence, but I do not really know what that statement is about, or what it is supposed to do, or how it is going to allay fears and concerns, and inspire confidence. It also implies —

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: I have only just started, so I will continue, thanks very much, Mike. As I said, it only really calls for a statement by the joint First Ministers and implies a Finance Committee inquiry. We believe that is far too narrow. For the sake of the debate, I would suggest to Philip Smith that he considers that. While he made quite a number of valid points, which we broadly support, he threw in a number of clumsy, politically inspired jibes, which undermine his own work.

For the record, we in Sinn Féin broadly support the thrust of the motion, even if we think that it is too narrow and clumsy in that it not only throws in some silly jibes but misses the point in some cases if the Member wants to seek all-party support.

Again, for the record, we in Sinn Féin have long been on the record as challenging the establishment of NAMA, the behaviour and activities of NAMA and some of the individuals associated with its business. John O'Dowd made the point well that the entire process around NAMA meant that a huge financial debt was imposed on the vast majority of ordinary Irish citizens. The twenty-six-county state was almost brought to its knees, and I have to say that that has been a recurring theme of annoyance for a lot of people. A lot of the people who seem to be associated with all that collapse — big bankers, developers, senior politicians, including Ministers — all seem to have come out of it smelling of roses, whilst the vast majority of citizens are left with negative equity and many have lost their home. People across the Twenty-six Counties have to pay for a GP appointment, and, sometimes, they cannot even get one for some considerable time. The litany of iniquity levelled against ordinary citizens is disgraceful when we look at the scandalous story of NAMA and how all that has unfolded, and it continues to scandalise the vast majority of us.

The SDLP amendment is also a bit narrow, in so far as all that it does is to recommend consideration of the creation of a joint investigating team. We have called for that and called for an all-Ireland inquiry. Again, it refers to the Assembly Finance Committee.

I want to promote the Sinn Féin amendment because it is very inclusive. We have tried to match the very genuine sentiment and intention of the motion and the SDLP's amendment. We support very much the thrust of the amendment and the motion, and we support very much the annoyance and anger felt and expressed by the Members who moved the motion and the amendment.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: No, I want to finish. Thank you.

By the same token, in trying to get all-party support in the Chamber for the key principles around all this, we have tabled an amendment that, we believe, is much more inclusive because it not only calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement; it calls on them to make a statement and make clear their support for all the criminal investigations under way — not only their support but the support of the Executive. As far as we are concerned, that is very important. If the First Minister and deputy First Minister make such a statement, they make it very clear on behalf of themselves and the Executive that they support all the relevant investigations that are under way, most of which at this time are criminal investigations, whether that is the PSNI and an Garda Síochána on both sides of the border on an all-Ireland basis, the NCA, the American organisations or whatever.

I want to say again for the record that we have no difficulty with the Assembly Finance Committee undertaking such an inquiry, but we already know that it will be seriously restricted in how it can conduct its business. We all know that Assembly Committees are limited in what they can do. They do not have the authority to have the type of forensic investigations —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Maskey: — that the law enforcement agencies have. I make the point that our amendment is open-ended in that it does not rule out an Assembly Finance Committee because that is entirely in the gift of the Finance Committee. We would argue that it —

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

Mr Maskey: — will be limited in its remit, but we call for —

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

Mr Maskey: — all-party support for our amendment to have a full investigation.

Mr Chambers: We need to understand that the purpose of the debate is not about the reputation or limiting the reputational damage of anyone who may have served under the roof of this Building or may indeed still serve under it; it is about the public and international perception of this political institution to which we all belong. We know that there are many negative issues in that regard in the mindset of the public. The recent announcement of the appointment of Mr David Gordon is perhaps an acknowledgement by the Executive of that fact. Public confidence in how business has been conducted by a few people in the business sector in Northern Ireland, especially when senior politicians become involved in the process, is also currently under pressure and is subject to intense scrutiny by a concerned public.

NAMA and its alleged irregularities taint us all. It is not a time for any party in the Chamber to continue to circle the wagons and hope that the NAMA scandal will simply disappear. It will not, and it should not. The public expects every transparent process to be deployed not just by the police but by the House using every mechanism available to us to uncover and reveal the truth. No one involved

in wrongdoing should be protected from all avenues of scrutiny or be able to sleep easy in their bed. Like a poisoned boil, this has to be lanced and cleaned out, and the sooner the better.

All the information we know about this sordid affair must be having a detrimental effect on our international reputation and standing in the worldwide business community. We may never know just how much or how badly. An example of this is how quickly PIMCO disappeared over the horizon, when it blew the whistle on a £7 million success fee arrangement that it wanted nothing to do with. That particular piece of doubtful business practice, along with other more recent revelations of alleged brown bags stuffed with cash being handed over and accepted, would sit comfortably in some corrupt, gangster-controlled country in some uncivilised part of the world.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Chambers: Northern Ireland is better than that. I will give way.

Mr Beggs: In May 2013, the then First Minister, Peter Robinson, and then Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson, held a meeting at Stormont — I believe it was in this Building — along with Frank Cushnahan, who was appointed by Sammy Wilson as the NAMA advisory group insider, and representatives of PIMCO, the American property investment company who were to be potential bidders. Does the Member agree with me that it was entirely inappropriate for Ministers to bring together potential bidders and NAMA insiders and that there should be full transparency on everything that happened in order to assure the public that in the future there will be proper governance arrangements, that we will not be held in such disrepute and that there will be confidence for future long-term investment in Northern Ireland?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I remind Members that interventions should be brief. You have an extra minute added to your time, Mr Chambers.

Mr Chambers: I agree that that episode is worthy of further scrutiny.

One of our main target areas for inward investment is the United States of America. It is a big country, but multinational companies there do not operate in silos. We will never be able to quantify how many boardrooms have echoed the conversations about the allegations around NAMA. Given the involvement of the US Department of Justice and the FBI, it cannot all have gone unnoticed or been ignored in America by either the US Administration, the business sector or the media.

Unfortunately, from time to time bad things can and do happen, both in the private sector and in the public sector. They can be outside the control of management or, indeed, government. However, in the court of public opinion and, perhaps, in the case of NAMA, the international business community, judgement is not merely passed on the fact that something bad has happened but more on how the situation is dealt with. Robust action breeds confidence, but prevarication creates suspicion.

The House cannot afford to tiptoe around the NAMA allegations. Nor should it peddle the line that we should leave the truth-finding to others. Every day the truth stays suppressed is another day of public and international scepticism of the genuine desire of the House to get to the

bottom of this cesspit. No matter how uncomfortable the journey or the process of digging for the truth may prove to be, we owe it to the House. We owe it to our people, especially to our hard-working and honest business community, who do not operate in circles where cash-filled bags are handed over in hospital car parks. We should also divert the spotlight off the BBC programme of that name and the other arms of the media who have pursued and highlighted the scandal. We should be grateful to them for casting a light in the dark corners that many would prefer to stay dark. Forget about criticising the messenger, and let us just spend all our energy and resource on this story, with all its serious allegations. Lord Morrow, in a debate in this Chamber last week, shared these words of wisdom:

“a common fault in Northern Ireland: we seem to look at who is saying the thing rather than at what is being said.” — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 117, p144, col 2].

Perhaps today is an important occasion not to lose sight of what is being said and to act accordingly in the best interests of the public we all claim to represent.

I turn briefly to the amendment from Sinn Féin. Given that they are so precious about their image overseas, I find it disappointing that they do not share my party's concerns.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

1.00 pm

Mr Chambers: Also, so much of the DUP's outrage was directed towards the Ulster Unionist Party, yet there did not seem to be a word directed at those involved in this nasty affair.

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

Mr Mullan: It has been a very interesting and insightful debate thus far. As a Member for East Derry and a member of the Committee for Finance, I welcome the opportunity to engage in the debate as well. As we enter our first Opposition day, I welcome a debate on what has been the biggest financial scandal of a generation.

As other Members and my colleague Claire Hanna have outlined, in recent weeks, developments have been picking up pace on NAMA's sale of Project Eagle, the biggest ever property deal in the North of this island. Some of the revelations in the media and other places have been deeply worrying, and the report of the Irish Comptroller and Auditor General, which catalogues the irregularities in the Project Eagle sale, should be compulsory reading for everyone in the Chamber. Clearly, as the revelations unfold, it has become increasingly clear that the Project Eagle scandal is multifaceted and multilayered. Complex as it is, one thing is quite simple and crystal clear: the manner in which further details and accounts of the transaction are emerging from private sources is doing great reputational damage to this institution and to the trust and confidence the public have bestowed on us as their public elected representatives.

The Irish Government's plan to establish their own inquiry into Project Eagle is a welcome development. The issue demands political consensus on the way forward because it is bigger than any one party and any one jurisdiction.

In that context, I turn to today's amendments. The only way to uncover the whole truth about Project Eagle is to have a cross-border investigation, and we cannot be found wanting. Sinn Féin's amendment is merely stating the obvious, which is that the Executive should be fully committed to any investigation: that should be the standard of any Government. Sinn Féin's amendment fails to recognise the importance of cross-border collaboration. The SDLP believes the only way to achieve the truth and accountability is to have a joint PSNI, NCA and Garda Síochána team to investigate the criminal allegations. Provision exists for that approach, and it should be deployed now and without any further delay. That would help to build confidence that all the evidence will be pursued, obtained and properly scrutinised.

Any inquiry established must, at its core, reflect that the alleged corruption at the heart of the deal is an all-island scourge and a resolution can be achieved only through a comprehensive, all-island investigation. There are jurisdictional issues involved in parallel criminal investigations, but we cannot allow the border to become a barrier to justice or accountability for the Irish people. Any cross-border investigation will require changes to legislation. The SDLP has a draft Bill to amend the flawed Westminster Inquiries Act 2005 that makes precisely that provision in public inquiries. That will now be circulated at Westminster and elsewhere as further legislation is developed to make fresh provision for North/South models of investigation.

It is important that, as we debate the motion, we do not let deep divisions in our Executive act as a veto to a thorough examination of all the issues arising from NAMA's Project Eagle sale. The Executive parties cannot continue to stifle progress here, and they cannot impede the course of any investigation. The public want the truth, and they want accountability — they deserve just those. Any attempt to stop that should be seen as an affront to democracy and to the democratic institutions of the Assembly. I urge support for the SDLP amendment.

Mr Agnew: There are two aspects to the NAMA scandal: the criminal is whether there has been corruption; the political is what role politicians played in what appears to be a poor return, particularly for the Irish taxpayer. The distinction is simple, and anyone who purports not to understand the distinction is clearly deflecting from their party's involvement in the political aspect. The criminal aspect will, to a large extent, take care of itself. I have full confidence in the National Crime Agency and an Garda Síochána working together to establish why there was an offshore bank account containing £7 million, which seems to be fairly well established, whether bin bags full of cash were passed over by so-called handlers and, if so, who those people were, what their role was and what criminality was conducted. That will take care of itself. It is relatively simple in its context. Separate to that, though, is the political side, and that is where we need to ensure that our Executive, the Government in the South and the NAMA board are held to account. That is our role, that is why we are here and it must be done. Otherwise, we fail in our duty.

Today we have a call for a statement from the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and it is disappointing that we cannot even get them to the Chamber to address the debate. I welcome the Finance Minister's attendance and his responding to the debate, but I would like to have

seen the First Minister and deputy First Minister. We are seeing a further example, as we saw with the use of the royal prerogative and the major spending decisions taken over the summer recess, of a First Minister and deputy First Minister who wish to act without accountability to or challenge from the House.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's report was clear about the difference with Project Eagle. Why was it different from sales in Dublin and London? The answer is plain and simple: the political considerations specific to the Northern Ireland aspects. That is what we have a duty to investigate — this House, the Dáil and collectively North/South. What were those political considerations? I will throw out one as a possibility. Sammy Wilson described Frank Cushnahan as a "friend" who did "great work", which is the crux of the problem with the NAMA process: cronyism in Northern Ireland politics. This is not the first time that we have seen it. We have seen issues before with property deals. I remember the Seymour Sweeney case, when someone who said that he was "aware" of the individual turned out to be his good friend. Now we hear of another good friend doing "great work", potentially on behalf of the DUP. We have to move away from that cronyism. We need transparency and accountability. Being a good friend is not enough to deliver effectively for the people of Northern Ireland, and we need to challenge that. We need to ensure that political appointments are the right appointments, that the job is done correctly and that there is no political interference where none is required.

I was told that the reason that Project Eagle was so different — why Northern Ireland was so different from London, Dublin or anywhere else in NAMA's portfolio — is plain and simple: whether it was east Belfast or west Belfast, you could not sell a house without a politician at the table. That is the crux of the matter: political interference in every deal. This should have been simply about getting good value for money for the Irish taxpayer through sales in Northern Ireland that met the market value. As it was, friends were at the table.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Agnew: Politicians were at the table during sales. We need to get to that cronyism and weed it out.

Mr Carroll: I am glad that the NAMA scandal has finally been brought to the Floor of the Chamber for debate. In all honesty, however, we should have had the opportunity to discuss this serious issue much earlier. The motion questions the degree to which the international reputation of the North has been damaged by the NAMA scandal. I do not doubt that the supporters of the motion are correct on that point, but I should point out that our international reputation often seemed to be exaggerated in the Chamber way before the NAMA scandal erupted.

Be that as it may, surely our starting point today should be what ordinary people think about this. What do the hundreds of thousands of people — the taxpayers who pay our wages, no less — think about the recent shenanigans? It is not an exaggeration to say that there is widespread revulsion in society about the recent revelations. Serious questions need to be asked, not just about the role of individuals in this affair but about the endemic culture that exists in the establishment here that bends over backwards for property developers and big

corporations and the cosy relationship that exists between big companies, big business and politicians. There is a rotten culture of reverence for people in suits with big bank accounts.

When it comes to public-sector workers and people who receive benefits, we are told that belts need to be tightened and tough decisions have to be made. They do not benefit from secret deals or backhanders, nor do they get the ear of the First Minister. Yet, the NAMA scandal shows that, when it comes to the interests of property developers, parties will go the extra mile for them, including operating on a cross-border basis to ensure that deals are made for individuals — this from parties that are normally ardent opponents of any kind of all-Ireland activity.

How can that be? How can it be that a giant US company can secure assets worth £6.5 billion for just £1.34 billion? The NAMA deal was a squandering of public money and a scam to bail out banks that were addicted to profit. It is clear, however, that NAMA is not just a scandal; it is a state-run agency bordering on a criminal enterprise. In the opinion of People Before Profit, nothing less than an independent, cross-border investigation will do to get to the bottom of it. Who knew what? Who benefited financially from Project Eagle? Who was to receive money from the Isle of Man bank account? Which other Members in the Chamber had relationships or clear conflicts of interest with those involved in the NAMA affair that they did not declare? Those questions need to be asked, and they need to be answered soon. It is time that we brought the crooks in suits to heel.

Mr Allister: Just this time last year, the then First Minister, Mr Peter Robinson, described Mr Frank Cushnahan as a pillar of the establishment. Anyone who watched the jaw-dropping 'Spotlight' programme of a couple of weeks ago might well have thought that that statement said more about the establishment than anything else. Of course, the establishment, then as now, is the DUP and Sinn Féin.

As Steven Agnew rightly said, there are two distinct aspects to this. There is the potential criminality, whether it was rucksacks of cash or hoards of money in secret accounts in the Isle of Man. Who were they for, and was there any corruption involved? All of that is for rigorous, relentless and uncompromising criminal investigation, and I am happy that that takes its course. However, as the Republic of Ireland's Audit Committee said, there is also the question of whether there was political influence. That is where this House should come into the equation, in seeking to hunt down whether there was political influence that laid the basis that facilitated and was part of that which was rotten in all of the NAMA escapade.

1.15 pm

Of course, there are many issues to investigate that do not impinge on the criminal investigation. There is the issue of how and why Mr Sammy Wilson as Finance Minister made the three recommendations that he did for suitable persons to serve on the committee: Frank Cushnahan, Mr Pengelly and, as we now discover, a third individual, Mr Adair, who never even knew that he had been nominated. He did not discover that until years later, and he himself had the wit to say that, because he was a debtor to NAMA, he would be wholly unsuitable to be appointed. What does that tell us about the due diligence that was conducted by Sammy Wilson in making those recommendations? Was there

the same lack of due diligence in recommending Frank Cushnahan, whom the PAC of this House said had behaved totally unethically over Red Sky and the Housing Executive?

The second issue of political investigation is one of the things in the programme that intrigued me most. Frank Cushnahan explained to Mr Miskelly years before this became DUP executive policy that the way forward in NAMA was to extricate the NAMA debt and transfer it outside of NAMA to a third party so that deals could then be done. Lo and behold, that exactly became the policy of the First Minister and the Finance Minister, and, it seems, the deputy First Minister. It was to back foreign vulture companies coming in and buying the debt, and, of course, we know that the very reason that the PIMCO deal fell apart is that one of the beneficiaries of that apparently was to be the man whose original idea it was and whose friends — they professed themselves his friends — then took it up and ran with it and delivered. Is that not something of political influence that this House should be investigating? It patently is.

Then from that programme, there is the suggestion from Mr Cushnahan that Peter and Sammy could lobby for a bit of a discount on the NAMA price. Did that happen? Is the House not interested to know whether that happened? Does the House want to hide its head in the sand? I understand that some to whom this comes too close do want to hide their head in the sand. They want to build a barrier and say, "Oh, the National Crime Agency is interested". As we heard at the start of the debate, there is no sub judice issue here.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: We know that we are entitled to talk about and investigate these matters. Some would rather hide from them. It will be a test of this House whether or not it hides from them.

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Is deas bheith anseo leat inniu, agus ba mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt do gach Comhalta a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht inniu. I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate, and I have no doubt that this discussion will run in the House and outside it, despite the fears of the previous Member to speak, who spoke about discussion or debate being closed down.

In essence, as was touched on by many Members, this is a discussion around who benefited from the NAMA/Cerberus deal and also around who benefited from the recession that blighted this island and who suffered. It is really a tale of hair shirts and silk shirts. We know today that we were told at the time of the property crash by the bankers, by Mr Noonan and the Irish Government and by others in positions of power that we would all be in this together and that, if there were hair shirts to be worn, they would be worn by everyone. However, in the years since, the reality has been that the suffering and hardship has been the monopoly of working-class people and middle-class people. In fact, those who wreaked havoc on this country through their speculative deals and their reckless behaviour, whether bankers or large property developers, have in fact done well.

I will illustrate that with a tale of two cities. One of the developers — one of the speculators — who alone racked up around €0.5 billion in debt and owned property across this jurisdiction and further afield, received a loan from the Anglo Irish Bank that was guaranteed against his shares in

the bank, so that, when the loan went bad, he lost nothing, which was another example of the golden circle at work. Whilst living in exile — as a tax exile — he received a call from a gentleman who, we know from 'Spotlight' and other sources, was at the heart of the controversy and was told to come back to Belfast. He was told, "We will sort out your debt", and he came back. We know that Our Lord healed the lame, but the miraculous work done with that debt was truly breathtaking. The debt disappeared, and the individual was made whole in terms of his debt. He then got a bonus payment by receiving all the land and property of John Miskelly. While ordinary people have gone through hardship, damage, lengthening unemployment queues and emigration, what has happened? He is back this week, in the Market area of south Belfast, with an office development — a monstrous office development — in a working-class street. I do not think that there is a precedent anywhere in Europe for a development like that going right in the middle of somewhere like the Market estate. The person responsible is living the life that he lived before the crash.

We see that tale of one city, where the golden circle has done well and is doing well. For the record, I will oppose the right of that individual to inflict that development on the Market. My colleagues in South Belfast who have supported that development should, perhaps, when they talk about who was involved in NAMA and what happened, think about whether they are doing the right thing in supporting the golden circle rather than the people of the Market.

Let us talk about the other side of that coin. One of my constituents wrote to me about being caught in negative equity. We know that in one case the banks lent recklessly to speculators, but they did not suffer; they were made whole again. At the same time, banks encouraged ordinary working families to take out loans and more money, telling them, "It'll be OK. You can pay it back". What actually happened to those ordinary families across this jurisdiction and across the country? This lady writes:

"Myself and my husband bought a two-bedroom bungalow in south Belfast in May 2008 for £250,000. The value of this property is now £104,000. This was our family home. My mortgage was £220,000 from Halifax on an interest-only mortgage, and the payments were £750 per month. In May 2014, the Halifax demanded a capital and interest payment, which totalled over £1,400. I couldn't afford to pay that and thus defaulted on the mortgage. In September 2014, I asked the Halifax if we could sell the property, and they said as long as a negative equity application pack was completed they didn't see a problem. The property went on the market for sale; it was agreed at £112,000. I left the property at the end of October 2014 thinking it was sold and moved into rented accommodation in Lisburn, even though my son went to school in Belfast. I couldn't afford the rental prices asked in Belfast."

That lady had no one to call. She was not connected to the golden circle to have her debt forgiven. She continued:

"In January 2015, I appeared at Belfast court for repossession. At that point, I was advised that the Halifax were being investigated and thus the repossession could not take place. The property is still in my name, and I am still incurring default charges"

against a mortgage. I haven't heard anything else in relation to the repossession.

In July 2015, I appeared in Newtownards Crown Court for non-payment of rates. I stood in front of the judge who did not know what to do with me and finally asked me to leave. I cannot begin to tell you the amount of pressure and stress that I have been under in relation to this matter."

She then speaks about her personal health difficulties:

"Notwithstanding the above, I can now not move forward with my life. My credit rating is on the floor, and I can't get credit for anything, not to mention another mortgage. I have no idea what the outcome of this will be. I have received no support from anyone in dealing with the bank, court, rates etc."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Could I ask the Member to put this in the context of the motion, please?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Absolutely. Here is the context, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The bankers and speculators who were responsible for wrecking the country and were at the heart of the NAMA deal had their debt forgiven and are now back living high on the hog. This lady and people like her right across the country are suffering and having their lives destroyed by the same banking practices, but no one has managed to make them whole. Someone mentioned the £7 million in the Isle of Man at the heart of this: would it not be wonderful if we could do something with that to help ordinary people?

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Mr Beggs, I think that some of the Members would like me to refer to their comments, so let us do a little bit of that.

Philip Smith opened. I do not think that anyone would disagree with him that there is a need to build confidence in these institutions; in fact, I think that accountancy practitioners, solicitors and those in high business in this country would agree with you that this affair — the NAMA/Cerberus scandal — has been damaging to all sectors of our community. Those of us who are involved in public life have been trying to do that. From my communications and dialogue with business in particular, I am confident that I enjoy the support of the business community. They know that we are determined to get to what some people call the truth or core of the NAMA/Cerberus deal.

John O'Dowd said that the place for putting those responsible for wrongdoing was the courts. We would agree with that, but, at the same time, none of us will hold back any arm of the Assembly or Executive if they wish to engage in further investigation. The point is made by all sides that, if justice is to be done — truth is one thing, and I hope that we get to that; we will try to do so — it will most likely be done by the agencies of the state, the NCA, an Garda Síochána, and the FBI or the SEC in the States.

Claire Hanna spoke, and I welcome the fact that the SDLP's sister party in the South of Ireland, the Labour Party, has now agreed to support a commission of investigation into the NAMA/Cerberus deal and Project Eagle. When I raised the question over many years, the Labour Party, when in government, supported Mr Noonan in not having an investigation of NAMA. Worse than that

— it was an insult to the Committee — NAMA refused repeatedly, as mentioned by others, to appear in front of us. Of course, the allegations that were made at the Finance Committee by politicians from all sides have been proven to have merit, and NAMA now has to answer them.

Ms Pengelly, the Chair of the Committee, has asked that we stand aside, I think she said, and allow the NCA to investigate the matter. I think that we are all agreed that the NCA will do its job and will have the full support of me as Minister of Finance and, I think, of every Member of the Assembly. I should add that I met the NCA in Lisburn last Thursday. I know that there has been some suggestion here that political interference — "political influence", I think was the term used — might stop the NCA in its tracks; I do not believe that that is the case. I believe that the NCA is pursuing this in a dogged, diligent and meticulous manner. The NCA is resolved to try to bring a case against those who were responsible for the fraud that, I believe, was at the heart of the deal. Of course, the evidence of that is the £7 million in the Isle of Man.

It is worth putting it on record that Stephen Farry defended Judith Cochrane's record on the Committee. While she and I did not agree on every decision that was made, she made a really positive contribution to the Finance Committee and to the investigation.

Mr Farry said that, in Dublin, the Taoiseach reached out to other parties and asked for a united front and a coming together in relation to the investigation. That decision by the Taoiseach came late in the day, but the point is well made, and I hope that there is some common ground here. While I have no doubt that there may be some party politicking going on — I would never do that — there is some common ground in that we all want to get to the truth of this situation.

1.30 pm

Mr Maskey said that the Sinn Féin amendment is superior because it is not as narrow as the motion or the amendment from the SDLP. He talked, as Mr Carroll did, about the disgraceful burden on ordinary people.

Mr Chambers referred to public confidence. What we are doing today, Mr Chambers, in part will send out a message to our supporters from all parties that we want to, as you say, lance this poisonous boil.

Mr Mullan rightly pointed out that we are talking about the greatest financial scandal in a generation and the biggest property deal in the history of this state. For those reasons, it is absolutely essential that, as he says, we get to the truth. He suggested that the Executive should not be allowed a veto on the investigation. Perhaps he is on the Finance Committee and has met the NCA; I do not know. If he does meet the NCA, the FBI or the gardaí, he will be sure that there will not be any veto by anyone over the criminal investigations. That is why Sinn Féin has supported a commission of investigation from the Irish Government and why we are arguing that it has to be cross-border.

Steven Agnew referred to the criminal and the political and pointed out the dichotomy. He insisted that we can do more to reveal political shenanigans in relation to this deal. Mr Agnew, we all agree with doing that in the pursuit of truth. It is about finding the correct mechanism to do it. I am sure that the Green Party would support the idea

of the commission of investigation in Dublin being truly all-Ireland.

My colleague Mr Allister finished off by railing against political influence and the hint or smell of political influence over this deal. I can assure him that I have no fear about all the investigations. I suspect that the investigations by the Assembly may not be as thorough as we would want because we do not have the powers. I think that we would all agree with him on that. I hope that he supports the all-island approach to the matter, as we do.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, an bhfuil mo chuid ama istigh? Ba mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt do gach duine arís as a gcuid pointí.

Mr Attwood: Can we be very clear on what this debate is about? It is about whether we have higher levels of accountability or lesser levels of accountability. If there is a conflict and tension in the Chamber, it is between both of those. We know that the DUP wants to resist higher levels of accountability on this matter. The issue is this: does Sinn Féin also support resistance to higher levels of accountability on this issue?

The one DUP speaker, Mrs Pengelly, said that it is “bizarre and perverse” — her words — for anybody to ignore the advice of the NCA. Is Mrs Pengelly saying to the British Government that, when they called for a commission of inquiry into the events and issues around the murder of Stephen Lawrence at the very time when there was an ongoing criminal investigation and, if my memory is right, criminal prosecution, that was bizarre and perverse? Are Mrs Pengelly and the DUP saying to the Public Accounts Committee in Dublin, before which certain senior people in NAMA will appear this week, that it is bizarre and perverse for that investigation to be going on? Is she saying to the Irish Government, which will perhaps announce a commission of investigation by the end of this week, that it is perverse and bizarre for them to ignore the advice of the NCA?

The words “bizarre and perverse” are a smokescreen to deny accountability; let us be very clear about that. Otherwise, how can you explain what the Irish Government will do or what the Lawrence inquiry did? They were able to navigate between the criminal investigation on one hand and the requirements for accountability on the other. Let not this Chamber allow a smokescreen to be sent out in relation to this matter through the voices of the DUP. As other people have said, the issues of appointment, the MOU, the meetings, the phone calls that involved more than one party in the North, and the discounts are all matters that are outwith the criminal investigation and must be interrogated by the appropriate authorities on the island of Ireland.

My question, however, is to Sinn Féin, who Mr Maskey says have produced an amendment that is more comprehensive and inclusive than the amended Ulster Unionist motion under the SDLP proposal. Let me ask Sinn Féin this question: as a party that purports to be all-Ireland, why are you resisting a call for the appropriate authorities — the NCA and the Garda — to consider an all-Ireland joint investigation team in respect of the criminal matters?

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way to the Member.

Ms Hanna: Does the Member not find it surprising that the Sinn Féin amendment also deletes the requirement for the First Ministers to give a statement to the Assembly?

Mr Attwood: I will deal with that matter in a second. How can Sinn Féin, who support all-Ireland in everything else, vote down a proposal for an all-Ireland criminal investigation if that is what the NCA and the Garda Síochána wish?

Mr O’Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way in a second, because my next point arises from what Mr O’Dowd said earlier. He said that Mr Smith had over-read the Sinn Féin amendment because it deleted the reference to reputational damage — that that was meant to be included. If it was meant to be included, Mr O’Dowd, include it by supporting the SDLP amendment to the Ulster Unionist motion, which makes it explicit that reputational damage has arisen. I will give way to the Member.

Mr O’Dowd: In reverse order, first, I did not say that it was meant to be included. I said that they were reading too much into its omission. Regarding the all-Ireland nature of any inquiry, our amendment makes it quite clear:

“committing to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations.”

Minister Ó Muilleoir has already made it clear that he will attend those investigations, and the deputy First Minister has made it clear that he will attend those investigations. May I also remind the Member that his party’s amendment does not call for any action. It recommends “consideration” of action.

Mr Attwood: It recommends:

“consideration ... of a joint investigation team”.

Why? Because it is not the role of the Assembly to tell a policing authority how to conduct its affairs, but it is the role of the Assembly to give best advice. Let us give best advice by recommending what an all-Ireland investigation might be able to achieve.

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

Mr Attwood: Secondly, the issue of reputational damage has been deleted, so let us put it in. Thirdly, let us put in the fact that the First Minister and deputy First Minister should make a statement to the Assembly. For some reason or another, Sinn Féin deletes the fact that the First Minister and deputy First Minister should make a statement —

Mr O’Dowd: No.

Mr Attwood: — but has deleted the fact that it is a statement to the Assembly.

Mr O’Dowd: We have not.

Mr Attwood: Read your words, Mr O’Dowd. Your words see the First Minister and deputy First Minister rush to the sound —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Order. I ask the Member to take his seat, please. I would request normal debate in the Chamber and not remarks from sedentary positions.

Mr Attwood: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Let the First Minister and deputy First Minister make a statement to the Assembly. Otherwise, it is a rush to the

sound of clicking cameras, not to the sound of Members' hard questions on accountability.

Finally, why has Sinn Féin deleted —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Attwood: — any reference to the NCA? It is coy about the NCA, so let us put the NCA back in. Let Sinn Féin accept higher levels of accountability —

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

Mr Attwood: — by accepting the SDLP amendment.

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

Ms Ruane: First of all, I apologise to the Assembly for not being here for the start of the debate: I was chairing an official event — the Positive Futures event — in the Senate Chamber. I meant no disrespect to the Assembly, and I view the subject of the debate as a very important issue affecting people right across the island of Ireland.

I heard many of the Members who spoke. Like the Minister, I find it incredible that, as people struggle every day to pay their bills, rent or mortgage, they are listening to the media talk about insider dealings and millions lost to the taxpayer and are shaking their heads in disbelief. I echo the question posed by our Minister of Finance: who benefited and who suffered? It is essential —

Mr E McCann: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: If I could just develop this, and then I will give way.

It is essential that we get to the truth of what happened, that the people who acted wrongly pay the price and that the taxpayer should not bear the brunt of the money lost. We need to ensure that there is a way of recouping the money so that it can be invested in our health and education sectors, in building our badly needed infrastructure or in supporting the people I just heard talking about their children with learning disabilities.

Sinn Féin has consistently — I will say it again — consistently raised concerns about the operation of and the culture of secrecy in NAMA. To listen to Mr Attwood, you would think it is Sinn Féin that is the problem here, rather than the people who have done the insider dealing and the people who have gained millions. I think people really need to wake up and smell the coffee and look at the work that Sinn Féin — our finance spokespersons, our deputy leader and our leader — has done North and South to expose the whole issue of NAMA.

I have a question for Alex Attwood — I will give him the Floor and will then give it to you, Eamonn McCann. Did the SDLP make a submission to the Taoiseach re the terms of reference for NAMA, the deadline for which was last Friday?

Mr Attwood: I am pleased to respond. Beyond the issue of submission, we have had conversations with the Irish Labour Party about how to scale up. Our party leader met Micheál Martin, the leader of Fianna Fáil, and I personally have spoken to a representative of the Irish Government on this matter.

Ms Ruane: I welcome that clarification. I will now give way to Eamonn McCann.

Mr E McCann: My question is this: does the Member agree that, in the light of the extremely serious and profoundly disturbing matters we are discussing today, it would be appropriate now to invite Mr Conall McDevitt to return to the House and resume his career?

Ms Ruane: I will leave that matter to the SDLP.

Sinn Féin believes that we need an all-Ireland commission of investigation. I will say it again, because people do not seem to understand or hear what we are saying about that: we believe we need an all-Ireland commission of investigation, and its remit must be wider than Project Eagle. It should examine the full operation of NAMA. The UUP's motion lacks ambition. We believe that the least effective route to take is an inquiry by the Finance Committee. You only need to look at NAMA's refusal to appear before it. What we need is an all-Ireland commission with powers. It is also worrying that, while all these questions remain unanswered, NAMA continues to sell off assets.

There is the recent report from the Comptroller and Auditor General on the disposal of the Northern loan book, yet we do not have a copy of it. I note that our Minister of Finance, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, has written to the Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan, requesting a copy of the report. Have we got a copy of it yet? Has our Minister of Finance got a copy?

In that letter, Minister Ó Muilleoir reiterated that his Department will cooperate and work fully with the investigation. That is to be welcomed. As my colleague John O'Dowd said, Martin McGuinness will attend the PAC in the interests of transparency and openness. I welcome that as well because Sinn Féin wants to see truth. We want to see our citizens get the resources they need. We do not want to see people who abused power or who are party to insider dealings —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close.

Ms Ruane: — getting away with it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I call Mike Nesbitt to conclude and wind up the debate on the substantive motion.

1.45 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I rise on a significant day for the House: the first Opposition day. It is different from the Opposition that we had in the 1960s and 1970s; for the first time, you have parties of official Opposition that are entirely committed to making these institutions work. I welcome the engagement of our colleagues in the SDLP on this matter. We have said that we, as an Opposition, will be positive. What better sign could you have than my colleague Mr Chambers quoting Lord Morrow positively? I welcome it, but I ask you not to repeat it.

The proverbial visitor to Planet Northern Ireland a couple of weeks ago, if looking at the Order Paper for our first day of business, would have been forgiven for not realising that there had been an EU referendum and a vote to quit Brussels or that there was any controversy around NAMA. There was no mention of the cash allegedly exchanged in a hospital car park or of the fact that one of the 108 MLAs

who went off on summer recess did not return, forced to resign — whether they jumped or were pushed is an open matter — over allegedly trying to coach a witness appearing in front of a Statutory Committee. There is no room in the House or these institutions for ostrich politics. It is a disrespectful attitude to the House.

Mr O'Dowd accused my colleague Philip Smith of being fixated with the Northern Ireland Executive. We are the Opposition, and it is our job to scrutinise. The Executive represent the House, so it is entirely proper for us to raise questions about the role of the Northern Ireland Executive. Yes, the courts are the right place, and the National Crime Agency is the primary investigatory body, but the fact that the NCA is involved should not be used as a convenient excuse.

While I welcome the contributions of all who took part in the debate, I record my disappointment in the remarks of the Member for South Belfast Mrs Emma Little Pengelly, who appears to be in denial. Her criticism of our motion was unfair and inaccurate. Her remarks were nothing more than a party political diatribe. She stated that the NCA says, "Do not initiate another investigation in your Committee". At no point in our motion do we say that there should be a Committee investigation running in parallel with the work of the NCA. In fact, the only mention of an inquiry by the Committee for Finance is in the last sentence, which states that it is an:

"inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance."

It does not say that it should be undertaken immediately. If Mrs Little Pengelly had listened to Mr Smith, she might have realised her error.

Mrs Little Pengelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: Oh, Deputy Speaker, Mrs Little Pengelly asked me to give way. Does she not realise that this is a debating Chamber, where we expect give and take? Does she not recall that she would not give way to me? She did not give, so she is not going to take.

Mr Chambers gave a very detailed analysis of the reputational damage that is being done to Northern Ireland and to this Chamber over what has happened with NAMA. The fact is that, internationally, we are a "ba-NAMA republic". He made the point that Lord Morrow made: we should not kick the man; we should kick the ball. On that basis, I welcome the remarks of Claire Hanna, who referred to Sammy Wilson's ridiculous attack on not on the ball but the man with the ball: the BBC journalist whom he accused of having ridiculous bias. The question for Mr Wilson and his successor as Finance Minister is this: what due diligence did the Department undertake before recommending Mr Frank Cushnahan for the role? I will very readily give way to the Minister if he will tell us what due diligence he has undertaken. Minister, have you satisfied yourself that due diligence occurred?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am very happy. Leslie Cree could have advised you on this one. He did a great job on the Committee as well. This question was asked many times of the Department. The Department's answer — you will see it in Hansard — is that it has no record of any due diligence being carried out in relation to any of these nominations.

Mr Nesbitt: There is a ministerial code. Let me quote what it says under "Openness":

"Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands."

You restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands, yet we have had the debate about the appointment of the so-called Executive press officer and the fact that, without reference to the scrutiny Committee, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister assumed the powers of a monarch to make Mr Gordon their new press secretary.

There is something else, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to take this away and examine the answers that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have given since 23 June 2016 to questions from the Floor of the Chamber with regard to what preparation the Executive conducted ahead of the vote on the European referendum. As we now know, there is a document dated as early as May 2015 — 'Preliminary analysis on the impact of a UK referendum on its membership of the European Union' — that gives a very stark analysis of what would happen to Northern Ireland if the UK voted to Brexit. I must say to you, Deputy Speaker, that, as Chair of the legacy Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I was totally unaware of that document. I will move on because I know that you want me to refocus on the debate. You showed some latitude to the Minister, and I appreciate your reciprocating on this occasion.

It comes down to this: as Mr Smith said, it is about reputational damage. What do the people of Northern Ireland, who increasingly do not bother voting in Assembly elections, think of us in the Chamber? What do they think of the Executive who represent us? What does the international community think, the people whom we ask Invest Northern Ireland to encourage to come to work with us as foreign direct investors? What do they think when they see millions of pounds in the Isle of Man, tens of thousands of pounds in cars in hospital car parks, information withheld and information allegedly shared most inappropriately with those who perhaps have a conflict of interest?

I find it extraordinary that Sinn Féin removed any reference to the reputational damage that was in the original motion. Do they not realise the damage that is being done? How could they not, with their links to Irish America? Yes, they call on the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to make a statement, but they have taken out the words that we put in our motion: make a statement "before the Assembly". Is the Assembly not the prior and primary body? Is this not the place where they should come first to tell us what they think? Yet Sinn Féin has taken that out. Mr O'Dowd nods at me in agreement, yet it is not in their amendment. Mr Maskey says that he does not understand why we are calling for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to make a statement, yet their amendment calls for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to make a statement.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: You would not give way for me. It is give and take: if you do not give, you do not get to take. That is the way of it.

There is no openness. There is no transparency. There is an NCA investigation, which is an investigation, not a convenient excuse to ignore the will of the House. We will not support the Sinn Féin amendment. We have no difficulty with what the SDLP proposes, as it is fine and balanced to say that it recommends consideration of the creation of a joint investigation team of the NCA and an Garda Síochána. We will support the SDLP amendment; we will not support the Sinn Féin amendment. I recommend the motion to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. After Question Time, we will return to the debate on public confidence after the NAMA revelations, when I will put the Question on amendment No 1.

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Communities

Benefit Take-up

1. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the programmes in place to ensure people receive the benefits to which they are entitled. (AQO 294/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I am committed to ensuring that those people who have rightful entitlement are receiving all the benefits and other supports and services that they are eligible for. Since 2005, my Department has delivered benefit uptake programmes and, more recently, I launched the new three-year strategic plan, 'Supporting People - Maximising Income through the Uptake of Benefits' which has a vision to ensure that every individual and household across Northern Ireland is receiving all the social security benefits to which they and their families are entitled.

Over the next three years, we plan to target 100,000 people with the offer of a full benefit entitlement check and secure at least £40 million in additional benefits. We have a number of approaches to meet these targets, including writing out to older people who are not in receipt of certain benefits; the Make the Call advertising campaign; roadshows held in local communities to promote the uptake of benefits; a team of community outreach officers who will visit the vulnerable in their homes to assist in making a claim to benefits; and partnership working across government, the wider public sector and the voluntary and community sector. We will be extending these programmes to ensure that support is available for people who wish to claim personal independence payment (PIP) or who are impacted by other welfare changes. Between 2013 and 2016, under its previous three-year plan, 'Maximising Incomes & Outcomes: A 3 Year Plan for Improving the Uptake of Benefits', this generated over £48 million for over 13,000 people.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for the update on those schemes. Equally important to targeting people who need benefits and are in receipt of them is to make sure that those who are not entitled to them do not get them. He may be aware that up to £800,000 was paid to prisoners between 2011 and 2014 and, since the system's upgrade, that data is no longer kept. What steps is he taking to recoup that money or make sure that it is not paid out incorrectly?

Mr Givan: The Member raises an important issue that I have touched on before, which is the amount of investment that we put in for detecting fraud and error — often, there can be error in the system. There is significant investment put into that team who proactively go after benefits that have been paid incorrectly or, indeed, fraudulently. Where that has taken place and whatever examples are drawn to my attention today, such as those prisoners, I expect that, if any benefit is received in error or fraudulently, that money should be recouped.

Ms Mallon: Given that people can avail themselves of the one-year mitigation package only when they go through the appeals process, why has money not been specifically ring-fenced to advise, assist and support them through the appeals process? What guarantees can the Minister give that much-needed resources and money will not be diverted from front-line advice services?

Mr Givan: I am happy to look at the particular example that the Member is referring to, around the one-year mitigation package and the funding that is available. Over the next four years, £2 million each year of Fresh Start moneys is being provided to organisations that are involved in providing independent support. People get support whenever they go through the system from the Social Security Agency, but, in addition to that, the Executive are putting additional moneys into organisations, such as Advice NI, to provide that extra help for individuals.

Mr Stalford: I welcome the launch of the three-year plan. Will the Minister give us a greater idea of what he hopes to achieve in increasing uptake? Precisely why do we need an uptake plan?

Mr Givan: The evidence has shown the success that we have had. For every £1 that we put into encouraging people to get the benefits to which they are entitled, we get a £12 return. It is something that has a clear track record of delivery, and I want to make sure that people who are entitled to benefit receive it. Often, for some people, and particularly the older generation, there is almost a stigma attached to claiming for such things. We need to make sure that we break down those barriers. I urge Members to encourage their constituents to make that call. If people are entitled to receive benefit, I would much rather that the money flows out of the Treasury and comes to Northern Ireland and ultimately benefits our local economy. Over the next three years, the commitment is to secure at least £40 million in additional benefits by 2019 to directly target a minimum of 100,000 people and ensure a full check on the benefits that they are entitled to.

Mr McGuigan: Will the Minister make an assessment of the Make the Call campaign taken forward in conjunction with the Older People's Commissioner.

Mr Givan: I was able to launch this event at Lagan Valley Island in Lisburn, and we had the Older People's Commissioner with us. He has an important role to play, and he recognises, as I do, the issues around older people having the confidence to make the call. This has been successful, and, for older people especially, there are benefits that they are entitled to that they do not claim. There should be no shame whatsoever attached to individuals who have worked all their lives and, in their twilight years, need support. It is only right that this campaign receives our support.

Mr Allister: The Fresh Start document boasted that there would be a ring-fenced £25 million to hunt down fraud. I ask the Minister for an update. Is that money being drawn down? How is it being spent, and with what effect?

Mr Givan: I remember there was a question from Mr Agnew about this. There is money being spent on fraud detection, and a specific team was established to deal with the detection of error and fraud. The money is there, it will be invested and it will yield results, because we want to ensure that the people who are entitled to support receive it and those who are not entitled to it are pursued rigorously. It is something that I intend to take forward.

Cavity Wall Insulation

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the extent of defective cavity wall insulation in Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes. (AQO 295/16-21)

Mr Givan: There is a UK-wide problem with cavity wall insulation that was installed in the 1980s. The degrading or failure of this insulation affects all housing tenures, not just social housing. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive estimates that around 62,000 of its houses have full cavity wall insulation and a further 9,000 have partial cavity wall insulation. No comprehensive survey of the condition of cavity wall insulation in Housing Executive homes has been undertaken. The Housing Executive will carry out a representative sample of cavity inspections in the future, as part of its cyclical maintenance scheme surveys, to determine whether the cavity has been filled and, if it has, what condition the insulation is in. Dwellings identified, where the cavity wall insulation is deemed to be severely or critically inadequate, will be addressed by the Housing Executive through response maintenance or through the planned maintenance program.

Mr Beggs: I understand that many Housing Executive homes and former Housing Executive homes were insulated using fibre and that there are particular problems with fibre where it settles and creates voids that can result in a cold home. Even worse, there can be damp fibre, which results in it being a conductor rather than an insulator. Can the Minister assure me that there is adequate training of Housing Executive staff and contractors so that they can quickly identify where damp fibre, which results in the ill health of tenants and in fuel poverty, is a problem?

Mr Givan: I am happy to relay those concerns directly to the Housing Executive. I have been in properties where I have been concerned about condensation and the impact it can have on damp, particularly where you have older people or children. It is important that, when we identify those type of severely inadequate facilities, they are responded to. That is something that the Housing Executive does through its response program. Obviously, there is a much longer-term problem with the investment that is needed in Housing Executive stock. In addition to cavity wall insulation, it impacts on a whole range of areas in Housing Executive properties, meaning that there is a need for investment. The public funding is not there to do what is required, which means that alternative solutions need to be put forward.

Mr Mullan: Can the Minister confirm the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes across Northern Ireland where damp and condensation have been identified as a problem? What action is he taking to remedy this plague that is affecting Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes across every constituency?

Mr Givan: I am happy to try to get the information for the Member in respect of the number of reports that there have been for damp or condensation in Housing Executive properties across Northern Ireland, but, as indicated, it is something that I recognise is a challenge for the Housing Executive with the budget that it has, dealing with stock as it is and the need to continue to supply new stock. These are challenges that the social housing sector is facing. It is one that should not be underestimated and, indeed, as the Office for National Statistics reports, I think that it will become something that requires urgent attention.

Mr McMullan: Most of what I was going to ask has already been asked, but will the Minister outline the steps that he will take immediately to ensure that the Housing Executive stock will be maintained? Will he give an assurance that those houses that have cavity wall insulation that is giving bother will be dealt with immediately?

Mr Givan: I will crystallise again for Members that the Housing Executive has identified that it requires £6.7 billion of investment in its stock over the next 30 years. So, to break it down to the next 10 years, the Housing Executive needs £2.6 billion, which is £700 million more than the Housing Executive expects to have. The quantum of moneys that we are talking about for investment in stock and new build is hundreds of millions of pounds. That presents a very real challenge to the Executive.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for the detail that he has given us so far. Is addressing the defective cavity wall insulation a priority for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive?

Mr Givan: There is a response to those serious needs that are identified when maintenance officers check facilities as a result of complaints and so on, and I know that, in his constituency, a number of issues were identified when the Housing Executive looked at 35 properties in the Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus area after cold, damp or condensation problems were reported. After investigation, including borescope testing, it was found that the properties had no cavity wall insulation at all or that the existing insulation had degraded. The Housing Executive has advised that it plans to appoint a consultant to carry out a feasibility study for those properties that were identified.

Mr Agnew: The Minister will be aware that a number of properties in Bangor were identified as having defective cavity wall insulation. That report was made a number of years ago. What has been happening in the meantime?

Mr Givan: A report was carried out by the South Eastern Regional College (SERC), which the Member may well be referring to. That was in August 2013. The Housing Executive appointed SERC to carry out research to establish whether there were quality and effectiveness issues with cavity wall insulation in its properties. That involved only a small survey of 206 properties across Northern Ireland. That report focused on the single issue in a very limited number of houses and took no account of the investment needs of other housing stock or, indeed, even if replacement cavity wall insulation was the priority investment needed for the houses surveyed. The findings of the report, therefore, whilst not irrelevant, have been superseded by the comprehensive data provided by the stock condition survey and the Housing Executive's adoption of its new asset management strategy to shape its future investment priorities.

Mr Speaker: Before I come to the next question, I should have informed Members that question 14 has been withdrawn.

Jobs and Benefits Offices

3. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the number of jobs impacted by the decision to downgrade local jobs and benefits offices. (AQO 296/16-21)

Mr Givan: Jobs and benefits offices across Northern Ireland play an important role in supporting unemployed

claimants to get into work and to provide them with benefit information and advice. Jobs and benefits offices will continue to play a key customer-facing role as universal credit is rolled out during 2017, and I can confirm that there are no plans to downgrade local jobs and benefits offices.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for his answer. This is an issue that concerns many people in my constituency due to the downgrading of the Enniskillen office and the negative impact that it will have on service users and staff. This is simply another case of Belfast getting it all and Fermanagh losing out. Is the Minister satisfied, following the Housing Executive's decision to move its grants office out of Enniskillen, that rural proofing legislation been strictly adhered to? Is he satisfied that those service users impacted will be able to avail themselves of local services following the centralisation?

2.15 pm

Mr Givan: The premise for the supplementary from the Member is entirely false — to suggest that it is Belfast first, and the rest of the country second. I represent the Lagan Valley constituency, and am always happy to see what I can get out of Belfast — which is seven miles down the road, never mind 70-plus miles down the road.

In respect of the issue that the Member has raised about the Housing Executive grants office, there has been a consultation process. I am happy to confirm that, as a result of that consultation process, the grants office in Enniskillen will be remaining, and the six members of staff will not be moving to Omagh. There will be some changes in how the service is delivered, but fundamentally the grants office in Enniskillen will be remaining open.

With regard to how universal credit is going to be rolled out, the key centres for the delivery of universal credit as a result of the welfare reform changes are going to be a location in Newry, which is outside Belfast; Foyle, which again is outside Belfast; and there will be a Belfast element of universal credit being delivered.

Then we take into account the announcement by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in London. Here in Northern Ireland, there are 1,400 jobs being provided to deliver services on welfare right across Great Britain. Only last week I was able to announce a further 280 jobs being established in Northern Ireland, as a result of the work that we are doing on behalf of DWP. The majority are going to be located in Belfast, where existing services operate, but I was able to announce that 55 jobs are going to be located in Armagh. That came on the back of significant lobbying from my colleague William Irwin, who tortured me around it, and also other Members: Cathal Boylan came to see me; Danny Kennedy also came to see me; and SDLP MLA Justin McNulty, if memory serves me, came to see me as well.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mrs Overend: The Minister said he was determined to ensure that people in Northern Ireland claiming benefits can do so as easily as possible, and that he would not want to make it difficult for them, but there is a proposal to close the local jobs and benefits office in Cookstown. If the consultation turns out to be a fait accompli, can the Minister assure me that claimants from places like mid-Ulster and the surrounding rural area, who will lose their local jobs and benefits office, will not be out of pocket by having to travel to Magherafelt or somewhere else to sign on?

Mr Givan: My colleague Keith Buchanan has already engaged with me on this issue and expressed his concern. He has raised the very issues that Mrs Overend is now raising here on the Floor of the Assembly. Obviously, there is a consultation process that has commenced in respect of offices in Cookstown, Newcastle and Ballynahinch. That is an eight-week consultation process, which members of the public and Members of this Assembly can engage with. There is detailed information which outlines where claimants are living, where they would have to travel to from areas such as Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon, and the impact that that could have. There is a consultation process currently being completed, and I encourage people to avail themselves of that opportunity to make the case.

Mr K Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Just to highlight the point that the other Members referred to, I would like the Minister to understand the community concerns in relation to Cookstown's social security office and the jobcentre.

Mr Givan: The Member relayed that to me quite forcefully in a meeting that I have already had with him about the impact that it has on the people in Cookstown. Again, I say to people to engage in the consultation process. Obviously we need to ensure that all of our buildings, right across all of the offices, are fit for purpose and are delivering the service that the individuals availing themselves of those services require. As demand changes, as need changes and as welfare reform is fundamentally changing how a lot of benefits are being delivered, we need to be in a position to respond effectively to that.

At times, that results in change. I accept that that then creates turbulence and can cause a lot of discomfort for some of the individuals who have to go through it. Obviously, I want to make sure that we take into account all the information that people will provide as part of the consultation process.

Mr Lynch: I welcome the Minister's announcement that the jobs will remain in Enniskillen. Will the workers carry out the same tasks or be allocated different roles in the future?

Mr Givan: In respect of the position in Enniskillen, I know the First Minister was not particularly pleased when she caught wind of what was being proposed. I know it was reported in the 'Impartial Reporter' at the time. The Housing Executive, ultimately, takes the decisions; it has its own board. They are not decisions I take, but I know, having engaged with them on this, that they consulted the staff and looked at the properties that they either owned or leased. In Enniskillen, they own their property; therefore, the staff, as I understand it, who carry out the administration will be kept in Enniskillen. I believe there may be a member of staff availing themselves of the voluntary exit scheme. Obviously, it is about delivering those services to the people. What I will say is that, whilst there will be a front office available in Enniskillen, the Housing Executive's motivation for some of the changes it is taking forward is that it can get out to meet people in their own homes because of the accessibility issues for some of the individuals who require this support. That is a service that will be rolled out not just in Fermanagh and County Tyrone but in other areas.

Sport NI: Rural Communities

4. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Communities how Sport NI works with local councils to ensure a joined-up approach to facilities and provision for sport and physical activity in rural communities. (AQO 297/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department and Sport NI, an arm's-length body of the Department, are committed to providing facilities and provision for sport and physical activity in rural areas. At a strategic level, that provision is coordinated with the 11 councils through the Sport Matters strategy, which has 26 targets set under the three themes of participation, performance and places. Following a midterm review of the strategy in 2015, an action plan was published identifying actions for key partners, including district councils, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Outdoor Recreation NI, which all have a focus on rural development. The action plan is reviewed twice yearly through the three Sport Matters implementation groups. The meetings are chaired by Sport NI board members and are attended by key partners, including representatives from the district councils. Feedback is provided by partners on their actions across a range of themes, including rural development, and is reported on annually. In addition, I chair the Sport Matters monitoring group, which meets twice yearly and at which I receive updates from each of the implementation groups.

The system of reporting under the Sport Matters strategy helps to ensure there is a joined-up approach between Sport NI and a range of partners, including councils, for the delivery of sports facilities and activities across rural and urban areas of Northern Ireland. At an operational level, Sport NI is a statutory partner in the council community planning process and participates in the strategic and themed working groups organised by councils. Sport NI has also been working in partnership with all district councils to develop a sports facilities framework, individual council area plans and a number of activity programmes, including Every Body Active 2020, to increase participation in sport and physical activity across Northern Ireland.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he give his estimation of the number of projects being funded by Sport NI in local areas?

Mr Givan: I am happy to provide the Member with specific details about the number of activities Sport NI provides funding to. Obviously, there are capital programmes through which Sport NI provides assistance to clubs. It also provides funding to support coaches. For example, through the Active Communities programme, there is £13 million providing 116 coaches; in respect of the new participation programme, Every Body Active 2020, in rural areas, there is £6.2 million of lottery funding being invested across all 11 council areas; and there is £2 million of lottery funding for outdoor recreation facilities as well.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Minister, can you provide any examples of how Sport NI works with councils to coordinate the delivery of sports facilities?

Mr Givan: Sport NI is working in partnership with councils to develop a sports facilities framework and associated council area plans. As part of that project, councils have identified existing sports facilities in their areas, including

rural areas, and are identifying the need for additional facilities or improvements to facilities in their area. It is intended that the regional sports facilities framework and the council area plans will be used by all funding providers to inform the future provision of sports facilities across Northern Ireland. The council area plans have already been used to great effect to identify gaps in the provision of sports facilities that serve rural areas. My Department and Sport NI were able to work collaboratively with the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to deliver new sports facilities in Coleraine and Dungiven and to identify the need for facilities to be improved at the Joey Dunlop leisure centre in Ballymoney.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister confirm his support for the agreed Executive investment in the redevelopment of Glentoran Football Club and community sports facilities in East Belfast?

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for the question. Quite early in my time in office, I was able to meet Glentoran, along with the Member of Parliament for the area and, I think, the Speaker and Mr Douglas. A consultation process has been carried out on soccer stadia and their funding. The specific strands of that process have been concluded, and the analysis is, I understand, at the end stage, and recommendations will then come to me for a decision.

Mr Aiken: Will the Minister outline the work being done by Sport NI in conjunction with the great Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council to promote a joint approach to sport and physical activity? Will he look specifically at the need for more facilities in the rural areas of Ballyclare, Crumlin and Randalstown?

Mr Givan: I am always happy to do more in Antrim council area, particularly if the proposed boundary changes in South Antrim go through. I will be keen to look at that as things develop. Working with councils is important in addressing sporting need. Often, councils, through engaging at grass-roots level with the community, can identify where the need exists. I believe that, where I can partner with local government, that partnership approach provides a real opportunity for us going forward, and I will want to look at that and take it forward.

Enabling Success: Update

5. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the implementation of the Enabling Success economic inactivity strategy. (AQO 298/16-21)

Mr Givan: As the Member will know, Enabling Success was launched in April 2015 as the last Executive strategy for addressing Northern Ireland's very high rate of economic inactivity. The current draft Programme for Government framework not only carries forward that commitment but prioritises it as a key indicator for a range of economic and social outcomes. Over the summer months, my officials engaged widely but in a directly targeted way with a range of interests to develop a Programme for Government delivery plan outlining the actions that will be undertaken to address indicator 17, which is to "reduce economic inactivity". The delivery plan builds on the Enabling Success strategy and is informed by updated research from, amongst others, NISRA and Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre. The proposals in the delivery plan will be the subject of a full consultation as part of the next stage of the Programme for Government

process in the coming weeks. The proposals set out are practical, evidence-based and radical, with a clear focus on prevention and early intervention, and they are set in an economic, health and well-being context. Subsequently, we will tackle economic inactivity through a collaborative effort from my Department, the Department of Health, the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education, as well as the Public Health Agency, the Health and Safety Executive, employers, employer organisations and other important stakeholders.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will recognise that Northern Ireland now has the highest employment rate since records began in the modern era, but we still have a long way to go in tackling economic inactivity. Will the Minister confirm that he will seek to avoid a long process of setting this up, which, unfortunately, his answer seemed to imply? Will he confirm that, in the forthcoming Budget process, he will bid for resources to make the strategy real? In that regard, what consideration is being given to the moneys mentioned in the Stormont House Agreement that come from tackling error and fraud being directed to tackling economic inactivity?

Mr Speaker: I ask the Minister to give a short answer.

2.30 pm

Mr Givan: The Member rightly highlights the success that we are having in achieving employment, but tackling the problem of those who are economically inactive is something that should cause us alarm, as our figures are above the UK average. However, let me assure the Member that that is something that I intend to take forward. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that tackling this issue is all about securing new money. We need to look at how we use existing funds better, how we better join up our health and work policy responses across the Executive in the context of the new Programme for Government, the new economic strategy, and Making Life Better, the Department of Health's public health framework, to ensure that we address this issue collaboratively.

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

HMRC/Concentrix

T1. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for Communities what action he is taking to reassure those people who are in real distress, with some described today in the media as suicidal, given the disastrous breakdown of relations between HMRC and Concentrix. (AQT 216/16-21)

Mr Givan: As the Member highlighted, this is an issue between HMRC and Concentrix; my Department does not have direct responsibility for the matter. Obviously, as issues emerge, we are always keen to help. In terms of people employed, I mentioned earlier the contract that we have from DWP to help to create 280 new jobs, 55 of which will go to Armagh and the others to Belfast. I want to ensure that my remit of trying to create opportunities for people to have employment is provided for in future. Ultimately, the Concentrix contract is a matter for HMRC, not my Department.

Mr Speaker: Does the Member have a supplementary question?

Ms S Bradley: Yes, please. Given the issue of child poverty, particularly reaching out to marginalised families who are no doubt the people affected in this, does the Minister not feel a sense of responsibility to put up an immediate fast-track system that will offer reassurance to those who are waiting to hear it today?

Mr Givan: Of course, I have every sympathy for the impact that it is having on staff employed by Concentrix, which is as a result of HMRC's actions, not those of my Department. Like any other individual, I would like to expect that they would get support from my Department when they face difficulties and challenges. Ultimately, however, this is a matter for HMRC; it employs Concentrix, not me.

Councils: Planning Committees

T2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Communities whether he is satisfied that members of the planning committees in councils across Northern Ireland have received sufficient training to understand that they must make decisions as individuals. (AQT 217/16-21)

Mr Givan: Elected representatives in local government should be familiar with the code of conduct that they must adhere to. The planning committee is a quasi-judicial function of the council, and that is something that needs to be taken seriously. In respect of that, councillors need to assure themselves that they are acting within the remit of the code. It is for councils to provide councillors with the support that they need. Where people feel that decisions are taken incorrectly, whether or not that is by the planning committee, they can avail themselves of the relevant challenge functions in respect of those decisions.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister agree that it is vital for public confidence in the planning system that councillors do not act on party-political grounds? In that regard, will he investigate the actions of Sinn Féin councillors in Belfast, who last week voted en bloc against a planning application for a 30,000 square foot grade-A office space near Central Station?

Mr Givan: Again, that is a matter for those individual councillors. They have to satisfy themselves that they are taking a decision based on the evidence that they have before them. In respect of the planning committee, I should say that planning powers are not my responsibility. Decisions taken by councils on planning issues are a matter for councils. The Department for Infrastructure has responsibility for broader planning functions. My Department has responsibility for local government, but the planning functions exercised by local government fall more accurately under the remit of the Department for Infrastructure.

Homelessness: DFC Action

T3. **Mr Logan** asked the Minister for Communities what support his Department has given to help those who have found themselves in the dreadful situation of being homeless and what action it has taken to reduce homelessness levels in towns such as Ballymena and across Northern Ireland, given that he will be aware that, in 2016, homelessness has caused lives to have been lost on our streets. (AQT 218/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have engaged on the issue. I have met a number of organisations that are involved in trying to assist

those very vulnerable people who are in the position of having found themselves homeless. The Housing Executive has statutory responsibility for responding to the issue. Its strategic approach to dealing with homelessness is the current homelessness strategy, which takes us up to 2017. It has an overall vision of eliminating long-term homelessness and rough sleeping by 2020 and focuses on prevention and early intervention. The Housing Executive is currently developing a new homelessness strategy in partnership with the Department, relevant statutory agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations.

The budget for homelessness, funded by my Department and administered through the Housing Executive, is over £35.5 million. The funding for the provision of homelessness services is £8.25 million, and £27.3 million provides homeless-related support services through the Supporting People programme. The most recently published information on homelessness refers to the three-month period from January to March of this year. During that period, 4,350 households presented to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as homeless, which was a decrease of almost 300 from the previous quarter. Let me assure the Member that it is a serious issue. There is resource put into tackling it, and it is one that requires our continual attention.

Mr Logan: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he have any plans to introduce any new programmes for organisations that help homeless people, particularly homeless people with addictions?

Mr Givan: There are organisations to which support is provided to try to give them that assistance. I was recently in the Stella Maris facility. St Vincent de Paul is involved in that, and it clearly has a passion for trying to reach some of the most vulnerable people, who often have struggled to get the support that they need through the statutory sector. Here is an organisation that is getting support and having very successful results in turning around people's lives. Where there is opportunity to partner with organisations that are involved in that work, I know that the Department and the Housing Executive will look favourably on that.

Subregional Football Stadia: Funding

T4. **Mr Lyons** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on funding for the subregional football stadia, particularly information on when the money will be available for applications. (AQT 219/16-21)

Mr Givan: On the specific details, consultation on the subregional stadia programme for soccer took place from 30 November last year to 22 February this year. There were 1,279 responses, of which 98 came from named organisations, with the rest from individuals. The responses to the consultation, together with all other relevant information, are helping to shape the programme. The proposals contained in the programme consultation document were based on the agreement made by the Executive in March 2011 to invest £36.2 million, and they reflected the five priorities that were then outlined by the IFA's facilities strategy of 2011. The IFA subsequently updated its strategy in 2012. The consultation was based, however, on what was in place at the time that the Executive endorsed the investment proposals. It was therefore the proposals contained in the 2011 IFA facilities strategy that were consulted on.

Statisticians completed their statistical analysis of the responses to the consultation in April. The subregional stadia team is finalising its consideration and analysis of its report, together with all the other relevant information. That will inform the recommendations that it will make to me, on which I will then take a decision on how we proceed.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Minister for his answer. Indeed, I thank him for visiting Larne Football Club last week to see the facilities at Inver Park and the need that is there.

Many clubs across the country need the money to keep their stadia as they should be and to help them to continue to thrive. Will the Minister ensure that the criteria for the funding are made clear so that those who are applying for money know what they should be saying in their application?

Mr Givan: I have had the opportunity to visit quite a number of different sporting clubs across a range of sports to have a look at their facilities. The Member had me in Larne with his colleague Mr Hilditch. They felt it necessary to bring the Member of Parliament for the area to that meeting as well; so, the case for Larne Football Club was made very strongly. Ultimately, as with every other club, Larne Football Club will be assessed against the criteria when they are agreed. I will not be able to pick out my preferences: I am sure Lisburn Distillery would like me to be able to do so but unfortunately that is not how it works, and Members know that. There will be criteria.

I hope to finalise the programme and have a call for applications made public in the next couple of months. So, hopefully, before the end of the year, this will be a programme that people can apply to. Based purely on the small number of visits that I have made, I do not think that the pot of money — £36 million — is going to meet the demand that there is. This presents a challenge for the Executive in the types of capital programmes that we would want to develop to give people an opportunity to make further applications for capital funding to support the plans they have for their clubs.

Supporting People: Update

T5. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Supporting People programme, which makes a valuable contribution to the lives of many individuals, particularly so that they can live independently, with the £74 million distributed annually by the Housing Executive enabling more than 20,000 people to live independent lives. (AQO 220/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Member will be very familiar, given the role he had, with the impact that that particular funding programme has on very vulnerable people. It provides housing support services that enable vulnerable people to live independently in the community. The programme supports more than 18,500 people and is funded by my Department and administered through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I assure the Member that the Supporting People programme remains a priority for the Department. The 2016-17 budget is almost £72.8 million, and that was protected against the 2015-16 levels despite the financial pressures facing the Department when Supporting People budgets in other parts of the United Kingdom were greatly reduced.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be well aware that independent research commissioned some

time ago demonstrated that Supporting People produces £1.90 in net financial benefits for the Executive for every £1 spent on it. Will the Minister give an assurance, given the particular challenges in the budgetary process generally and the various demands on the budget, that the priority that has been given to Supporting People will continue so that we are able to see progress in relation to those who are the biggest beneficiaries of the programme?

Mr Givan: Let me reassure the Member that this is a priority for me. When engaging with the Finance Minister, I have been making the case that this budget needs to be protected. There is a very clear correlation with the Department of Health, and the Executive have, in the past, chosen to protect the Department of Health. Associated with that was the Supporting People programme. So, I have been making the case for it being protected.

The Member raised with me the pressures that the programme is facing this year, and I have been able to identify £3 million of additional funding for it. That will come from this year's budget in my Department. I have had to look at the budget and assess where the need exists, and I am waiting for proposals from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on how it plans to use that money. Ultimately, the Housing Executive will have to stand over the administration of the funding, but I have made £3 million available this year to provide support for what is a very important programme.

2.45 pm

Economy

Belfast Manifesto

1. **Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister for the Economy how he plans to work with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce on the implementation of its 'Belfast Manifesto: Our Vision for the Future'. (AQO 309/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I welcome Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce's 'Belfast Manifesto' and share its vision to make Belfast a world-class city. The publication of this document is timely, as my Department is taking forward the refocus of the Executive's economic strategy, which will recognise the importance of cities as drivers of economic growth. We will work closely with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce and other key stakeholders and listen to businesses and their representatives as we seek to develop and implement the strategy. My Department will work closely with all relevant organisations, including the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, throughout the development and implementation of the Programme for Government and economic strategy to ensure that Belfast develops as a city and Northern Ireland develops as a region.

Ms Bradshaw: Thank you for your answer. What discussions has the Minister had to secure more money as a proportion of the overall Executive budget for skills to continue to address a skills shortage, as referenced in the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce's manifesto?

Mr Hamilton: Skills is an incredibly important issue for the Northern Ireland economy. One thing that I am increasingly aware of in this job, particularly when we are making job announcements, as we did last week for

another 94 jobs based in the city, is that Northern Ireland's skill offering is one of the things that differentiates us and sets us apart from other regions that we are competing with. Interestingly, in the conversation that I had with Metaswitch last week, I found that the differentiator for it locating here rather than somewhere else was the Assured Skills programme that we have in place, which has been incredibly successful in promoting over 5,600 jobs since 2011. That is where we work with foreign direct investors, or indeed existing investors and indigenous firms, to ensure that they get the skills pipeline that they require.

The Member has identified an issue around funding. I am sure that every Minister who comes to the House has issues and pressures in respect of elements of their budget. I know that the skills budget has been under pressure in the last number of years. If we are to maintain our primary position and that ability to attract inward investment to grow our economy, we need to focus much of those precious resources on ensuring that the skills of our workforce are in place and that the skills of those coming through our universities, colleges and schools are up to scratch and fit for the workplace.

It is an incredibly important area. My Department faces a lot of challenges in a whole range of different areas, and I see skills as incredibly important. We attract people to Northern Ireland on the basis of our skills. We know that we are not the biggest economy in the world. We do not have the biggest market. We do not have a lot of natural resources. Our best resource is our people. That is what attracts people to these shores, and I want that to remain the case.

Mr Maskey: Will the Minister commit to continuing to work in the time ahead with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, which has many laudable objectives and great work behind it, and make sure that the Department's investments are put into the city as a whole, so that communities that heretofore have not really benefited as well as they might will do so and Belfast can become a fairer city as well as a stronger city and economy?

Mr Hamilton: I am happy to confirm to the Member that I am happy to work with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce. I have not met it formally in this role, although I had a good relationship with it in the past, and I want to keep that good relationship going in my current post. Whether it is refocusing our economic strategy or developing our economy as a whole, it is incredibly important that I and my Department have good relationships with all the relevant organisations, of which the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce is obviously one, particularly in developing the city.

The Member will know that I have spoken, including at the Committee last week, about how, yes, we need to grow our economy — our economy is heading in the right direction, and we see a lot of good data coming through, particularly around unemployment and economic inactivity — but that growth has to be inclusive growth. The new Programme for Government points to the need to have a strong regionally balanced economy. That is something that I believe in, and I know that the Member is particularly concerned about that in respect of his constituency.

Sometimes the perception is that certain parts of the city or the Province do less well from investment, but, interestingly, in the past five years, there have been 93

start-ups per 10,000 head of the population in the West Belfast constituency. That points to a good entrepreneurial spirit among the people of West Belfast. That compares with an 83 average across the whole of Northern Ireland. It is better than the Northern Ireland average and is the sixth-highest constituency in the UK. That has received support from Invest NI, and helping business start-ups is now in the hands of councils. Getting regionally balanced and inclusive growth is incredibly important to me and to the Executive as a whole, and we will focus on that over the remainder of this term.

Mr Douglas: The previous question was about the Belfast chamber. One of its objectives, in its manifesto, is to turn Belfast into a tech city. Could the Minister outline to the Chamber what progress he thinks Belfast has made in this regard?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. There is a real developing sense that Belfast is a hub for digital and tech jobs. In fact, the whole of Northern Ireland is developing that relationship. Perhaps Belfast is the anchor for that. You see that in lots of different ways. You see it in the fact that we are attracting, in terms of inward investment, a lot of jobs in that digital and tech space. I mentioned Metaswitch, which brought 94 jobs in the telecommunications sector, some of which are in tech support. Interestingly, a significant number of those jobs are in research and development. It is really good that Northern Ireland is able to attract that type of work. Recently, I announced 17 jobs in Belfast for a company called BDNA, which is a California/Silicon Valley-based firm that is coming to Northern Ireland to have a presence here because it sees this as a good place to invest because of the skills of our workforce.

As well as attracting those sorts of jobs, we are developing a reputation. The Member will know that, sometimes, as the reputation develops, it gathers momentum. For example, this week, the BBC tech week highlighted Belfast as one of the UK's digital tech hubs. It highlights specialisms that we have in software development, and, of course, we are Europe's leading destination for software development. It also highlights our ongoing good work in the area of cybersecurity. Yes, it points to our FDI but also to our excellent local firms like Kainos, which are putting us on the world map. That follows on from a report by Tech City UK, a 'Tech Nation' report for 2016, which, again, highlights Northern Ireland as a growing digital cluster and talks about our tech industries making the highest contribution to GVA in the local economy in the whole of the UK with the exception of London and the south-east.

Our excellent talent, our infrastructure, our low overheads and government support are helping to put Belfast and the whole of Northern Ireland on the international map as a tech hub. I think that something really special is happening, and we need to make the most of that.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr Attwood: Could I press the Minister? As you know, there are many voices in Belfast, in the chamber of commerce and in the council, pressing for the devolution of regeneration powers. That idea was derailed in the last mandate. That is not within your gift, but, as part of the Programme for Government, are you committed to and will you argue with the Minister for Communities and your

Executive colleagues for the devolution of regeneration powers to councils?

Mr Hamilton: The Minister for Communities was just in the House. The Member was not in the House for his questions. He might have been in for an earlier part of it. I suggest to the Member that it is a question better directed to that Minister. I think that regeneration powers should be devolved to councils, but it obviously needs to be done in a way that enables them to take those powers on and make the most of them. We want our cities and our council areas to grow, develop and move forward, and regeneration powers are at the heart of being able to do that, but I will leave it to the Minister for Communities to decide the right time to do that. I am sure that he will work very closely with his colleagues in local government to ensure that that can happen in a timely fashion.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Storey for his question, I inform the House that question 3 has been withdrawn.

Dark Hedges

2. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the impact the Dark Hedges have had on tourism. (AQO 310/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I fully recognise the importance of the Dark Hedges as a tourist destination. They are a tremendous tourism asset, not just for the local area but for Northern Ireland as a whole.

When the Dark Hedges were featured at the start of season 2 of 'Game of Thrones', they immediately captured the imagination of viewers. There was an instant impact at the Dark Hedges, with a huge increase in the volume of visitors from all over the world. Subsequently, they have become an iconic image not just of the series but of Northern Ireland.

'Game of Thrones' has just broken the record for the highest number of Emmy awards won by any fictional series. It is, quite simply, the biggest TV show in the world. It is broadcast in 199 territories, which offers a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland to position itself internationally and promote our destination to a global audience. With at least two more seasons to be filmed, the audience will continue to grow, as will the demand to visit film locations in Northern Ireland.

The show has been a catalyst for business growth, with Northern Ireland Screen estimating the economic value of 'Game of Thrones' production to Northern Ireland as £148 million to date. Tourism NI is building on that success and has been working closely with the industry to develop new and innovative 'Game of Thrones' visitor experiences and marketing campaigns. Most recently, the Dark Hedges featured prominently in Tourism NI's collaborative marketing campaign with Tourism Ireland celebrating season 6 of 'Game of Thrones'. The videos associated with that campaign resulted in over 1.2 million social media engagements.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. I declare an interest as the chair of the Dark Hedges Preservation Trust. Given the strategic place that it has in tourism in the north Antrim area, will the Minister welcome the fact that the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has taken a very proactive role? I thank the Minister for his help in ensuring that Tourism NI was present at a recent

meeting with the council. That will allow us to build on the success and deal with the challenges. The Minister will be aware that there are particular issues in relation to preserving the site, ensuring that locals have adequate and appropriate access, and having a system in place that manages the many hundreds, indeed thousands, of people who come to the Dark Hedges on a very regular basis.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I also want to thank him and the other members of the trust for their ongoing work in seeking to preserve the beauty that is the Dark Hedges. I visited them for the first time this summer, and they are absolutely spectacular. You can see why they are such an attraction and why the show wanted to use them, but they are clearly under pressure. I am aware that, by visiting them, I was also putting them under pressure. There were a huge number of people there that day.

A lot of work has been done to try to preserve the beauty of the Dark Hedges, and the preservation trust has been to the fore in that respect. If we are to use them to attract people to Northern Ireland, we will have to preserve them for future generations. I know that there have been tree preservation orders in place since 2004, although there have still been difficulties in preserving trees. It is interesting that we were able to use the bad news of some of the trees falling for good by creating the doors that have been located around different parts of Northern Ireland and have themselves become a bit of a tourist attraction.

It is not my area of responsibility, but I know that Transport NI is looking at a number of traffic management proposals that I think will be incredibly important. It is my intention for Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to continue to promote the Dark Hedges through 'Game of Thrones' and use it to our advantage. Continuing to build on what we did with season 6, we now have apps in place that identify the Dark Hedges and other filming locations that are publicly accessible. As the Member knows, NI Screen has been working with the council to put interpretative panels in place, and the Dark Hedges feature in all Tourism Northern Ireland's marketing information about the Causeway coastal route. If we are to continue to do that, we will have to ensure that they are preserved: that they are still accessible, but preserved and there for future generations to enjoy.

Mr Speaker: The Minister is allowed up to two minutes. He does not necessarily have to take the two minutes. [Laughter.]

Mr Swann: As the Minister indicated, the Dark Hedges have been put on the world map because of 'Game of Thrones'. I would not necessarily have taken Mr Storey as a fan. [Laughter.] Given that there are only two series left, is the Minister confident that the film and creative industries are sustainable enough to outlive the series, so that the production companies will keep coming back to locations in north Antrim, Dalriada or west Antrim?

3.00 pm

Mr Hamilton: That is the local press statement drafted for this week. I think we can focus, as did Mr Storey in his question, on promoting the Dark Hedges in the short term. We are very fortunate to have secured the sixth series. There are at least two more, and who knows what the future holds with 'Game of Thrones'? Northern Ireland has benefited from it through the promotion of certain places,

whether it is the Dark Hedges, Castle Ward or wherever it might be. A lot of areas have reaped the benefit. I was in Ballintoy harbour, which is in the Member's constituency, over the summer. Again, that is a hidden gem in Northern Ireland. It was probably not visited that much in advance of the series, but now huge numbers go there. I think there are about 20 'Game of Thrones' tour experiences in Northern Ireland, and they employ people and provide a service for visitors.

Perhaps the best and most important legacy is that for our film, television and creative industries in Northern Ireland. We have studios in the Titanic area that are full, we have new studios developing on the other side of the lough in Giant's Park and there are studios in Banbridge. There are opportunities for Northern Ireland to be used for filming locations for many years to come. Over the weekend, I was looking at statistics from the National Association of Theatre Owners in the States that show the huge increase in the number of films being made and released in the United States alone. Whenever you look at the big studios in London that are full and see that studios are looking for capacity to make films, you see that Northern Ireland is very well positioned for the future thanks to the expertise we have developed through filming 'Game of Thrones' in Northern Ireland.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far and for his praise of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, of which I was until recently a member. The Minister placed importance on the Dark Hedges as an environmental and tourist attraction. How does he envisage their long-term management, given the cross-cutting nature of his Department, other Departments, the local heritage trust, tree preservation bodies and the council? Who does he envisage taking the lead in their future management?

Mr Hamilton: I will be honest: we have yet to give specific thought to how that might be done. Obviously, there are a lot of actors involved — excuse the pun — including the preservation trust, the council, Tourism NI and local stakeholders. That is part of the conversation Mr Storey alluded to, which has already started to take place on the ground about the Dark Hedges.

Our first priority has to be preserving the Dark Hedges. There is a temptation, to be completely honest, perhaps, on our side — on the tourism side of things — just to market this and not necessarily to think about the environmental impact. That is incredibly important to me. As I said before, there is nothing to market if they are not there. We have to look after them first and foremost. That is where we would look to the preservation trust to lead on that and show us the best way forward in preserving the asset as an asset. From a tourism perspective we are then very happy to step in.

There is much more we can do at the Dark Hedges. I know that the hotel and the resort beside them are developing further and see huge opportunities; in fact, I think they are rebranding to call themselves the Dark Hedges resort. There are huge opportunities, and we will work very closely with them to do that. I look to colleagues in the Environment Agency and Transport NI to ensure that we can preserve the asset first and foremost. Then it is very much over to us in combination with the council and the preservation trust to ensure that the asset is marketed in a way that not only benefits everybody but is sympathetic.

Mr Allister: As the Minister recognises, the Dark Hedges have been a victim of their own success. Is it not rather neglectful that, in looking after them and exploiting them to the maximum degree compatible with their future, there is no structured management arrangement, given that there are so many cross-cutting departmental and council interests? I was rather surprised by an answer six months ago or so from the Department saying that there were no structures, for example, in place between the preservation trust and Departments such as the Minister's. Is it not imperative that there is more structure brought to this? Many local residents have their own concerns. There are issues about access and Transport NI issues, yet there is the capacity, because of the lack of structure, to pass the buck. Is it not time that there was a more structured input?

Mr Hamilton: I agree with the Member: it has, in many respects, been a victim of its own success. If a range of organisations, including my Department and Tourism NI, were, perhaps, caught out, it was because nobody could have foreseen how big a success it would be. I am sure that the Member is a huge fan of the show and binges on box sets all the time. *[Laughter.]* I do not want to spoil it for anybody, but, as the Member will know, it appears on the show for only about 10 seconds. I will not give any spoilers about who dies, but most of them do. It appears for only a brief moment, but, out of that, we have the success of the number of people visiting. Part of the pressure comes from a large number of tour buses going up and down a road that was not designed for them.

The council is very much taking a lead in trying to bring people together, and the preservation trust is important to that. Conversations, as Mr Storey intimated, have already started about what we may do in the future, first and foremost, as I said in response to Mr McGuigan, to preserve the Dark Hedges — that is the most important thing that we can do — and, beyond that, what we can do to market and promote the Dark Hedges in a way that does not jeopardise them or ruin what is a fantastic asset to the area. It is wonderfully spectacular and attracts people from far and wide to Northern Ireland.

Renewable Energy

4. **Mr Kearney** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on his Department's policy on renewable energy. (AQO 312/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Since their introduction in 2005 and 2012 respectively, the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) and the renewable heat incentive (RHI) schemes have successfully supported the development of the renewables industry in Northern Ireland. Around a quarter of our electricity needs are now met through renewable technology such as wind, solar, photovoltaic, combined heat and power, and hydro. With a further 700 MW of committed projects with grid connection offers, I am confident that the Executive's 2020 target of 40% can be achieved over the next few years. Similarly, almost 4,800 renewable heating systems have been installed in homes and businesses. Current estimates suggest that over 6% of our heating needs are provided through technologies such as biomass, heat pumps and solar thermal.

The Northern Ireland renewables obligation is now closed to new onshore wind applications and will be closing to applicants for other technologies from March

2017. Existing renewable generation will continue to be supported by Northern Ireland Electricity consumers for 20 years. Similarly, despite the closure, the renewable heat incentive scheme will continue to support existing renewable heating generation for up to 20 years.

Looking to the future beyond the Northern Ireland renewables obligation and renewable heat incentive schemes, I will consider the future direction of renewable energy policy in the context of wider energy strategy development and ensuring that energy costs for all consumers in Northern Ireland remain as low as possible. To achieve that, we need an informed debate around wider energy policy in Northern Ireland on what we realistically expect our energy system to deliver, what aspects of it we are prepared to invest in and who pays for it. It is my intention to initiate that wider debate in the coming weeks and months.

Mr Kearney: Go raibh maith agat, a chara, as ucht an fhreagra sin. That was a helpful answer to my first question. The C&AG report on the non-domestic renewable heating incentive scheme has found that the operation of the scheme will result in devastating costs to the Northern block grant for 20 years or more. We will see a loss of hundreds of millions of pounds from our block grant, which will be a cost to the Executive. The Public Accounts Committee will commence its hearing of the issue —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to come to a question.

Mr Kearney: — on Wednesday. Have you read the report, Minister? Will you indicate how your Department intends to deal with the huge and serious fallout from and the financial and economic implications of the scheme?

Mr Hamilton: I have read the Audit Office report, and I know that it is subject to a PAC hearing this week. I know that the Member is new to the House, but he will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on live PAC investigations.

I am looking forward to that hearing. I have said consistently in response to the issue of the renewable heat incentive that there are a lot of lessons to learn. I would be more than happy to listen to and respond appropriately to all recommendations made by the PAC, the Audit Office or whoever. We are working very hard to mitigate the loss. In fact, I have had conversations with the Member's colleague, the Finance Minister, about the issue. I recently launched an investigation, which is under way, although I do not want to get into the details of what it is finding. Needless to say, however, an investigation into the very serious allegations of fraud and abuse of the scheme has been undertaken by external consultants. It is producing some interesting findings, which will be fed into the process. I take the issue exceptionally seriously. It is clear from my review of the evidence presented to me that Ministers followed official advice but that that advice was flawed. There is a cost as a consequence. I assure the Member that I will work very hard, listen to the helpful input from the Audit Office and the PAC and take all possible actions to mitigate that.

Mr McGlone: Is the Minister aware of any issue with payments from Ofgem to businesses associated with the renewables sector? I have previously had to write to the Minister and thank him for his Department's intervention on that occasion because clearly that would have an impact on businesses and those who have expended quite

a bit of money in formulating projects and putting them on the ground.

Mr Hamilton: I am not aware of any trend in respect of the issue that the Member raises. I am not clear what type of payments he is talking about. I am sure that Ofgem, as he would expect, would be robust in ensuring that all payments are due and should be made. As I am speaking, I think that there were issues with some payments that had been made, which were dealt with on an individual case-by-case basis after some intervention by my Department. If he has further evidence on payments, or if he or indeed any other Members have come across similar issues that they think would benefit from intervention by me and the Department, I encourage them to come forward to me as quickly as possible.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answers. Can he give us his assessment of the Executive's renewables policy and how we compare with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Hamilton: I suppose that it depends on how you judge success. I would judge our renewables policy, particularly the renewables obligations, to have been successful in several different ways. I mentioned in my answer that 700 MW of renewables projects have grid-connection offers. I understand that there are 200 MW worth of offers still to be made. That is on top of the 900 MW of renewable energy already online. That will all combine to help the Executive to meet their 2020 target of 40% of electricity being generated through renewable sources.

Our peak demand is midweek in the wintertime, at about 1,800 MW; the average demand is about 1,200 MW. The capacity that we already have online, what we have in offers made, and what we have in offers to be made all adds up to a position where we would have the capacity to meet 100% of demand through renewables. That allows us not only to meet our 40% target but to match the Scottish target, which is a different target, to have 100% renewables capacity. In the next number of years, we will also meet that. We are compared with Scotland, sometimes unfavourably. We are on course to meet not only our own Executive target of 40%, which was in the old Programme for Government, but to similarly meet what the Scottish have had as their target.

As a policy, it has, by and large, been successful, but it has been successful with consequences. Mr Kearney's question referred to some of them. It has been costly. Resources are certainly a factor in considering future renewables policy, which we will do in the context of a renewed energy policy framework. There is also an impact on grid capacity. The Member will be aware of the difficulties that some people have had with getting connections to the grid and that our grid infrastructure is insufficient in many respects. It has been a success, but there have been consequences.

Mr Speaker: I stress the need for a quick question from Kellie Armstrong and a quick response from the Minister.

3.15 pm

Ms Armstrong: Given the current vacuum in energy policy, what discussion has the Minister had with renewable energy providers?

Mr Hamilton: I have had a range of discussions with lots of different people from the energy sector. I have a meeting in the diary — I cannot remember for exactly when — with renewable sector representative organisations in the next number of weeks, at which I will be happy to discuss some of the issues that, I am sure, they will raise.

The Member describes it as a “vacuum”. I said that we have 900 MW of renewable energy already on the grid, 700 MW with offers to go on to the grid and a further 200 MW to be put on to the grid. That would allow us to meet our peak daily demand of 1,800 MW.

There are lots of reasons and circumstances as to why the NIRO scheme is coming to an end. It has already ended for some. It is, however, an opportune moment, in concert with the renewable sector and broad energy sector, and, indeed, with wider society, to have a discussion about what future renewables policy might be.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Broadband Contracts: Autumn Review

T1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the autumn review of broadband contracts. (AQT 226/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I did not quite catch that. Did the Member say “autumn review”?

Mrs Overend: Yes.

Mr Hamilton: We have a good track record with broadband in Northern Ireland. We were the first region in the UK — indeed, the first in Europe — to have 100% broadband connectivity. That came as a result of a £64 million investment by the Executive, which, in large part, was matched by private-sector providers, to ensure that our telecommunications infrastructure improved over the past number of years.

I am keen to see that continue, in concert with the private-sector providers. I am happy to write to the Member on the review, because I do not have an update to hand.

Mrs Overend: I look forward to receiving that information. I am sure that he will appreciate the large number of entrepreneurial people in my Mid Ulster constituency and how important broadband is to them. I really would like the Minister to be able to advise what the autumn review will involve, what contracts will be examined and what timescale is expected for its completion.

Mr Hamilton: I am happy to provide the Member with all that detail. She, and pretty much everybody in the House, will raise the issue of the standard of broadband connectivity in their constituency. The Member represents a constituency in the west of the Province, and there is sometimes a perception that this is a problem only or largely in the west. However, a lot of Members who represent east of the Province constituencies will be able to tell you that they cannot always get the speeds that people would like, particularly in rural parts.

The Member is right that it is increasingly an issue for businesses. Businesses that want to connect globally and do their business internationally need, for lots of reasons, to have good broadband connectivity. I mentioned the £64

million that we have invested since 2008. That has helped us to improve our broadband infrastructure radically.

Superfast broadband is now available to 77% of premises in Northern Ireland, and 38% have taken it up, compared with the UK average of 33%. That has come as a result of a large number of initiatives, including a broadband improvement project in which we invested nearly £24 million. Sometimes, and I said this at Question Time two weeks ago, there is a bit of an obsession with fibre connections. Although everybody wants to get fibre — and I completely understand that — there is a range of alternative technologies available, particularly in rural parts of Northern Ireland that cannot get fibre that easily, that can deliver a decent broadband speed.

I am happy to come back to the Member on the issue that she raised and give her more detail. It is appropriate to look at the contracts from time to time. Yes, it is important that we work with private-sector providers, but it is also important to make sure that they are providing value for money and doing the job that we want them to do.

Mr Speaker: Mr Mark Durkan is not in his place.

Brexit: Financial Shortfall

T3. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy how, as a pro-Brexiteer, in his influential position in government, he proposes the financial shortfall be filled or replaced, given that he will be aware that Mr McCrossan's border constituency of West Tyrone has benefited significantly from EU funding, receiving almost £300 million over the past five years. (AQT 228/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Member is back to the same well as two weeks ago, asking about Brexit.

Two weeks ago, he was complaining about the benefits of the referendum result in his constituency; where he was seeing booming cross-border trade and exporters were seeing great success over the last number of weeks and months. I apologise to the Member that all his predictions, or the predictions of doom and gloom that he subscribed to, have not come to pass. The number of people who talked about a deep recession coming into place is interesting.

Mr Logan: Steve Aiken.

Mr Hamilton: Yes, and Steve Aiken as well. Within days of the referendum, he had dispensed with the need for the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to do its job and declare whether we were in a recession. If a recession is seeing two quarters of negative growth, then, within about three days, Mr Aiken had put the UK into recession. The ONS has now said that the referendum appears not to have had a major effect on the economy. So we will listen to what the ONS is saying and not to Mr Aiken who dispensed with the need for the ONS to do its job.

The Member touched on the impact. Is there an impact, will there be challenges and are there issues to deal with? Absolutely, there are. We are absolutely focused on getting the best possible deal for Northern Ireland. We have been working very hard over the summer period, and we will continue to work through the autumn, to inform the Government on their position in the negotiations. We have been informing them of Northern Ireland's particular circumstances. We have done that through direct meetings I have had with Liam Fox, Greg Clark and David Davis and

we will continue to do it to ensure that the Westminster Government and the new Prime Minister know the particular circumstances that Northern Ireland faces and the deal that we want to get.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I would not say that it is complaining; it is delivering a message from the ground and I am sure you have heard it loud and clear at this stage. You have talked about what the benefits will be when Brexit comes, and Brexit has not yet come. What are these great benefits that you are telling us about?

Mr Hamilton: The Member wishes to go back over a referendum campaign that was fought and, from his perspective, lost many months ago. I am perfectly content with the outcome of the referendum. In my view, there are a huge number of benefits to be accrued not just for the United Kingdom but for Northern Ireland in particular. The very fact that our country will regain control of its borders, its Budget and its laws is incredibly important and incredibly beneficial to Northern Ireland.

In a small market like ours, with 1.8 million people, we have to look outside Northern Ireland if we want to grow our economy. Let us not forget that the eurozone has suffered considerably over the last number of years and has been in decline in large parts. There are huge opportunities, beyond Europe, to trade to, for example, the Middle East, the Far East, and to South and North America and other parts of the world that have been encumbered by the fact that we have been a member of the European Union. I look forward to the opportunities that being outside the European Union will present for Northern Ireland and for British companies to export beyond Europe. That is what I have been focusing on, particularly in discussions with Liam Fox, to ensure that Northern Ireland is perfectly placed to take advantage of the opportunities that will accrue after the UK leaves the European Union.

Economic Growth: Infrastructure Projects

T4. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy, given his objective of growing our economy, whether he acknowledges that any growth will be highly dependent on expenditure on infrastructure, and, given the situation with Brexit looming and the political landscape in trying to fund such projects, what conversations has he had in the Executive about prioritising the projects that he sees as critical to the growth of the economy and the funding of those projects. (AQT 229/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I accept the basic premise of the Member's question that infrastructure expenditure is good for the economy. I was in charge of the Finance Department for a number of years and was very keen to do everything we could to increase our capital expenditure because I acknowledge that, if you want to improve and grow your economy, having the best economic infrastructure possible in energy and telecoms, which we were talking about earlier, and road infrastructure is incredibly important for any economy, particularly one like ours. Quite evidently, it also provides a short-term boost to the economy, as more people are employed and more aggregates are used and so on. I absolutely accept the basic premise of the Member's question that more infrastructure investment is good for our economy. It is for the Executive as a whole to take it forward. I will be making bids for infrastructure

investment around telecoms, tourism and a range of different aspects of infrastructure.

The Member and her party wish to tie everything back to the referendum result, but if she looks at the figures, she will see that our capital expenditure as a nation has been on the rise across the UK recently and does not appear to be affected by the referendum result. In fact, media reports at the weekend suggested that the Prime Minister is incredibly keen to boost even beyond the initial projections for capital expenditure, recognising that it provides a short- and a long-term boost to the economy.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Minister, for your answers so far. As a Member from the South Down constituency, I want to afford the Minister an opportunity to perhaps put on record his support for a critical project in the Narrow Water bridge for the development of the tourism sector across South Down. It was always envisaged that the project would be part-funded by this House, the Southern Government and European funding. Can he give an assurance, one, that he supports the project and, two, that he has started to seek out possible holes in the funding package?

Mr Hamilton: This is a project that the Executive and the Irish Government have been committed to in principle, which previously fell through for a range of different reasons. If a bid comes forward for future funding, it will have to be dealt with in the appropriate way to ensure that it is a beneficial scheme and has a business case in place and all the rest. It is a project that the Executive and I and the Irish Government have supported in principle and will continue to do so.

Year of Food and Drink 2016

T5. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Year of Food and Drink 2016. (AQT 230/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Year of Food and Drink has been a huge success for Northern Ireland so far; we are not finished with it yet, as we are only nine months through. It is a really exciting initiative that has presented us with a great opportunity to celebrate Northern Ireland's food and drink. The Member, particularly with his farming background, will know that Northern Ireland has always had a fantastic food and drink offering, which has only improved over the last number of years. We have known that we have a great product in food and drink, but we have not, perhaps, let the world know that, and that is something that has been changing in the last number of years and has been highlighted by the Year of Food and Drink.

It was great to see that we are now being acknowledged by others. In the recent UK Great Taste Awards, Northern Ireland's food and drink won 303 gold medals — gold stars, sorry. Gold medals? That was more the recent Olympics and Paralympics, obviously. We got 303 gold stars, which is a fantastic achievement — the best ever — for the Northern Ireland food and drink sector. It shows that the Year of Food and Drink has helped to highlight and promote a wonderful sector that is absolutely key to our economy and tourism product and that, hopefully, will go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

Mr Poots: How will the success of the Year of Food and Drink be judged? I know that I am not much of a drinker,

but I am not a bad eater — *[Laughter.]* — and I know that Northern Ireland has some excellent food.

Mr Hamilton: It has been successful already in lots of different ways. Look at the buy-in that there has been. This is a Food NI and Tourism NI initiative — a government-led initiative — but it has been supported by a large number of others, including some supermarkets and big food producers in Northern Ireland. People have really got on board with the whole Year of Food and Drink agenda and taken it to their hearts. Yes, they have used it to help promote their businesses, but they have also used it to promote the food and drink sector in Northern Ireland.

A number of objectives were set around increasing the level of visitor satisfaction, developing new food experiences and developing the skills in the sector. So, when the year is over, we will go back over those and test them. We do not want it to be just a one-off; we need to build on the success that we have already clearly had and, in some respects, make every year a Year of Food and Drink in Northern Ireland.

3.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Mr Middleton, we may not get to your supplementary question.

Tourism Strategy: Londonderry and the North-west

T6. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for the Economy whether he will work to ensure that tourism in Londonderry and the north-west is well represented in the new tourism strategy, given that he will be aware of the highly successful Maiden City Festival in the Foyle constituency. (AQT 231/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Yes, absolutely. I can give the Member and the people in his constituency that assurance. The Maiden City Festival, which he cites as a hugely important part of the calendar that has attracted a large number of visitors to Londonderry, is something that we have supported through Tourism NI in recent years, including this year, and we look forward to doing so in the future and building on the success of what has been a tremendous event down through the years.

Mr Speaker: That ends the time for questions to the Minister. I ask Members to take their ease while we change —

Mr Durkan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise to the House for not being in my place for a topical question. I have often been tempted to miss Question Time, but that was usually when I had to answer them.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top —

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This question should be asked in other places as well, but on one or two occasions during the last Question Time you indicated that Ministers in reply had up to two minutes, yet there seems to be a growing pattern of Executive Ministers taking at every opportunity two minutes. *[Laughter.]* I know the irony. It is not said tongue-in-cheek, Mr Speaker. Is it not time for that matter to be looked at?

Mr Speaker: I have noted your remarks, Mr Attwood. I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

Opposition Business

NAMA Revelations: Public Confidence

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations made during the recent BBC Northern Ireland ‘Spotlight’ broadcast on events surrounding the sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) properties; supports the investigations and inquiries being undertaken by the National Crime Agency (NCA), the Republic of Ireland and other international bodies; further notes the ongoing damage being done to Northern Ireland’s international reputation, not least by the continuing failure of institutions here to examine the issue effectively; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement before the Assembly to restore the public confidence in these institutions and the inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance. — [Mr Smith.]

Which amendments were:

Leave out all after “properties;” and insert

“supports the criminal investigations being undertaken by law enforcement agencies; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement emphasising their support, and that of the Executive, for all efforts to uncover the truth around the sale of the Project Eagle portfolio and committing to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations.”. — [Mr O’Dowd.]

Leave out all after “effectively;” and insert

“recommends consideration of the creation of a joint investigation team of the National Crime Agency and An Garda Síochána into allegations of criminal conduct in relation to the National Assets Management Agency; calls for full cooperation in the production of papers and attendance of persons at parliamentary inquiries or commissions of investigation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland around the work of the National Assets Management Agency; and further calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement before the Assembly to restore the public confidence in these institutions and the inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance.”. — [Ms Hanna.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 59; Noes 35.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin,

Mr Kearney, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Maskey and Mr O'Dowd.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken and Mr Chambers.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations made during the recent BBC Northern Ireland 'Spotlight' broadcast on events surrounding the sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) properties; supports the criminal investigations being undertaken by law enforcement agencies; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement emphasising their support, and that of the Executive, for all efforts to uncover the truth around the sale of the Project Eagle portfolio and committing to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations.

Rural Bank Closures

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. 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 in which 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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Order, please. Please show courtesy to Members who wish to participate in the debate. If you wish to leave the Chamber, do so quietly and have your discussions outside.

Mr McPhillips: I beg to move

That this Assembly is extremely concerned at the number of bank branches that are being closed in rural areas; is alarmed that large rural areas are without access to a local bank branch; recognises the limitations of many of the alternatives, such as mobile and Internet banking, and the Post Office; believes that the provision of accessible banking is an integral part of social inclusion, with a particular impact on the elderly; notes the negative economic impact bank closures have on small businesses and on future investment opportunities; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to intervene meaningfully and encourage the banking sector to maintain a strong network of rural bank branches and to safeguard the existing bank branches within these communities from closure.

As a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I welcome the opportunity to bring today's motion to the Chamber. It concerns a huge number of people and businesses in rural areas that have been, and continue to be, impacted by decisions to close local banking facilities. Despite promises of no more bank closures in 2013, on 20 July this year, the Bank of Ireland announced that it will close eight branches in Castlereagh, Draperstown, Antrim, Belleek, Castlederg, Newtownards, Maghera and Donegall Square South in Belfast.

The decision has hit many individuals and businesses hard, especially those in rural communities.

Before discussing the overall implications of the decision, I will focus on the branch in Belleek, where the decision has been met with anger and frustration and is why 7,000 people signed a petition calling for a halt to the closure plans. Along with my SDLP councillor colleague John Coyle and Ulster Unionist MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Rosemary Barton, I witnessed that frustration at first hand when we visited the branch, its customers and local businesses to hear their concerns.

By way of background, the Bank of Ireland branch in Belleek serves some 5,000 customers and has done so successfully for decades. The branch is a lifeline for many people in the local area. It is a major part of the fabric that supports the vast majority of financial activity in the village, for businesses and individuals. Bank of Ireland's decision to close the branch has been devastating, especially for rural dwellers who have no access to other banks, because it is the last bank in the village. Those people now have to travel considerable distances to towns such as Enniskillen, Lisnaskea and Irvinestown in order to avail themselves of basic banking services. That is despite the

fact that a NISRA publication found that the Belleek area is the second most deprived area for access and proximity to local services in the North of the island.

The proposed closure will also impact on cross-border trade, as a number of large businesses in the Republic have accounts in Belleek, and it is impractical for them to travel to Enniskillen or Lisnaskea. There is also the security issue, as many local businesses will have to transport vast sums of money in cash rather than deposit it locally. The closure of the bank will also have a negative impact on investment in the area. There is Belleek Pottery, and a new hotel has been proposed to open in the near future. With no local banking services, it does not bode well for the future of the area.

Last week, along with my SDLP colleagues, I met Sean Sheehan, the bank's regional director for the North, and Des Crowley, who is on the bank's board of directors. We specifically outlined our concerns, and it became clear that the decision has been made in order to increase profits rather than look out for the people of Belleek and elsewhere and the thousands of people who use the bank.

I will now turn to Bank of Ireland's reasoning for the closures. In its statement, it mentions alternative banking and how important it is to move online. When pressed on the issue, however, it became clear that the bank has made no assessment regarding access to Internet and mobile phone services. I know at first hand that there are many people in Belleek who do not have a stable Internet connection. The bank has made no assessment of what impact its decision will have on older people, who may not be tech savvy and may not be able to use computers. That simply cannot be acceptable.

The bank has also stated its intention to integrate banking services with local post offices, which are themselves facing many pressures. Gone are the days when you had a dedicated post office that was well staffed and offered an array of postal and financial services. Now it is crammed into the corner of the local shop. It therefore cannot be a realistic alternative to bank branches. The post office is simply not able to deal with the heavy footfall, while the privacy aspect of local banking that we have all become accustomed to has been removed.

Another possibility being considered by the Bank of Ireland, in the Belleek branch at least, is the linking of Belleek services with those in Ballyshannon in County Donegal. Again, however, the bank was pressed further on the issue, and it seems that the Brexit decision and future financial uncertainty means that that option is also highly unlikely.

Neither I nor my colleagues are satisfied with the proposed alternative arrangements, nor am I satisfied that a proper engagement and consultation process has been or is being completed. Staff, customers and businesses have been left completely in the dark. That is despite the fact that, last year, the banking sector came together at Westminster to agree the access to banking protocol, which sets out specific requirements for closing a bank. Those include the adequacy of alternative banking services and customer and staff engagement. None of this has taken place to date, and it is important that we in the Chamber challenge the bank on whether it is using this protocol. There are 54 staff across the North who are impacted by the decision in that they are now left in uncertain circumstances. They will either have to

take redundancy or travel miles to get to and from their work, and, if you live in Belleek, that comes as a massive inconvenience.

It is against this backdrop that I find it crucial that the Chamber sends a direct message to the Bank of Ireland and to the wider banking services that we will not sit back and allow the gradual erosion of local and rural services. For far too long, rural communities have been stripped of services by banks and other institutions with little challenge and few ramifications. We talk lots about reducing corporation tax and giving our banks massive tax cuts, but what about a reduction in corporation tax and having social clauses in which there must be a commitment to rural banking services in order for banks to avail themselves of any tax break?

The Assembly needs to make a statement that rural bank closures are unacceptable, especially when it is the last bank in an area. It will be detrimental to farmers, SMEs and investment in the area. I want the Chamber to be proactive rather than reactive. In the short term, I request the Minister to engage with the Bank of Ireland to outline our concerns and that he meets Des Crowley who is on the board of directors in London. In the long term, it is my belief that the Assembly needs to make a clear statement that we will not sit back and allow the gradual erosion of services by stealth, and we must review this situation and consider whether legislation is appropriate to safeguard banking services.

I will now address the Sinn Féin amendment. It remains clear that rural broadband and mobile phone connectivity is not up to speed. That is why the SDLP brought a motion to the Chamber in June. However, Sinn Féin fails to recognise that the issue is much greater than connectivity; it is about access to banking services in rural communities. Internet and mobile banking cannot be a substitute for local face-to-face banking, and it cannot be used as an excuse to rubber-stamp the closure of these vital services. In this regard, I urge support for the motion as proposed and I cannot accept the Sinn Féin amendment.

Ms Archibald: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "Office" and insert

“, particularly given the limitations of broadband and mobile Internet provision in rural areas; believes that the provision of accessible banking is an integral part of social inclusion, with a particular impact on the elderly; notes the negative economic impact bank closures have on small businesses and on future investment opportunities; calls on the Minister for the Economy to intervene meaningfully and encourage the banking sector to maintain a strong network of rural bank branches and to safeguard the existing bank branches within these communities from closure; and further calls on the Minister to commit to investing in identifying and addressing the problem of rural areas where no, or no worthwhile, broadband and mobile provision can be received.”.

I thank the proposers of the motion for raising this important issue. We believe that our amendment adds to the spirit of the motion, which is to ensure the equivalence of service delivery for rural dwellers.

I was supportive of the motion. As a representative of a constituency with large rural areas and as a member of

the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, I am well aware of the many issues affecting rural constituents regarding services. As Mr McPhillips pointed out, there have been a number of bank closures across the North, the most recent in July. As he said, this represents a loss of local jobs as well as the service.

A few weeks ago, the Federation of Small Businesses presented to the Economy Committee, and I asked whether there were specific issues for rural small businesses. The two points raised were the importance of rural banks and rural crime. It was pointed out that small businesses need to be able to deposit cash and that it is a security risk for them to travel or keep money in a safe. It was also highlighted that there is footfall associated with local bank branches for cafes, shops etc in a small town or village that can be lost when a branch closes. For personal banking, there are of course those who prefer or need to avail themselves of in-branch services for particular transactions.

On our amendment, it cannot be ignored how banking has changed in the past decade. Online banking is now used by around 60% of our population for a range of transactions. For example, 33% of Barclays personal loan applications are done online. Mobile apps are increasingly the method of choice for many banking transactions. For example, Halifax states that 65% of its online banking is done via mobile app. For many rural dwellers who do not have access to transport, it is imperative to have access to online or mobile banking. This could be households with a single earner and one car where a parent is at home with kids or rural dwellers who are unemployed, are long-term sick or have a disability. In this instance, people may be unable to travel to the nearest branch. It is therefore necessary to have adequate broadband or mobile phone coverage. Many of our most isolated areas suffer from a lack of services in general, including public transport, so the loss of a local bank branch exacerbates an inequality in service that is already there.

4.00 pm

It cannot be ignored that there has been a reduction in the number of in-branch transactions and that fewer people may be using branches, but banks should be encouraged to look at more innovative or imaginative solutions than simply closing branches. Reduced hours is one option, or, if reducing overheads is an issue, sharing premises with shops, other banks in the town or post offices or delivering a full range of services through a post office branch are other options. I acknowledge what Mr McPhillips said about privacy, and that is something that needs to be addressed. This would ensure that the full spectrum of service remains within the locality. While acknowledging that the Minister has limited say in the business decisions of individual banks, all possible influence should be exerted to encourage those types of initiatives.

There have been many debates and discussions about the need for better broadband provision and mobile coverage in rural areas, and a great deal of investment has been put into mobile and broadband infrastructure. I acknowledge what the Minister previously said about not wanting to allow a situation to develop where there is one level of service for urban areas and another for rural areas, and I welcome that. Unfortunately, however, that may already be the case in some areas. It is very frustrating for individuals, whether they are seeking home or business broadband, to

be told they are just outside the scope of decent delivery, and it is equally frustrating as a rep to be told the same and not be able to offer a solution to those individuals.

I could stand here and list areas with no coverage or very poor coverage, but so could many other Members, and I am sure that the providers are aware of where they are. That information needs to be collated and the issue tackled. That is why we are calling for the Minister to commit to a programme to identify the pockets of areas with poor broadband or mobile coverage and hold the providers to account to ensure they target those areas in a systematic way.

There is also a role for local councils in that, and some have plans already in that regard. A targeted action plan should be developed to deliver at least basic broadband over a set period of time to all areas. This is a piece of work that will become necessary with the universal service obligation. It is expected that there may be some clawback of investment to BT, which could be redirected towards a project like that.

Broadband and mobile coverage are no longer luxury commodities; they are necessary utilities like water and electricity. They are a requirement for SMEs to do business and are expected in households for educational and entertainment purposes alike. It is no use telling people who live in those areas affected that 48,000 premises have been connected via the broadband improvement scheme; they only want to know when they too might be connected.

I support the motion and commend the amendment to address the disparity in service provision to rural dwellers.

Mr T Buchanan: The closure of a bank in a rural area is a very emotive issue for any community. It instils a fear in the heart of that community because it is another loss in a rural area. Far too often within rural areas we are seeing the losses of businesses, banks, post offices and other facilities, which we must stand firmly against. A bank closure means the loss of a facility that has been in situ for many years and forms part of the very fabric of that society. It is fair to say that in many areas the bank is utilised from the cradle to the grave. Family members — fathers, grandfathers and siblings — will have used it. When a child is born, an account is opened for them, and it used throughout their lifetime. The closure of that bank creates a huge gap in that area and a huge concern for the people in that community.

The removal of the facility and that face-to-face encounter with a member of staff creates a huge gap for all those who prefer this method of banking. It has a huge knock-on effect on the footfall in a town or village and a negative impact on many of the local businesses in the area. A local branch manager understands the difficulties and challenges facing many businesses, from small to medium-sized enterprises right through to the agriculture industry, which depend so much on that knowledge and flexibility to allow growth. Unfortunately, that relationship with the managers is being lost, placing huge pressure on some of the businesses. I have been working with businesses that have found that, with their local branch gone, they have extreme difficulty in even securing a meeting with a senior member of the bank to sort out very simple financial pressures. That is a direct result of the loss of the branch in their local area.

As I look across my constituency of West Tyrone, which is a large rural constituency, the number of banks that have already closed and have been proposed for closure is alarming. In the past few years, the number of banks in Castlederg has been reduced from three to one. Our rural villages are losing not only their banks but, in some cases, their post offices as well. This is stripping rural areas of a facility that is so essential to them.

While we understand that, right across Northern Ireland, there is a focus on changing how banking should be done in the future — for example, Internet banking and other methods — that simply does not work in rural areas such as our small towns and villages. The lack of broadband availability puts paid to that. Many rural dwellers and small businesses do not have adequate access to broadband services and are, therefore, at a loss to even contemplate doing Internet banking.

Regardless of how advanced online banking may become, the people making the decisions must take into consideration the infrastructure difficulties that exist and the extreme pressures that branch closures are placing on rural communities. Many individuals and small businesses are being forced to travel round trips of anything up to 50 miles to access their banking facilities, which also creates a security issue for the small business sector. Consultation between customers, the community, elected representatives and the banks prior to any closure is practically non-existent, with many customers and members of the community not being made aware of proposed closures until they read it in the local press.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he agree with me when it comes to these closures? We are now seeing a further eight Bank of Ireland branches close, on top of the original 19. The chief executive told us last week that the bank in Castlederg in our constituency was in profit, as was the one in Belleek. Does the Member agree with me that this is about profit and not people?

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

Mr T Buchanan: That appears to be the issue. It does not seem to be people-focused any longer. Prior to the axe falling on any branch, the banks must conduct a much more rigorous impact assessment and consultation exercise with the customers and communities who are likely to be affected by any closure. For the benefit of rural areas and the small business sector in particular, most of which we find in rural areas, it is essential that the Minister, who we are glad is with us for the debate, in the limited role that he has in this matter, intervenes in some meaningful way to seek to safeguard the existing branches in our rural areas, to protect the rural areas from any further closures. Every branch closure in a rural community has a hugely detrimental impact on that area and is a huge loss. I ask the Minister to intervene and do what he possibly can to seek to stop and prohibit the closure of these branches.

Mrs Barton: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this bank closure debate. I, too, support my constituents in their efforts to halt the closure of the last remaining bank in the town of Belleek. From 2010 to 2014, 77 branches in the overall banking network in Northern Ireland closed; that is one third of all branches. Since 2014, this closure programme has been accelerated, leaving many towns and villages without any

form of banking. This is particularly prevalent in my own constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

A number of Members have outlined the socio-economic reasons why banks must remain open. We all realise that banking is changing, but at least one bank needs to be operational in the larger villages, given the land mass of the county of Fermanagh. How many people in the Chamber would endure a round trip of 50 or 60 miles several times a week to use a bank to do business, together with the risks of transporting cash? Very few, I assume.

We are told the bank is closing because of the reduced footfall due to declining business. In the past two years, two other banks in Belleek have closed. What has the Bank of Ireland done to encourage new business? What incentives did it offer those customers from the other banks to change their account and make the Bank of Ireland in Belleek more viable? The banks have to change their single-minded approach of using a decreasing footfall as an excuse to close a bank. They must make a greater effort to entice more clients with larger incentives.

Presently, it looks as though the banks do not want the bother of providing a service to rural customers. I understand that, due to accounting procedures, the more lucrative income from business and mortgages is not now counted in the bank income measurement, thus accelerating the rate of closures in rural areas such as Belleek. Since 2013, the Bank of Ireland has closed 17 branches in Northern Ireland, leaving only 28 operational. I hope this is not the thin end of the wedge of the Bank of Ireland closing all its branches.

Again, the excuse that customers are doing their banking by Internet is not acceptable. Of those who have access to the Internet, only 51% use it for online banking, compared with the average figure in the UK of 60%. This access to the Internet and poor mobile infrastructure certainly is a huge disadvantage economically for the Belleek area and is a gigantic issue that the Executive still have to address successfully. The Bank of Ireland speaks of 365 online, which it says offers the convenience and flexibility to do day-to-day banking at any time. Has the Bank of Ireland in Belleek considered working with the community and the Executive to jointly finance a state-of-the-art mobile and online infrastructure to ensure the success of its 365 online service in Belleek so that digital banking will be accessible for the people of the area?

Time and time again, one is told by the bank about its good customer service. The threat of closure certainly does not indicate that, nor does the manner in which the bank's customers learned of the proposed closure. There is also no evidence that the Bank of Ireland assessed the impact on the local community of this closure. My constituents in Fermanagh and South Tyrone deserve better than bank after bank being under threat of closure or being closed. While Belleek town is relatively small, it is a vibrant community with a world-famous pottery and a thriving tourism industry.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close.

Mrs Barton: I therefore urge the Executive to intervene, meet the Bank of Ireland chief executive and do everything to prevent the proposed closure. I support the motion.

Ms Armstrong: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the motion and the amendment. As a rural dweller and a representative of the largely rural constituency of Strangford, I have seen at first-hand how the closure of local bank branches has had a negative impact, particularly on older citizens and small rural businesses.

Wilfred Mitchell, policy chair of the FSB, noted the unwelcome rural focus of bank closures across Northern Ireland over recent years. I have heard from constituents about how they do not want to discuss personal banking requirements over the post office counter, especially when that counter is in the garage forecourt where their neighbours are next in the queue waiting to buy their milk. I have heard from constituents about how the post office alternative is no longer available because even the post office in that village has closed. Indeed, I have heard about situations where the local post office is based in a village that you cannot travel to using public transport because the rural village-to-village route has been removed and the only local taxi does school runs during the week and pub runs at the weekend.

While 60% of people may use online banking, I have heard from constituents who are frustrated that online banking is often the only alternative offered and from elderly citizens who never use a smartphone. There may be limited broadband in their areas, but they do not have or want to have an expensive computer, tablet or smartphone or they cannot afford to have broadband in their homes. The opinions of rural dwellers and businesses are not being considered enough.

4.15 pm

In a press release following the announcement of the closure of a number of Bank of Ireland branches, the bank stated that the decision was not taken lightly and noted that customers would be disappointed. Customers were and remain more than disappointed. They feel abandoned and disillusioned by high-street banks that have given little or no consideration to the impact that the closure of local branches has on communities and small businesses. During the financial crisis, customers stayed loyal to local branches and banks, and those same customers are now being abandoned. Indeed, Larry Broderick of the Financial Services Union stated that branch closures were “irresponsible”, given the announcement of “significant profits”. Therefore, it is appropriate that the Minister engage with banks to encourage the sector to maintain a network of rural branches.

The pace of bank closures has accelerated rapidly over recent years. The British Bankers’ Association (BBA) investigated lending data and found that bank closures dampen SME lending growth by 63%. That figure rose to 104% in areas that have lost their last bank. That is a significant and damaging drop in funding for areas that are already under commercial and economic pressure.

I fully appreciate that banking is a reserved matter and that the Department has no statutory oversight of the banking sector. However, where there is market failure, there needs to be intervention by Government to address issues that are having such a negative impact on the public and, at the same time, hindering small businesses. Does the Minister accept that this is market failure? If he does, does he acknowledge the need for Government to intervene as is suggested by the motion and the

amendment? One way that the Minister could help is by encouraging banks to look again at their balance between profit and social responsibility, and to encourage them to treat rural customers fairly by replicating the protocol on bank closures as agreed by the British Bankers’ Association. In that protocol, high-street banks, consumer groups and Government signed up to an industry-wide agreement to minimise the impact of bank closures on local communities.

It is not appropriate for banks simply to state that online banking or the Post Office are appropriate alternatives to local branches. If appropriate consultation with the community were completed, the bank would have had to address whether broadband access was available, enabling online banking to be a reasonable alternative. It would also have to consider those customers who do not use online banking.

In my constituency, broadband and mobile phone signals may be available, but their speed and strength is so limited that it makes it difficult — in some areas, impossible — to use a smartphone or computer to bank. There are, of course, a generation of bank customers who are used to speaking to a local bank manager. Those people will never use online banking, no matter how good the broadband capacity. In my family, my father and my mother-in-law do not use online banking. They do not trust it or want to use it and would not do so. That generation needs to be able to speak to a human being in person. The fear of computer glitches — let us face it: many banking customers in Northern Ireland have faced significant difficulty thanks to computer glitches over recent years — cybercrime and computer hackers means that they have little trust in online banking. What alternative is available for them?

Banks have said that the Post Office provides local banking. In my constituency, the Post Office is having its own problems delivering local rural services. A number of local Post Office providers have pulled out, including those in Kircubbin, Carrowdore, Portavogie and many other small villages. While the Post Office tries to find another shop or garage to take on the services, many villages are being left —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you. Many places are left without an alternative.

I ask the Minister to take forward a protocol on banking closures like the one agreed by the BBA in 2015 —

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

Ms Armstrong: — and considers the Move Your Money report.

Mr Irwin: This is a matter of particular relevance in my constituency of Newry and Armagh, where, in a matter of a few months, a number of rural banking branches were withdrawn from towns in the constituency. Tandragee lost the Danske Bank branch, and many customers who were less mobile and, indeed, businesses in the town that enjoyed that accessibility to a banking branch switched to the remaining bank in town, an Ulster Bank, only for it to close a few months later. That had a negative impact on Tandragee, with a noted decrease in the number of people

stopping there. It has also had a negative knock-on effect on businesses.

Newtownhamilton lost its only banking branch, as did Markethill, which, in reality, means that, over a very large area, the only physical branch-based banking services are in Newry city and Armagh city. That continues to be a significant issue for businesses and, of course, the general public, who now have to travel much greater distances to do their banking.

I have liaised with various banks and was successful in encouraging Ulster Bank to operate a mobile bank in Tandragee one day a week, which has been of some assistance to local people. However, it has limited services on board; it is no substitute for a permanent branch in the town. I recall, in the weeks leading up to the closure, holding various meetings with the banking institutions, at which I put forward strong arguments for the retention of services in each of the respective areas. However, the banks' defence of closure was consistently based on the rise of Internet banking and the cost of operating a branch versus the financial benefit to the bank.

It is, in my view, unacceptable that banks feel that they can withdraw a vital service from a town, especially when the general public and businesses have given a bank loyal custom over many years; in many cases, for decades. The public and local businesses that I spoke to remain very dissatisfied by the decision of banks in my constituency to withdraw their branch services. Indeed, some of those banks in recent times have made record profits in Northern Ireland.

That Internet banking is rising in popularity is no surprise, and, in many respects, it represents a convenient opportunity to check your accounts at any time, day or night, and in any place. However, not everyone is comfortable with this form of technology, and not everyone has access either to 4G mobile, a phone data signal or suitable broadband speed to permit the use of online banking by computer. That is an issue for those either without the technology or for those uncomfortable using it. For those in that position in my constituency, it means a significant journey to access branch services elsewhere, and, of course, it poses a real problem for the elderly and those without suitable transport.

I encourage our Finance Minister to continue to liaise with our banking institutions and impress on them the requirement to maintain branch networks, particularly in rural areas, where towns have been negatively impacted by branch closures.

Mr McAleer: I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I commend the proposer of the motion. Banking and access to financial services are vital for local people. That is especially true in areas where there are already very few basic services. Take Owenkillew, which I represent. It is the number-one deprived area in the North of Ireland as measured by access to basic services. It is very important that we look at banking and financial services in the context of wider services to meet the needs of people in the area. Recently, we marked the successful conclusion of the rural development programme, which created over 1,000 jobs, lasted five years and invested £100 million. We are now looking forward to the new one. The stripping back of important financial services makes for a disappointing contrast with that good news story of investment and development in our rural areas.

My party raised the issue of broadband in the amendment. Throughout the North of Ireland there are many not-spots, particularly in rural areas. Part of the area that I represent, along with others in the Chamber, is the Sperrins, and it has many not-spots or areas where broadband is not available. That was a subject of debate in the Chamber in June, just after the election. Indeed, last week, Barry McElduff MLA, Pat Doherty MP and I followed up that debate by meeting Ofcom to discuss access to broadband for people in the area. It is a massive issue, and I am glad that it has been included in the amendment.

Bank closures are a big issue in West Tyrone, as in many other areas. Indeed, I was personally involved in the campaign to save the Ulster Bank in Gortin and engaged with businesses, the GAA club and the local community. The sense that I got through dealing with people was that they felt let down after giving decades of valuable custom to their local branch.

Ms Armstrong: I thank the Member for giving way. You talked about people feeling let down. Does the Member agree with me that if, as the Swiss bank UBS predicts, another 50% of banks in the UK close in the next 10 years, the problem will only be exacerbated?

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

Mr McAleer: Yes. That was a very timely intervention, Kellie. Certainly with the Bank of Ireland, we are looking at another swathe of closures. There are in the region of eight bank branches in the pipeline for closure across the North, one of which is in Castlederg in the West Tyrone constituency. My colleague Pat Doherty, the MP for the area, met Des Crowley in Westminster to discuss that. The sense that he got was the same sense that we got when we met bank chiefs before, which is that these are business and economic decisions. You get the sense that these things are foregone conclusions. The message that comes out of that is that these are people, customers and communities who have been loyal for decades, yet they do not feel as though their loyalty is being reciprocated by the banks. Banks need to look at their social responsibility as well as just the economic case for whether a branch stays open.

Just a few months ago, we marked the conclusion of the Rural Needs Bill. This is the first region in Europe to have rural needs and rural proofing enshrined in legislation. Hopefully, the South of Ireland will come into line within the next year as well. The now Rural Needs Act 2016 puts a statutory duty on public authorities to pay due regard to the needs of rural dwellers and to consider the impact of the decisions that they make. It is beyond the legislative competence of such an Act to include banks, but that is the challenge for our banks. They need to rural-proof their decisions, look at the impact that they have in local areas and reciprocate the loyalty that they have been getting for decades from people here.

In conclusion, as I said at the outset, banking and access to financial services cannot be seen in isolation from other services and areas such as access to GPs, transport, youth services and caring services. It is our responsibility as a legislative Assembly to give a voice to the people who feel let down and cut off; to cash businesses in rural areas that now feel vulnerable having to go some distance to a bank in the nearest town to deposit cash; to sporting clubs, GAA clubs and others that need to deposit cash at

their local bank; and, of course, to older and vulnerable people who maybe cannot get to town or who are in a broadband not-spot, of which there are many throughout the North. It is our duty to speak up to prevent the closure of these banks, to make banks see that they have a social responsibility and to do whatever we can to prevent the overall decline and decimation of services in rural areas.

Mr Dunne: As a member of the Committee for the Economy, I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. It is an important issue that affects so many people across Northern Ireland. The reality is that it is not a problem that is exclusive to Northern Ireland. Since 2010, it is reckoned that over 30% of bank branches — some 77 — have closed right across the Province. It is also estimated that some 1,700 bank branches have closed their doors across the UK in the past five years. Any closure can have a real and severe impact on many in society, including our older population, those who are less mobile, those who have disabilities, those with lower incomes and those who may not have the resources or the skills required to manage their own bank account online.

*(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)*

There is no doubt that bank closures have a real effect on so many. They have a negative impact on small businesses in our towns, which rely on banks daily for lodgements and getting access to money. Any closure also leaves a vacant hole in our town centres, and that can often be very difficult to fill, with reduced footfall and the effects of that. People in Northern Ireland still like face-to-face service, which they get in a bank. It gives them confidence and convenience and meets their banking requirements. They build up relationships and trust with staff over many years. There is also the security element. With no bank facility, householders and businesses may end up having to store large amounts of money within their own four walls, which presents a personal risk.

In my constituency of North Down, Holywood has been left with one bank. We originally had three. The First Trust Bank branch closed in 2013 and the Danske Bank branch in 2014. Donaghadee has lost its bank. It has no bank. There is no bank in Donaghadee. The village of Millisle nearby has no bank either.

I understand that there are a further nine Ulster Bank branches under threat. Local people really feel the impact of these closures, and there is no doubt about the reduction of service when the banks close.

4.30 pm

Closures are often carried out with no consultation with the local community, and they leave many customers feeling let down, frustrated and concerned. In the case of the Holywood Danske Bank closure, I got a phone call to my office saying the branch would close within three months. It was totally out of the blue; it was a shock to everyone, especially to the local community. There was no consultation. Certainly, we had meetings with senior bank officials, but no one listened, and the decision was made.

Certainly, online banking has transformed the way that many people bank. The digital age of mobile banking, with online transfers and credit cards, has radically changed the whole sector. However, banks must do more to protect

our most vulnerable and ensure that they are looked after and to respect their customers' needs and requirements.

Another real frustration is the lunchtime closing of banks, where customers are standing outside the door trying to get in. Banks talk about customer focus and putting people first: it seems to be all about putting profits first.

Whilst alternative facilities in post offices go some way to soften the blow following a bank closure, they can often be busy places and, understandably, are not able to carry out the full range of services that a traditional bank branch can offer over a counter with dedicated financial staff. The last Enterprise Committee regularly met those from the banking sector and other agencies, such as the Consumer Council, on these issues, and we always raised the need for a strong branch network to be sustained across Northern Ireland.

I know that the Minister, Simon Hamilton, has a long interest in the issue, and I know that he will continue to fight the case for local communities.

Mr Aiken: I commend the SDLP for tabling this important and wide-ranging motion, which we will, of course, support.

Rural bank closures affect all our constituencies, urban and rural. Most acutely, however, in rural constituencies like South Antrim and our adjoining constituencies of East Antrim and North Antrim, bank closures have had a considerable effect. I quote Rachael Cray, head of money affairs at the Consumer Council of Northern Ireland:

“by next February, Northern Ireland’s big four banks will have closed 77 branches in the last four years (31 per cent of the bank branch network) ... Despite an increase in online banking, our research shows that bank customers still want access to local services” —

for the reasons we have already heard —

“with 68 per cent of consumers surveyed saying they had visited a bank branch at least once in the last month.”

This is not an issue for just County Antrim or even Northern Ireland; it is a much wider issue that goes across all these islands. However, we in Northern Ireland are particularly hard hit because of the dispersed and rural nature of our towns and villages and the generally poor nature of our rural broadband Internet coverage and 4G mobile coverage.

It has been said that technology changes and it is a sign of progress that bank branches have been thinned out and closed. It has been said that, in the age of superfast broadband, the Internet and smartphones, the need for local bank branches has diminished to a point where they are virtually extinct. However, we should have a word of caution for those who say that Internet banking is wholly the method of the future and face-to-face banking in a physical building, interacting with trained clerical staff, a thing of the past.

The recent report from the Federation of Small Businesses in Northern Ireland highlights the problems for small businesses. There is the time spent physically to travel 50 miles or 60 miles on a round trip and the time that that takes out of the business. There are the security aspects of transporting large volumes of cash and cheques, and

the impact on rural communities, villages and towns of the lack of footfall when a bank branch closes.

On the issue of online accounts, the question many people will ask is about security: "How secure is my account?". Over 16 years ago, the British Bankers' Association published an academic report entitled, 'Banking without Branches: a study of how people conduct their banking business without a local branch', which stated:

"Remote banking, technical solutions and even unattended deposit facilities appear not to command widespread trust amongst isolated bank users, so banks will need to work hard if they wish to market these as alternatives to branches for some types of customer."

We recognise that some banks, in particular the likes of Ulster Bank, have introduced mobile banking, but that is not enough. It is no substitute for proper banking facilities and where they are located. Bank closures in small towns and villages have hit our communities hard in recent years; it is an island-wide phenomenon. We all understand that individual banks will make their decisions on bank closures for their own commercial reasons, but for some of us it smacks of issues around profit. This debate will have been worthwhile if it raises understanding of the issue. It would be helpful if the Minister, in summing up, could clarify what role the regional Government can and will play in mitigating the effects of bank closures, particularly in rural areas.

Mr McGlone: A lot of reference has been made to the Bank of Ireland and how it has impacted; indeed, it has beaten a retreat from two branches in my constituency, in Draperstown and Maghera. Recently, in Maghera, we have had Danske and Bank of Ireland announcing closures; indeed, the Danske is long vacated. Both were in the town centre, virtually facing each other, so we have a void there. People might say, "OK, it is just a building", but it was about the service that was provided to those communities. I speak today about my constituency and Portglenone, which is on the periphery of it. Danske closed there too, and a lot of people from the lower end of south Derry did their business in the Portglenone branch.

There appears to be a gradual retreat by banks from, particularly, the rural communities that they serve. We hear time and time again that you can do banking online and that there are issues of footfall and increased numbers of people doing online banking. That is true and may well be the case, but many people do not have access to the Internet, as amply outlined earlier, or do not have it on their smartphones. There are people, mainly older people, who do not do the online stuff, do not get the online stuff and will not ever be able to do it. There are also others who have learning disabilities that prevent them from doing it. The support of the one-to-one interface and exchange is crucial. As I see it, the banks are beating a retreat from our rural areas, and these are not non-productive rural areas. I can cite Draperstown and Maghera, and we can look at the number of self-starters, self-employed people and very productive businesses in that area, many of which are into manufacturing and exporting. I am sure the Minister can verify that from stats from his Department. The banks actually get this and say, "Yes, we know", but what are they doing about it? They are withdrawing their services from those areas.

I have dealt with the individual and community perspectives. Nobody could have put it better from the business perspective than the Federation of Small Businesses. It referred to footfall. When a bank branch closes, particularly in a rural area, there is a knock-on effect in reduced footfall in that town or village that impacts negatively on other local business. Of course, it does. If you are not bringing people into town or you have not got the footfall in the streets, business is not going to happen. Other businesses will be affected, be they in the retail or service sectors. Some people are being forced to travel up to 50 miles on a round trip, which is time away from their home, their business and other duties that some simply cannot afford. The in-branch relationship managers did not just provide advice, they understood the locality, the area and the needs of the actual customers. They are not going to be there. We cannot expect Post Office staff to advise on banking facilities such as overdrafts and other necessities that are required from a bank. Security has already been referred to, and many of us know businesses that have had their homes ransacked by criminals looking for money. Direct access for those businesses to overnight facilities, night safes or whatever it might be with banks is crucial, particularly where there is a rapid cash flow in those businesses. I have already mentioned access to broadband and, again, customers' needs. This is very important: the Federation of Small Businesses has done its work. It took a focus group, and members told it that the proportion of cash or cheque transactions in their businesses ranged from 50% to 95%. Therefore, the closure of nearby branches will have a significant impact on them.

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil mo chuid ama ag teacht chun deiridh. I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat as ucht seans a labhairt.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for the Economy, Simon Hamilton, who will have 15 minutes to respond to the debate.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I have listened with interest to the debate today and welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion, even though, as several Members have pointed out, my Department or, indeed, any Department in the Executive does not have direct responsibility for banks in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, it is an important issue that is rightly raised on the Floor.

The number of bank closures, particularly in rural areas, is a real concern for the many customers — both local businesses and the wider community — who rely on the services of their local bank. We must, of course, acknowledge that there has been a major shift in how we engage and interact with our high street banks. The services of the high street banks in Northern Ireland have traditionally been delivered through an extensive network of branches; however, it is indisputable that branch usage is not as high as it once was. As financial innovation has increased, trends in society have seen falls in the demand for traditional banking methods and a significant rise in the use of online banking and electronic payment methods. Recent data from the British Bankers' Association (BBA) shows that the number of bank branch transactions across the United Kingdom has fallen to an average of four per customer per year. The BBA calculates that the average

branch in the UK receives 71 visits per day: that is a 32% fall since 2011.

I raise those issues not with the intention of sounding like a spokesperson for the banks — I have a tough enough job without taking that one on — but because, as many Members have acknowledged, we are changing our behaviour in how we interact not just with banks but with a range of services, such as retail and government services. The BBA also showed that there had been a 50% rise in banking app logins, to 11 million per day in 2015. The Bank of Ireland, which is understandably in the eye of the storm in today's debate because of its recent announcements, suggests that as few as 2% of customer transactions are now done in-branch, that there has been a 20% increase in online customers in the past two years and that, two years ago, 70% of mortgages were sold directly via branches or on the phone. That has now flipped the other way, and now 70% are sold via mortgage intermediaries, without interaction in branches at all. It is that changing behaviour, driven largely by technological change, combined with the impact of the financial crisis and new regulatory costs that has made banks across the UK, Ireland and the world look at the viability of their branch networks. Unfortunately, in the last few months, we have seen, as mentioned, an announcement from the Bank of Ireland that it proposes to close eight branches across Northern Ireland. Since 2010, 104 bank branches have closed here, leaving us with 252 branches across Northern Ireland.

The role of high street banks in our society is still essential. They play a valuable role in our communities. Many people believe that the Northern Ireland high street banks could have done more for their customers, especially those in rural areas, as they have tried to concentrate their branches in major centres of population or close their branches in favour of online banking. With each closure, the impacts on domestic and business customers can be considerable. Businesses suffer reduced footfall, cash flow shortages and concerns around the security of cash lodgements, whereas domestic customers can feel more isolated and excluded from society. The impact of the closures has been felt in rural areas and places where no suitable alternatives to bank branches exist. Northern Ireland already has a high number of unbanked consumers — around 10% — compared with the rest of the UK, which is at 4%.

It is important, therefore, that we do not unnecessarily increase the sense of exclusion; rather, we must look to increase the confidence and capability of consumers. However, I recognise that banks are private concerns. As I said, the nature of their business is changing. I want to develop good, open and transparent relationships with the banks so that we fully understand each other.

4.45 pm

It is important to note that, as I mentioned before, the regulation of financial services is a reserved matter. However, in recent weeks, some Members called on me to meet various banks, but I have, at my instigation, met Danske Bank, Ulster Bank and the Bank of Ireland, and I have plans to meet others in the coming weeks. If we can work together, I think our banks can provide great and early insight into our economy and how it is performing in varying sectors.

We have to appreciate that, as the majority of customers change the way they interact with banks, the nature of banking in Northern Ireland will also change. We need to develop progressive relationships with our high street banks so that they remain mindful of the needs of rural communities and those more vulnerable in our society who face the possibility of being left behind and, ultimately, financially excluded.

Many will ask what our consumers really think. We hear from our banks that their customers and the data suggest that consumers are behaving very differently. A survey, though, by the Competition and Markets Authority in April last year showed that 63% of consumers found that having a local convenient branch was very important. There is still a fundamental role for branches in retail banking in Northern Ireland. Consumer Council research from Move Your Money shows that there are some fundamental moments in your financial life when you want to speak to someone face to face, such as, obviously, when taking out a mortgage.

As we know, human contact engenders trust and confidence, and in a rural area that has an even greater value. A sense of community often depends on a busy, thriving high street, and rural banks are a key element of that. Perhaps one of the most telling results from research carried out by the Consumer Council shows that it is predominantly the more vulnerable in our society — that is, the elderly, disabled and those on low incomes — who are most adversely affected by bank closures. Whilst, unfortunately, some branches in Northern Ireland have closed, many others have been refurbished and upgraded, offering more space and meeting rooms so that customers can meet staff. So I think it is important to acknowledge that banks recognise the need for investment also.

Many have asked what we can do to mitigate the impacts of the closures. In Great Britain, as part of the British Banking Association's (BBA) bank protocol, banks must investigate alternative arrangements for customers before closing the last bank in town. Those can include free-to-use cash machines, mobile banking solutions and the use of local post office branches. Unfortunately, to date, the protocol has not been adopted in Northern Ireland. I think there are some weaknesses with the protocol as it currently exists; some Members focused on it. It is a protocol that comes into place, I understand, only when the last bank is closing in a town. I think we need to be very careful about encouraging and almost opening the floodgates for banks to rush to close branches in rural communities and, indeed, right across Northern Ireland.

An independent review of the BBA's bank branch protocol was announced in May. The review will provide proposals for the Northern Ireland high street banks. It is being led by Professor Russell Griggs, who is a friend of Northern Ireland and has been involved in banking issues here, and will consider the way banks have applied the protocol, as well as the outcomes for affected customers and communities.

The post office network has been mentioned by many contributors. It can also provide an important role in solving the problem. With the exception of First Trust, which provides only limited services, all banks operating in Northern Ireland provide access to banking services through post offices. However, more needs to be done on that to promote these services, as research by the

Consumer Council shows that, while satisfaction levels were high with post office banking services, standing at some 81%, only one in four customers had used the post office for banking services.

The post office branch network is undergoing its own network transformation programme to make it more viable. There are 477 post offices across Northern Ireland. Of those, 326, or 60%, are in rural areas, and the Consumer Council estimates that an additional 10,500 extra opening hours have been added through this process.

There is no doubt that access to online banking and financial services is important. Digital services have undoubtedly changed the way consumers engage with banks, and reliable broadband is essential for accessing these services. I very much recognise that some consumers who have faced or are facing closure of their local bank may not have access to the reliable broadband or mobile connection that is necessary to properly support online banking.

My Department administers the Northern Ireland Better Broadband project. That provides access to subsidised broadband installation to homes and businesses that are unable to access a broadband service with a download speed of at least two megabits per second. In addition, we are working with the communications regulator, Ofcom, which consulted earlier this year on implementing a UK Government proposal for a universal service obligation to give all households a right to request a broadband connection within a reasonable cost threshold and offering speeds of 10 megabits per second by 2020. Broadband availability in Northern Ireland is increasing, with 94% of households having access to basic broadband services and some 77% to superfast services.

In addition, 72% of people use a smartphone, and significant investment is under way by mobile network operators, aimed at addressing partial not-spots by 2017. It is envisaged that mobile not-spots will be reduced to 0.3% of land mass by the time these investments are complete. Research from Ofcom shows that 62% of Internet users in Northern Ireland bank online. However, 38% of Northern Ireland consumers said that they would still not be confident about accessing a bank account online. Clearly, more work is needed to make this a viable alternative for high-street branches.

Access to cash machines is also a very real issue for rural areas. In 2007, the then Department of Finance and Personnel introduced rate relief measures aimed at businesses in rural areas, which gave a full exemption from rates to ATMs located in rural areas. The aim of the policy was to encourage and sustain the provision of ATMs in rural areas. I am very pleased to say that, when the policy was introduced, there were 37 ATMs in rural areas, and today, as a result of the policy, the number of eligible ATMs has increased to 82. That is a success story that the Executive have delivered.

The credit union network can also help to support the rural community. According to the Irish League of Credit Unions, membership has doubled in the past 10 years. Whilst credit unions do not offer the full range of services of a high-street bank, their network and the number of people who use their services have an important impact across Northern Ireland. Most are community-founded and locally based, and they are an important element in increasing

and maintaining financial inclusion across Northern Ireland.

Understandably, the closure of rural banks is a real concern. I thank the Consumer Council for its efforts to work with banks to mitigate the negative impacts and for the research that it has carried out into consumer attitudes to banking following recent branch closures. Its research shows that 80% of customers had visited a bank branch in the last year, consumers aged 55 and over are more likely to visit a bank branch than younger customers, and disabled customers are more likely to be affected by bank branch closures. The Consumer Council is working with the Bank of Ireland on its proposed bank closures to ensure that communities affected are left resilient to the change. It has proposed to the Bank of Ireland an action plan that includes suggestions that the bank provide drop-in sessions to give affected consumers information on continuing to access their bank account; support and training to consumers on online banking options; resource packs of information that compare different bank accounts, facilities, switching advice and other methods of payment; and accessibility audits of the alternative arrangements that are being put in place for disabled consumers.

As customers, we are changing how we interact with banks. An increasing number of us are going online to carry out transactions. Banks need to lower their cost base, which can lead to branch closures. However, banks in Northern Ireland have to make significant decisions about how they interact with their customers.

I have spoken about growing our economy but doing so in a way that serves the common good in Northern Ireland. As we grow our economy, I do not want us to lose sight of the values that make Northern Ireland a special place to live in. One of those values is that of community. We have a very strong sense of community in Northern Ireland. Whether or not we like banks, they are part of that community. They have a broader responsibility to their customers in Northern Ireland, which is not always evident from their behaviour. I recognise that it will be a challenge, but I encourage our banks to ensure that they take informed decisions that take full account of the likely impact on local and, in particular, rural communities. I will do my best to have an open-door relationship with our banks because it is vital that we truly understand each other. That relationship should be mutually beneficial to the needs of the banks and the wider economy and society in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, Northern Ireland needs a strong, vibrant banking sector and effective relationships to ensure that our economy and rural communities can continue to grow and prosper.

Ms Dillon: As outlined by my colleague Caoimhe Archibald, the amendment adds to the motion, as there are substantial infrastructural deficits that mean that Internet banking is not accessible to many rural businesses and dwellers. As mentioned, that does not solve the issue of cash lodgements and withdrawals for businesses. Unfortunately, we do not have control of banks and how they choose to deliver their services. However, as customers, there is an expectation that the bank that we use can meet our requirements. There needs to be an innovative approach to the issue, and the Minister should have proper engagement with banks to discuss how services can be delivered and retained in rural areas.

Many examples have been given here today of how that could be done.

My town of Coalisland, which has quite an urban base, is without a bank. Mr McGlone mentioned Maghera. We talk about towns and businesses needing to use Internet banking, but one half of Maghera town does not have access to broadband. One half of the businesses in that town do not have access to broadband, so it is impossible for them to do Internet banking. Mr McGlone also mentioned Mid Ulster, which has the largest number of VAT-registered businesses outside Belfast. It is a very innovative area, where people got up and out to start their own businesses. They made the effort, but they often feel that they do not get the support from central government to remain in Mid Ulster.

Generational difficulties were also raised, in that many of our older people have difficulty accessing the Internet. Going to the bank was part of their routine; it was a social thing. My colleague Declan raised that.

There is a loss of business in areas where there is no bank, because people do their business where they do their banking. Often, if you pass Coalisland to go to Dungannon to do your banking, you will do your shopping there as well. That is an issue for businesses that are trying to survive in a difficult economic climate. Banks can talk the talk about consumer focus, but, when it boils right down to it, it is all about profit. That has been well highlighted here today.

Broadband is not a substitute; online banking is not the answer. Even though it can be used in certain areas, it cannot be availed of in many of our rural areas. The Minister said that viability was the driver for bank closures in this new age of technology. Whilst I accept that that may be the case, I would like to highlight the fact that that is the case only in big towns and cities where there is good Internet connection, not in rural areas. It has been pointed out by several Members that the new age of technology has not yet reached many of our rural areas.

I have some questions over the stats that the Minister gave today. I can assure you that 94% of homes and businesses across Mid Ulster and many other areas of the rural North do not have a decent standard of broadband. The broadband that many have is so poor that you cannot use it, so those stats need to be questioned. I wonder whether they were rural proofed and checked against what is available in rural areas of the North rather than an average being taken across the North. I definitely question those statistics.

I commend the amendment. I hope that we will get support for it in the House, given that there is an issue. The motion is about protecting, standing up for and looking after our rural areas. We need to look at everything. In addition to the bank closures, there is the issue of broadband connection and all the infrastructure that rural parts of the North have been left without for many years. Whilst we are trying to address it now that we have people here in a legislative Assembly who can do something about it, the many years of neglect have left their mark.

5.00 pm

Mr McGrath: The most striking thing in the debate was how consistent the remarks were across the House, which goes to show that the issue affects the greater population

of the North. It affects many people, and most of us, as representatives, know people in our community who are directly affected by this. I look back to the beginning of the debate and the contribution from my colleague Richie McPhillips. He talked about 7,000 people in Belleek being mobilised to sign a petition. That is a huge population in a rural area who are concerned that they will lose out on services.

I will summarise some of the issues raised. Caoimhe Archibald talked about how the broadband issue added to the problem. I will probably come back to that in a little more detail towards the end. There is nothing in there that one could disagree with initially, but one has to ask how it sits alongside the motion. She mentioned important things for rural communities, such as access to transport. We know that transport in rural areas is a big issue and that starting to move banks 20 or 30 miles away from people would have a direct impact. Another issue mentioned by Caoimhe was footfall. The people coming into towns and villages to use the banks also, we hope, use the shops next door or across the road. As representatives of our communities, we all aspire to attracting people into towns for one reason and getting them to spend for other reasons, and that would be impacted on if services started to reduce.

Mr Buchanan referred to the emotive issue of how closing services in a rural area led to fear, particularly among our older population. What we are asking is this: do we want to be sitting back and doing nothing when a sector is consistently closing services, resulting in fear among our older population? Just sitting back and doing nothing does not seem a very good thing to do. At that stage, there was an intervention from my colleague Daniel McCrossan, who referred to the eight additional Bank of Ireland closures. He highlighted the fact that the eight additional closures are not for profit reasons; those eight branches are managing to deliver a profit for the bank. If it is not for profit reasons, why is the bank taking those services out of rural areas? It seems very strange, and maybe the Department can discuss that with the Bank of Ireland to find out what the motivation is.

Rosemary Barton acknowledged the change in our banking world but said that the onus should be on banks to provide at least one bank in each village. It feels as though they are all running away from the rural community. Can they not get together and try to maintain a network of branches across the rural community? She also highlighted the fact that residents of Belleek will have to go 25 miles to the nearest bank and 25 miles back — a 50-mile round journey. My bank is about a third of a mile from my front door, and I detest having to go down to it and go through the whole process, but it has to be done. Imagine having to make a 50-mile round journey to lodge a cheque. That really is not serviceable for people, and I know that she has called on the Executive to meet the Bank of Ireland. I know that the Minister said that he had met a number of the banks, and I hope that that can be extended.

Kellie Armstrong highlighted the Federation of Small Businesses issue and how branch closures were disproportionately impacting on rural areas. That was another theme picked up by a number of Members who contributed today. Declan brought up the requirement for rural proofing under legislation passed by the Assembly about a year ago. He said that, with government services, we should be careful not to walk away from the rural

community. It is important for us as an Assembly to say that we will not just sit back and let the private sector turn its back on the rural community; we want to do what we can to service and support those in rural areas. Kellie also raised an issue that will resonate greatly with the public: we stuck by the banks when they made huge profits and bust just about everything else. Rural people stuck by their banks, and we now ask the banks, given that it is not an issue of profit, to stick by their customers. That is an important message: the people did what they could, and now they are asking the banks to do their bit.

There was a reference to older people interacting with technology. It is not an easy task for older people to move to online banking. It is not necessarily an easy task for younger people either; sometimes, they have to go to a branch to get issues sorted out. Members raised an important issue: when it is required, you like to have the face-to-face contact. If it is not a profit issue, why can that service not be passed on?

William Irwin highlighted the issue of the loss to rural areas. Again, the feeling among rural communities that they are losing out is a common theme. He also talked about the large profits that the banks make. If they are making those large profits, what are they going to give back to the community? Where is the social responsibility of big businesses to local people?

Declan McAleer said that the community had been let down and talked about social responsibility and how important it was that many people in deprived areas were going to lose out. It seems that the banks are picking on the most vulnerable. Is that really a responsible thing for banks to do?

Gordon Dunne highlighted that 77 branches had closed in Northern Ireland in the last number of years. If that was any other service, we would all be getting quite exercised. That a network of 77 of anything would be lost across the North would be a big disappointment, and it will have a big effect. It is timely that the motion was brought here today.

We also discussed online banking and those who do not have the skills. It is not just the elderly; there are maybe people with poor literacy and numeracy levels who are not able to use an app to sort out their banking as quickly as others can. As was mentioned, if those people are then left with big journeys to undertake, there is a sense of unfairness. As well as that, we talked about the lack of consultation. If the banks had carried out a true and proper consultation in rural areas they would have heard, loud and clear, all these issues over and over again, which might have made them think twice about what they were doing.

Steve Aiken said that 68% of customers had attended a bank in the previous month. We got a couple of statistics from Members that highlighted that the branches are being used; it is not that they are lying empty. People are going to them. They want to use them, and the banks are not losing profits. Really, then, what is this all about?

My colleague, Patsy McGlone, said that this was not just a Bank of Ireland issue. That is important: all banks seem to be reducing their provision in rural communities, and we need to address that. The Minister mentioned that he had met a number of banks and the issue is across the whole platform of banking services. Mr McGlone also referred to the gradual retreat of the banks from rural areas. That is something that we want to reverse. We do not want to sit

back and allow a gradual retreat of anything from our rural communities.

The Minister acknowledged that there had been changes in how we carry out our banking and, therefore, it is something that the banks may have to address. However, he also acknowledged the impact of bank closures and the effect that they had. I liked the fact that he mentioned the “unbanked” community — those who are not bank customers — who represent 10% of the community, which is a very high number. What are we going to do to encourage those people to use banks if we are starting to reduce the visibility of banks in our community? I hope that the meetings with the banks can continue so that the elected representatives of Northern Ireland can impress on them the need for those banks to be in rural communities.

I will turn quickly to the amendment. We do not want to confuse the issue, and that is why we are not going to support the amendment. This is not about broadband. I take the spirit in which the amendment was tabled, but the opening line of the motion is:

“That this Assembly is extremely concerned at the number of bank branches that are being closed in rural areas”.

It is not about online banking, and we must not confuse the two. If we ended up with superfast broadband across the North, we would still have bank branches closing. We say that that is not good for footfall, for our communities or for our elderly people. The amendment does not address all those issues, so we will not support it. We commend the motion to the House, and we hope that we can get full support for it.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 22.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Carroll, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Kearney, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stafford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Archibald and Mr McAleer.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hanna, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McGrath and Mr Mullan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly is extremely concerned at the number of bank branches that are being closed in rural areas; is alarmed that large rural areas are without access to a local bank branch; recognises the limitations of many of the alternatives, such as mobile and Internet banking, and the Post Office, particularly given the limitations of broadband and mobile Internet provision in rural areas; believes that the provision of accessible banking is an integral part of social inclusion, with a particular impact on the elderly; notes the negative economic impact bank closures have on small businesses and on future investment opportunities; calls on the Minister for the Economy to intervene meaningfully and encourage the banking sector to maintain a strong network of rural bank branches and to safeguard the existing bank branches within these communities from closure; and further calls on the Minister to commit to investing in identifying and addressing the problem of rural areas where no, or no worthwhile, broadband and mobile provision can be received.

State Pension: Impact of Changes on Women

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other speakers will have five minutes.

Mr Allen: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign; recognises its call for fair transitional state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s who have been negatively impacted by changes made to the state pension age under the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011; accepts that the changes were poorly communicated; appreciates the impact of the changes on post-retirement planning; and calls on the United Kingdom Government to re-examine their position and bring forward fair transitional arrangements for the women affected.

I bring the motion before the House to recognise the unfair treatment that has been forced on women born in the 1950s, who have been negatively impacted by increases to state pension age.

Allow me to first outline the issues that have left the affected women feeling rightly aggrieved. In 1993, in his Budget statement, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Ken Clarke, outlined that the state pension age for women would be equalised between 2010 and 2020.

At the time, this was justified on the grounds of financial sustainability and equality in order to bring the UK in line with the equal treatment rules in European law. The Pensions Act 1995 set a timetable for women's pension age to accelerate to reach 65 by April 2020. It would begin to increase in April 2010.

Let me make this clear: no one is arguing against equal state pension ages for men and women, especially not the women behind the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign, whom I had the pleasure of listening to this morning. What has caused grievance is the lack of any attempt by the Government to make those affected aware of the changes. Given that the changes would not begin to take place until 15 years after the legislation was introduced and that, when the proposals were announced, the relevant women would have been no older than 44, the responsibility lay with the Government to ensure that all those who would be disadvantaged by the changes were well informed of the implications. Sadly, this did not happen. To add further anguish, following the 2010 general election, the coalition Government announced that they would increase the overall state pension age to 66 in light of increases in life expectancy. Women's pension age would now reach 66 by October 2020. For this to happen, the Government would accelerate the increase in women's state pension age from April 2016, when it would be 63, to reach 65 by November 2018 rather than April 2020 as previously planned under the 1995 Act. In their 2010 manifesto, the Conservative Government said that the pension age for women would not increase beyond 65 until at least 2020. Therefore, the Pensions Act 2011 amounted to a broken promise.

It was only shortly before their sixtieth birthday that many women learned that, in fact, they would not be able to draw their pension at 60, with some having to wait until they were 66 to receive it. The changes in the 2011 Act mostly acutely affected women born between October 1953 and April 1955, who will have their state pension age increased by at least a year on top of the increase that resulted from the 1995 Act. These women worked hard all their lives and contributed to the National Insurance pot with the belief that, when they turned 60, they would be able to draw the state pension, yet these changes have unfairly and disproportionately impacted women born on or after 6 April 1951. They have been uniquely disadvantaged. A large percentage of these women received a letter advising them of significant increases to their state pension age only within two years of the expected state pension age of 60. It is not unreasonable to expect Government to take appropriate steps to communicate the biggest changes to women's pensions in half a century. However, the changes were not communicated in a way befitting the scale of the changes, leaving many women unaware and still planning to retire at 60. Many women reported never receiving a letter. Others say that letters were sent to the wrong address, despite their notifying DWP of the address change. WASPI is still receiving reports of women who are just finding out about the changes.

It is important to note that the Turner commission, the Work and Pensions Select Committee and Saga have all recommended that, for changes to the state pension, those affected must receive 10 years' notice at the very least. The Government now agree with this position, despite not following it in the past.

It is important to focus on the human side of these changes. I am sure that we could all think of friends or family members who have been impacted. Women who expected to be able to spend their early 60s in retirement or semi-retirement and believed that they would be able to spend more time with their children and grandchildren now have their lifetime ambition postponed. Financially, these changes have driven a horse and carriage through retirement plans, with the lack of communication leaving little time to make alternative arrangements. That has had devastating consequences.

We know that there are substantial barriers to older people gaining new employment. Some have been forced to seek casual, low-paid work as a result of these changes. Some women are relying on increasingly dwindling life savings, and others will have to depend on their spouses for financial support, which means loss of independence for women who are single, divorced or widowed. It could mean the delay of their only source of income. As a member of the WASPI campaign put it:

“Significant changes to the age we receive our state pension have been imposed upon us with a lack of appropriate notification, with little or no notice and much faster than ... were [proposed] – some of us have been hit by more than one [change]. As a result, hundreds of thousands of us are suffering financial hardship, with not enough time to re-plan for our retirement. Women are telling us that they can't believe their retirement age has increased by 4, 5 or 6 years and they didn't even know about it!!”

5.30 pm

The WASPI campaign is not seeking to challenge state pension equality, nor does it seek to reverse the 1995 or 2011 Pensions Acts. What it seeks is fairness. It is a matter of fairness that transitional payments be given to those women.

The key point is the lack of notice. The Work and Pensions Select Committee at Westminster has established that more should have been done to communicate the planned changes. In 2011, the Pensions Minister, Steve Webb, was on record as saying that the Government were forced to implement the changes without appropriate notice because of the state of public finances at the time. We are now in a different fiscal context, and, because of the lack of appropriate notice, and the effect that the changes have had on women born on or after 1951, the Government should introduce transitional payments to assist those women who have been adversely affected. The Government have made £30 billion of savings from these changes, so it is only just that some of those moneys be released to assist those women who have been disadvantaged.

In written responses to questions asked by my Westminster colleagues, the Department for Work and Pensions has continuously stated that it has no plans to introduce transitional arrangements. I call on the Department to rethink that position and to consider ways in which the grievances of the women affected can be addressed. I encourage Members to support the motion.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I add my voice in support of the many hundreds of thousands of women in their 60s across the United Kingdom who are suffering severe financial difficulties because of this situation. I have had first-hand experience of this. My mother has been caught and is one of those women who have to face this and, despite having worked every day in a school kitchen in a local primary school, she still has the difficulty of having to wait for years for pensions to come through and is looking at what are very low-level benefits.

The impact is on many thousands of women across Northern Ireland, not just the hundreds of thousands across the United Kingdom. In many cases, these are women who have worked, have been mothers for perhaps 10 or 20 years, and have continued with caring duties, including looking after elderly parents and grandchildren. They contribute a huge amount to our society and have found themselves, unexpectedly, in a very difficult financial situation. Many of them have had their retirement plans thrown into doubt; at times, as has been pointed out, with just one year's notice that added a three- to six-year wait to draw down their pension. Some who had planned for redundancy or early retirement took irreversible decisions and are now really suffering as a result. It is too late now to go back and change plans that were communicated in a different context.

For the first time, many thousands of women in their early 60s have had to go to the jobcentre seeking employment. Jobcentre staff have been placed in a situation of trying to recommend what are often very low-paid manual or physically demanding jobs to women who have effectively been full-time mothers for decades. Women who are single, separated or divorced have been particularly hard hit and are trying to survive on jobseeker's allowance

alone, with little option but a few hours of low-paid work. For women who are in a marriage or who are co-habiting, there are options with pension credits, for example, but that does not apply to women who live alone and who have been particularly badly hit.

The campaign Women Against State Pension Inequality has done great work in raising coverage and awareness of the issue. They have made it clear that it is not an issue about equality but fairness: had these women known in time, they could have planned for their retirement and put a little aside that would have made things much easier for them. They now find themselves in very difficult financial situations and in financial stress. Many are suffering from poverty and are struggling to get by.

DUP MPs have been at the forefront of campaigning on the issue at Westminster. It is a UK-wide issue — I think that we are all aware of that — and it has been a product of the Westminster process, particularly the legislation that was passed in 1995.

I wholeheartedly support the campaign to keep the pressure on the United Kingdom Government to look again at the issue. It is a small cohort of women, but the impact is profound.

The recent statement by the Pensions Minister at Westminster that there would be no change to the Government's position was disappointing. The arrangements for these 1950s women, who have been treated very badly, are a mess and have not been appropriately implemented. The matter needs to be looked at again — urgently, given the poverty and stress that these women in their sixties experience. Unfortunately, it is difficult for the House to make an impact in any specific way, but the campaign should continue and has my full support. These women have given a huge amount to families and to the community and are the very backbone of our society.

Ms J McCann: I support the motion and thank its proposer for bringing it to the House. It has been said clearly that we are not debating the equalising of the pension age between men and women but looking at how those plans are being carried out, particularly at the timeline and at how it impacts on a group of women who were born in the 1950s.

The motion supports the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign. This is a group of women affected by the changes who got together to create the campaign. They have to be commended for that. They are a voice for all women who have been unfairly impacted on by the changes to the state pension age. They are challenging not the equalisation of the age with men but the way in which it has been carried out and almost accelerated, meaning that they have not had time to plan for their retirement. Imagine, as one of the contributors said, that you thought that you were retiring at 60 and then, all of a sudden, were told a short period before then that you now had to wait a number of years for your pension. That has a big adverse effect on people and pushes them into financial difficulties. These are people around 60 years old who have contributed to society in whatever way. A lot of the women have been low earners throughout their life, simply because they may have been in part-time jobs because of family and caring responsibilities. They were waiting patiently for their state pension — the only pension that they can access, because they had not had enough

contributions to have a private pension — only to be told that they are not getting it and may have to look for work at 60 years of age. That is totally unjust. The lack of a public awareness campaign around the issue has been particularly difficult for the women, who have not been notified directly, as the group highlighted. A lot of them only heard through the media or places like that.

We have to look at this in the context of gender inequality right across the piece. There is inequality in the gender pay gap, and women are particularly impacted on by cuts to in-work and out-of-work benefits. This will only add to their financial difficulties, particularly this group's. It is very unfair to treat women in this way. We need to support the campaign, which is about fairness and equality. I call for the making of transitional arrangements for people who have been caught up in this. I am not sure of the numbers, but we could look at some sort of a transitional period in which these women are given something financially to get them through it. We support and look forward to working with the campaign, and I congratulate the proposer of the motion.

Mr McGrath: I cannot but feel that this is like bringing children into a sweet shop and showing them exactly what they cannot have. What we have here is a group of women who have worked all their days, expecting to get their pension at the age of 60, only to be told that they are not entitled to it and will have to work longer. That seems to be decidedly unfair to these people who, in all fairness, entered into contracts when they started work and started paying their National Insurance contributions. They expected that, at the end, at 60, they would get their pension, but that has been taken from them. It is the inequality of picking on one group with the changes that I find particularly distasteful.

When the changes were introduced in 1995, it took HMRC a full 14 years before it wrote out and told people about them. For some people, those changes would come online in 2010 and they were given a year's notice. Back in 1995, when the decision was taken, there was no social media, Facebook or the mass spreading of information. Taking out a few advertisements in a few newspapers was not an adequate way to inform people of these major changes.

There is just no sense to the gradual introduction of the change, with people born at different times getting a different retirement age. People who are about two and a half years apart in age have to retire about six years apart. There has been no methodical approach to it. People in the same family — two sisters with only maybe a year or a year and a half between them — have different times to retire. It has just been very unhelpful. People feel very hurt and aggrieved that they are losing out on a large amount of money.

There is also the insult that, because they have to work extra time, extra years, they have to make the contributions. They can pay the money in, but they do not get the money out. That was the double dose for them. They just do not appreciate the fact that they have to spend extra time paying in without getting the money back.

We have also heard today, through the petition and in the debate, about the scale of the issue: 68,000 women in Northern Ireland. If any other sector of Northern Ireland's population were being detrimentally impacted, there would rightly be all the shouting that there should be about the issue. It is important that we bring this to the Floor of the Assembly so that we can raise this important issue for all

those people. Other figures that are available show that the 1995 rule affected 1.1 million people across the UK and that the changes that were brought in in 2011 increased that to over 2.5 million women, who are having to work the extra year. A massive proportion of the population is being impacted by this. Needless to say, it is no shock or surprise that it was Tory Governments in 1995 and in 2011 who introduced the changes, but we have a local —

Ms S Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGrath: Certainly.

Ms S Bradley: Does the Member agree that, at the outset, the issue was to address equality of access to pension income but, in fact, it has had the reverse effect? Women did not have equal access to planning and scoping out their retirement and what their choices might be at that time. You mentioned 14 years and the scale of the problem: do you agree that this goes beyond inequality? It goes back to the Government at that time actually being negligent.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute. I ask that when people make interventions they keep them brief.

Mr McGrath: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. The points raised are exceptionally valid. This was to address a £30 billion gap, as we were told, in the pension pot, but it seems most unfair that to address a £30 billion gap in the pension pot they singled out this one group, this narrow band of people, and picked on them. That seems exceptionally unfair. It is the fact that, when the changes were made, people were not fully aware of what their implementation would mean. That was caught on only in 2008, 2009 and 2010. That is why the issue is being raised now.

Some of the matter is devolved. I wrote to the Work and Pensions Minister in England and to our local Minister. With respect to our local Minister, he wrote back to me. The Minister in England said that it was a devolved issue; the local Minister said that it was something that we did on a parity basis with London. It just seems that, as the women were explaining to me earlier, every time they try to get the issue sorted out, they seem to go round in circles.

This is a big issue. It affects lots of people in our community. They are being treated very unjustly. They are being left substantially out of pocket. I support the motion so that we can send them a message from here to say that we support them and are on their side.

5.45 pm

Mrs Long: I welcome the opportunity to speak in favour of the motion.

I do confess, however, to being a bit surprised to find on this much vaunted Opposition day that we have a second motion over which the Executive have no control. I doubt that it will have the Executive quaking in their boots if we are holding to account the British Government in London and, indeed, commercial decisions by banks, neither of which are the responsibility of the Executive.

That said, I have supported similar motions —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Long: No, I will continue, if that is OK.

I have supported similar motions in Westminster concerning the pension injustice facing women, and I am wholly supportive of the campaign being run by Women Against State Pension Inequality. They deserve praise for how they have run their campaign since early last year, most notably for having engaged directly with the decision makers by submitting evidence to Westminster and petitioning for debates in Parliament, as well as making regular appearances in national media, organising rallies and developing their social media presence to raise awareness of the issue. Their cause is a just one and is aimed at delivering fairness for those women born in the 1950s, who deserve to have proper transitional state pension arrangements introduced.

The Pensions Act 1995 announced that the pension ages of men and women would be equalised by 2020, which was a fair measure under equality law. However, that was fast-tracked by the coalition Government in 2011, along with provisions to raise the state pension age, with pension age equalisation going to happen in 2018, not 2020, and with the age rising to 66 by 2020. That decision left a sizeable proportion of women underprepared for the changes and without sufficient time to make adjustments to their plans for retirement.

No one is disputing that the pension age has to rise, given the growing older population relative to our working age population. However, any such reforms should be fair, be properly notified to those affected and be implemented in a time frame that allows individuals to adjust their future provisions. Sadly, due to the manner in which this was handled, thousands of women who have worked from their teens, with an expectation of one set of pension arrangements, now find none of those opportunities afforded to them to adjust to those changes. Many have received correspondence from the Department for Work and Pensions informing them of the change only relatively recently or have been left totally unaware of the changes so many years after they were made. These women are being disproportionately affected and have a right to feel aggrieved.

Despite evidence of the harm that the current policies will have on women financially, physically and mentally, and despite the £1.1 billion concession by Parliament in 2011, many thousands of women who have worked hard and contributed to the economy stand to lose out financially and face uncertainty and hardship. Thus far, the Conservative Government have consistently opted to ignore the plight of these women, raised by Opposition parties and backed up by clear evidence. Unfortunately, recent comments from the Department for Work and Pensions Minister, which I think the Member for South Belfast also referred to, simply restated their position, confirming that a policy reversal is unlikely.

Women Against State Pension Inequality has confirmed that, regardless of the Government's intransigence thus far, it will continue to fight this injustice and seek fair transitional arrangements for the women who are bearing the brunt of these changes. I believe that it is right that they should do so with the full and unequivocal support of this Assembly. Therefore, I am happy to reiterate Alliance support for their cause and to call on the UK Government to put in place necessary transition arrangements to ensure that all those affected by the pension changes are treated fairly and equitably and relieved of the stress that the mishandling of this issue has created.

Ms Lockhart: I thank those who brought the motion forward. I will speak in favour of it, and I commend those who have already spoken in support of the motion.

My research and engagement with affected women in the Upper Bann constituency has highlighted that this is not an equalisation issue — as has been mentioned throughout the debate — but an implementation issue. Its implementation has been what I would class as rather clumsy and badly communicated. Let us be honest: it is a blunt and crude instrument that the Government have used as a saving technique, and it is not a case of equalising the playing field.

Communication from the Government to date on this issue has been lamentable. Many women have not been informed at all of the changes and others have received one year's notice. For anyone who is planning financially with regard to cash flow, one year's notice is not sufficient. I believe that a wrong has been committed, and the Government should be held to account. My colleagues at Westminster have highlighted this matter, and I commend our DUP team on the Westminster benches for their robust action against the way in which this is being brought forward and the fact that they have been very vocal and supportive of the WASPI campaign. We need a fair transitional process for the many thousands of women — our colleague mentioned that there were 68,000 — in Northern Ireland. That is a sizable number of our population. We need a very fair transitional process for those 68,000 people.

As an Executive, we have highlighted mental health and physical well-being as being a key issue to address during this mandate. This is certainly having an effect on the mental health and well-being of the women within our society, and we have heard today of many of them. Cases have been brought to me in Upper Bann. One, for instance, is a lady who is caring for an ill husband and is also caring for a mum who has Alzheimer's. That is the harsh reality; these people are now carers. We have got to take this into account and think of the contribution that they are making to society even through that caring role.

Like most Members, I have been contacted by constituents who are gravely concerned about these changes and who are worried about how this will affect them financially. Many are now reliant on small amounts of savings to top up their modest pension. Let us be honest: women who are single, divorced or widowed are amongst the most heavily affected — women that have given so much to our society but, owing to this change in legislation, they have no other source of income and have been subjected to going to the jobs and benefits office to inquire about JSA and consider going into zero-hour contracts. As my colleague Emma Pengelly highlighted, they are also having to look at very heavy-duty jobs. I do not think that that is acceptable in this day and age.

A woman born in early 1953 received her pension in November 2015. However, a woman born one year later will not receive her pension until May 2019. This is a delay of around three years because of the Pensions Act 2011. The women who worked throughout this period did so when the gender pay gap was even more significant than it is now, until a so-called remedy was implemented by the Equal Pay Act 1970. These women do not have gold-plated pension pots to look forward to but rather are reliant on the state pension to help them through retirement. The

reality is that the age discrimination Act did not apply when these women were seeking employment. Studies that were carried out recommended implementation over anything between 10 and 15 years. The Parliamentary Select Committee recommended 10 years, and this should be the minimum amount of time.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw her comments to a close?

Ms Lockhart: I encourage the House to get behind the WASPI campaign and commend the campaigners on how hard they have worked.

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

Mr Lynch: I support the motion. This is an issue of equality and, in this case, gender equality. The pension changes were designed to give people long-term clarity about how much they could expect to receive and to allow for a planned approach for later life, but this did not happen for a group of women born in the early 1950s who are coming to pension age. The changes left this group of women, born between 1951 and 1953, not eligible for pension benefits although a man born on the same day is, or may be. This gives rise to inequality affecting a group of women in the North. A number of people have mentioned 68,000 women. I do not actually know the exact number, but it seems to me that the women in this narrow birth cohort are caught between two pieces of legislation.

This group of women does not disagree with proposals to reduce gender inequality in the state pension but they feel aggrieved that they will just miss out financially, whereas men born between these dates will be treated differently. That, to me, seems unfair. Yes, the majority of women born between the stated dates will be better off, but that number of women needs to be addressed.

Another change that caused the problem in this issue was the coalition's acceleration of the pension changes. Campaigners for these women, who had their state pension age unexpectedly pushed back, state that they either were not informed about the changes or were informed of them late, as a number of Members said, meaning they had little time to prepare. Let me give two examples. A woman who turned 60 this year has not received any information about the changes. She was the primary carer for her children and was unable to work due to disability, but she now has to work for a number of years extra to make up her pension. To give another example of how these women can be impacted, there is a woman who has had to push back her retirement several times, and now, aged 63, she still has to work part-time to make ends meet.

Most of the things said about this issue show that it is about women, equality and fairness. The group Women Against State Pension Inequality describes this as new permanent inequality.

Mr Durkan: I, too, support the motion and congratulate its proposer for bringing this important issue to the Assembly for debate. All Members so far this evening spoke about the inequity and, indeed, the downright unfairness of the acceleration of the equalisation of, and increase in, the state pension age.

Coming from a party with equality at the core of its ethos, I will not argue against men and women qualifying for the state pension at the same age. However, I am pretty

sure it was not a desire for equality that prompted the Westminster Government to push through the Pensions Act 2011. It was and remains purely a money-saving exercise designed to get more money in from people without putting more money out. It is certainly not cognisant of the needs or the rights of the individual. It is also particularly unfair to force women to face two accelerations while men face just one.

Previously stated timescales indicated that there should be no changes until 2020. Therefore, women in work, and, indeed, women who left work in the belief that they would receive their pension — it is a pension that is their entitlement; a pension they have paid for — may not have enough money put by to cover them in the new transition period. We are talking about a generation of women in the North who are and have been the backbone of our society, growing up and raising children through some very dark times, often against the backdrop of low pay and inequality. Many women, as Mrs Pengelly pointed out, are now sandwiched between the conflicting pressures of caring for elderly parents and helping their own children with childcare. Their plans have been thrown into disarray. Forcing this group of women to change their life, plans and future, without considering the challenge that will pose for them, is a far cry from equality. To force them to accept these changes without sufficient time to make adequate provision is completely unfair.

While today is the first official Opposition day in the Assembly, I would like to think that Members and parties will unite in support of the motion. We must, as an Assembly, put all the pressure we can collectively bring to bear on the Westminster Government to re-examine their position and bring forward fair, transitional payments for the women affected. This is not the first time these arrangements have been debated in the Chamber. When we debated the Pensions Bill nearly five years ago, the SDLP proposed amendments, which we believed were fair, realistic and workable, to slow down the equalisation. We put particular focus on women born between 1951 and 1953, who are being particularly harshly treated by these changes. The amendments were very similar to those the DUP and Alliance Party voted for in Westminster but were unable to support here for fear of breaching parity. They chose, as did the UUP, as it happens, to slavishly follow the Acts and actions of the UK Parliament.

In rejecting those amendments, the Assembly missed an opportunity not only to reduce the negative impact that we are hearing about today that the changes will have on so many of our citizens but to show that we are capable —

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. He is correct that parity was the deciding factor. Will he tell us how much it would have cost Northern Ireland if we had broken with parity and gone for a completely different set of pension arrangements?

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

6.00 pm

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the intervention; I was running out of time. The Member voted for the amendments or similar ones in Westminster. The cost of our amendments — they were costed — would have been in the region of £257 million and would have come

as a huge relief to the 7,000 women who would have been impacted on positively had they been passed.

As an Assembly, we missed an opportunity to show that we are capable of challenging the shackles of parity in a mature and progressive fashion. Some people might even ask what the point of the Assembly is. I also recall an attempt at that time by the then Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland, to secure accelerated passage for the Bill so that it would not even have been debated in the Chamber.

Transitional protections and mitigation measures for those negatively impacted by welfare reform are welcome, but where is the protection for the women who have worked all their lives only to see their promised pensions taken from them and their retirement age raised? Even the former pensions Minister, Ros Altmann, has said that the Government got it wrong and has called for more help for the women affected. She, like the motion, recognises that women were not adequately informed.

The Tory Government have said that the matter is settled: Parliament voted for it, and that is that. Not only is this attitude completely dismissive of the women affected — I pay tribute to WASPI for keeping up its fight — but it is complete bunkum. The UK Government can and do move the goalposts on legislation when they want to make the nets smaller, to save them more money and to cause people more hardship, but they expect us to believe that they cannot do it when it comes to righting wrongs and ensuring justice. Let the message to Westminster from the Assembly today be very clear: we support this campaign and demand fairness for these women.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Clare Bailey. You will have three minutes, and, if you choose to take an intervention, we will not give you an extra minute due to the time constraints in the debate.

Ms Bailey: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. I will keep it brief. I have heard most Members state that they understand exactly the implications and impacts that this issue is having on women. Naomi Long said that our Executive have no control over these changes, but having the debate in the House can highlight the fact that we as a society need to embed urgently a gendered impact study on economic decisions that are being made in the wider economy because this is an absolutely shameful treatment of women. I believe that it is targeted welfare reform from the Tory Government on women in Northern Ireland.

If a woman was born in 1953, she will be 63 this year. I am sure that that is no surprise to any women born in 1953, but these women have already suffered many economic disadvantages in their lives. They were forced to leave certain jobs in the workforce if they got married. They were actively refused access to some other career paths, and they had no childcare provision. Actually, even today, we still have no childcare provision, and we do not have equal access to maternity and paternity leave in wider society. All those things impact on women's economic autonomy and choices. For a Government to then target them and leave them with little or no notice to make the required changes is absolutely shameful treatment. I do not believe that this is an implementation matter, although that was disgraceful on its own. It is absolutely about the equal treatment of all citizens throughout Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): It has been an interesting debate. I thank Members for making their points. Let me say at the outset that I fully appreciate that women affected by the changes to the state pension age feel that they have been treated unfairly.

The state pension is and will remain an important part of income in later life. I will give some idea of scale: in 2014-15 the Department paid around £46 million per week in state pensions, which equates to approximately £2.4 billion per year. Moreover, that figure does not take account of other payments to pensioners such as housing and disability benefits.

State pension is paid largely from the Northern Ireland National Insurance fund. However, the fund is not self-sufficient, and, under the parity arrangements — Mr Durkan referred to why Northern Ireland should do its own thing — it receives an annual subvention from the Great Britain fund; for example, in 2015 it needed a subvention of £609 million.

I turn to the state pension age reforms, which were legislated for by the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 —

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Can the Minister confirm for the House that the genesis for the pension changes came about in 1995 as a result of a directive emanating from the European Union?

Mr Givan: The Member is right: the drive for parity in pension age is a result of the UK meeting its obligations to the European Union. Some Members voted to stay in that union, but part of the consequence of being in the union was the drive that has disadvantaged women in respect of this issue.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: If I can make some progress, I will come back and give way to you.

The pensions landscape has changed significantly in recent years, not only with state pension age increases but with the phased introduction of automatic enrolment and the introduction of a new state pension from 6 April 2016. Those reforms were introduced in an attempt to address three key issues: increasing life expectancy, gender inequality and the need to ensure that the state pension system remained affordable and sustainable in the long term. Successive generations have been spending longer and longer in retirement as a result of increasing life expectancy, advances in medical care and healthier lifestyles. Whilst that has been one of the success stories of the last 50 or so years, the challenges posed by an ageing society cannot be ignored, not only for pensions but for health and social care. The increasing proportion of adult life spent in retirement means additional financial pressures on state pension funding. The state pension scheme operates on a pay-as-you-go basis. Today's workers pay for today's pensioners, but the proportion of pensioners relative to the total population is increasing. For example, in 2012, there were around 4.3 people of working age for each person aged 65 or over; that ratio is expected to fall to 3.4 by 2022 and to 2.4 by 2037.

When the contributory state pension was introduced in the 1940s it had a differential state pension age — 65 for men and 60 for women. However, the five-year gap in men's and women's state pension age could no longer be justified in a

world where women increasingly play a role equal to that of men in the economy and National Insurance credits provide pension protection for those unable to work. The Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provided for a phased increase in women's state pension age to 65 between April 2010 and April 2020. The 1995 Order did not impact on anyone aged 44 or over at the time of the announcement and gave the women affected 15 years in which to prepare for a later retirement. The planned equalisation of state pension ages also ensured that the United Kingdom met its obligations under European law, which required a progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security. Maybe it was on that point in respect of the EU that the Member wanted me to give way.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for giving way. The Minister refers to the EU rule on the need for equalisation. No one in the House today has disputed the need for equalisation, but what the Pensions Act 2011 did was accelerate that equalisation. That is the point that I was making.

Mr Givan: The Member makes a valid point. However, what drove this was not just the economic arguments but European legislation on social security matters. That is something that people who wanted to stay in the European Union need to recognise.

Ms Bailey: I thank the Minister for giving way. Would you recognise, if it was a European-driven policy, that many other European countries have removed a lot of the economic barriers for women — something that the UK, particularly Northern Ireland, has failed to do? Targeting them at the end of their working life, rather than removing barriers during their working life, is still a failure.

Mr Givan: On this issue, I am on the same page as the motion. I will support it, but I say this to Members: reflect on what has been driving the changes to the pension. There are the issues to do with economic arguments, but proponents of the European Union need to accept the consequences of that, not just on this issue. For example, for girls now going out to get car insurance — I accept that girls are better drivers than boys, particularly at the age at which they get their licence — insurance companies can no longer discriminate because of European regulations. You cannot make that differential between girls and boys who drive, irrespective of the fact that girls make for better drivers. I am moving away from the issue, however. Let me get back to the point, but it is worth bearing in mind that point about the European Union and the impact that it has.

Mr Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Givan: Let me make some progress, if I can.

In 2010, women reaching state pension age would, on average, spend 41% of their adult life in receipt of state pension. The figure for men was only 31%, owing to the longer life expectancy and earlier state pension age for women. The equalisation process was designed to treat men and women equally. The Pensions Act 2012, which Mr Durkan referred to earlier, accelerated the timetable so that women's state pension age will now be 65 by November 2018, rather than by April 2020. It also brought forward the increase in state pension age to 66 for men and women by October 2020, rather than by 2026. The original policy intention was that state pension age would reach 66 by April 2020. However, that would have resulted

in some women experiencing a further increase in their state pension age of up to two years. Therefore, during the passing of the equivalent Pensions Act 2011, the Government made a concession, costing around £1 billion, that delayed the increase in state pension age to 66 by six months. That ensured that no woman would experience an additional increase in her state pension age of more than 18 months, relative to the 1995 timetable.

Over the years, changes to state pension age have been promulgated in a variety of ways. For example, as long ago as 2001, Minister Morrow launched a pensions education campaign to encourage people to plan for retirement. The campaign was supported by a series of leaflets, including one entitled, 'Pensions for women – Your guide' that included a ready reckoner to allow women to see what their new state pension age would be and a telephone helpline from which people could request more information. In subsequent years, information has been available through a variety of sources, including state pension forecasts, websites and direct mailing. For example, Northern Ireland citizens born between 6 April 1953 and 5 April 1960 were issued with a letter by the former Social Security Agency to advise them of the changes to state pension age flowing from the 2012 Act.

I turn to the Department for Work and Pensions estimate, and this gets to Mr Durkan's suggestion that we should break parity. I believe that, regarding a UK position, we are right to argue against what has been happening, but for someone to argue that Northern Ireland should take a separate approach is, I suggest, not just foolish but entirely reckless when it comes to the use of public funding.

Mr Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Givan: Let me just crystallise it for the Member. To undo the 2012 reforms across the United Kingdom would cost in the region of £30 billion. To undo the 1995 pension reforms would cost approximately £77 billion up to 2020-21, and the costs would continue to accrue after that period. That is on a UK-wide basis. Let us make those arguments at a national level. On the basis of those figures, it is estimated that, in Northern Ireland, such measures could cost £750 million and £1.93 billion respectively.

I say to Members very clearly that the motion should be supported and the battle should be taken at a UK-wide level, but to suggest that Northern Ireland should break with the approach that we have taken on the issue is entirely reckless when it comes to public funding. I note that there has been not one suggestion from the SDLP as to how that would be funded.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister bring his comments to a close?

Mr Givan: I accept that the Ulster Unionists did not take that approach. The SDLP did, and that shows it up for the type of Opposition that it intends to be in the Assembly.

6.15 pm

Mrs Palmer: This is an extraordinarily complex matter. I thank my colleague Andy Allen for bringing the motion to the House, and I will certainly support it. It is vital that we have had the opportunity to discuss the issue. The most recent changes to the women's state pension age will have a direct impact on around half a million women across the United Kingdom. Nobody would disagree that spending

on pensions must be rationalised and must be sustainable for an ageing population. Pensions have the potential to be the millstone around the neck of future Governments if they are not properly funded and addressed. It is common sense that the Government must make sure that they are adequately resourced going forward.

That said, there are few things so clearly deserved as the state pension: the quintessential promise that, if you work hard for your whole working life, the state will take care of you in your old age is an ideal that has underpinned our society for more than 70 years. That promise is precisely the reason why I am so deeply worried about the manner in which the Government have decided to deliver the equalisation of pension age, and it is why I am speaking in support of the motion today.

Women born in the 1950s were made a promise; that promise has been broken. Worse still, it is being done with little or no notice. Women who have rightly been considering and planning for retirement now face a level of uncertainty that threatens what should be the most relaxed period of their life. While today's National Insurance contributions pay for today's pensions, many of those women believed that, when they started paying National Insurance contributions at the age of 16, they were entering into a social contract with the Government to retire at the age of 60.

Raising the retirement age is a necessary evil. With life expectancy climbing, it is unavoidable that we must work longer and retire later. Equally, because a far greater number of women today work on an equal footing with men, which we all support, the principle of equal state pension ages should be fair. The problem, however, is that while the principle may be sound, the reality is somewhat different. When Her Majesty's Government introduced the Pensions Act in 1995, women were supposedly given 15 years to prepare, as their pension age would not begin to equalise with that of men until 2010. However, no one aged 44 or over at that time was to be affected. It is, therefore, understandable that any discussion of pension changes was viewed as irrelevant. What was required from the Government at the time was a concerted effort to publicise the changes widely, spelling out the implications for the women affected, but this was glaringly absent. Compounding this, the Pensions Act 2011 increased the overall state pension age to 66 by 2020, accelerating the rate of increase for women. The previous lack of notification meant that it was only at this point that many women learned of the change. Some women who had anticipated drawing their pension at the age of 60 will not now reach the state pension age until they are 66.

I will put this in perspective: men will see their state pension age rise by one year between 2010 and 2020; the state pension age for women will increase by six years in the same period. The unfairness is made worse when we consider that the pension system already unfairly targets women, who, traditionally, are more reliant on the state pension as they have had less chance to build up a private pension due to the breaks in their working life to bring up children and the fact that they have lower incomes than men. It should be noted that men of this age could join company schemes, but women working part-time were banned from them. Yet it is the women who the Government expect to bear the brunt of the cost-saving measures designed to save money on pensions in the long

term. It is, therefore, no surprise that the women affected by the changes are frustrated by the implications for their post-retirement planning, financial and otherwise.

The Government have substantially moved the goalposts without effective communication. This is an unfairness that must be addressed. There is a need for transitional payments to come into play. Consecutive Work and Pensions Ministers, Iain Duncan Smith, Stephen Crabb and, currently, Damian Green, have said that they are not for moving on the issue. In fact, this weekend, as mentioned by a Member who spoke previously, the Minister said that all pensioner benefits were under review, which sounds like we could see a further grab at pensions in the future.

In thanking all the contributors who spoke with passion, I pick out Andy Allen, who outlined the negative impact of this accelerated state pension timeline and focused on the human side of the changes. He called on the Government to introduce transitional payments to assist the disadvantaged. Carla Lockhart said that the implementation of the changes was clumsy and badly communicated, and she talked about people's mental health and well-being. Seán Lynch highlighted gender inequality and stated that some women were caught between certain age gaps. Mark Durkan said that this was a money-saving exercise from the Westminster Government and that it was unfair to force women to seek other employment. He asked for all parties to support the motion. Emma Pengelly said that women contributed highly to society and that many thousands of women are seeking jobs through job centres because of the unfairness in the pensions system.

I recognise that the power of the Assembly is constrained because, sadly, the issue lies primarily with changes made by the Government at Westminster. However, we have a voice and we can apply pressure. We can say that we feel that these women deserve to be treated as people and not as unfortunate rounding errors. They should not be disadvantaged solely because they had the bad luck of being born a year too early or a year too late. I must, therefore, back the motion and ask that the UK Government demonstrate some compassion and look again at this matter. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign; recognises its call for fair transitional state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s who have been negatively impacted by changes made to the state pension age under the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011; accepts that the changes were poorly communicated; appreciates the impact of the changes on post-retirement planning; and calls on the United Kingdom Government to re-examine their position and bring forward fair transitional arrangements for the women affected.

Adjourned at 6.21 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 September 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can I ask you to review Hansard and satisfy yourself that, in the period since the EU referendum on 23 June, the House has not in any way been misled on contingency planning by the Executive for a Brexit vote? I ask because we now know that there is a document, compiled by officials of the former Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, entitled 'Preliminary Analysis on the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union'.

Mr Speaker, perhaps you will further consider whether the non-publication of this document represented a breach of the ministerial code on openness, which states that information should be restricted:

"only when the wider public interest clearly demands."

I suggest that it was in the public interest for this document to be published.

Mr Speaker: I have noted your opening comments. On your point about the sharing of Executive information, that is not a matter for the Speaker. The Member will know that it is for Ministers to decide how they answer questions or how they share information. It is for the Member, in fact, to pursue his concerns through the normal available channels, whether they be questions for oral or written answer. I will pursue your first comments.

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/16-21] be agreed.

In July 2014, one of my predecessors Nelson McCausland published proposals for the way forward on changes to the law regulating the sale and supply of alcohol in Northern Ireland. The measures in the Bill are broadly in line with those proposals, which are aimed at tackling ongoing political and community concerns surrounding the excessive and harmful consumption of alcoholic drinks. The Bill will also provide some assistance to the hospitality sector to support the tourism offering here.

The Bill contains 27 clauses, which are divided into provisions that affect licensed premises — pubs, restaurants, hotels and the like — and amend the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and those that affect registered clubs and therefore amend the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. As many of the provisions affect licensed premises and registered clubs, I will provide an overview of those first.

The period of drinking-up time at the end of a premises and registered club's permitted hours will be extended by 30 minutes to one hour for a trial period of one year. This will discourage customers from stockpiling drinks during last orders and drinking too quickly and will allow for a more gradual dispersal of people onto the streets, allowing staff more time to clear the premises in an orderly fashion. That will reduce the impact on local communities at closing time; in particular, it will allow people to remain inside while they are waiting for a taxi.

The removal of alcohol in sealed containers will also be prohibited. This will reduce impulse buys at the end of the night that often lead to prolonged drinking, either at home or, worse, on the streets.

Young people will be allowed to attend functions in certain licensed premises and registered clubs provided that a number of conditions are met. This will ensure that they have a safe environment to hold events, such as formals, where adequate safeguards are in place and no opportunity exists for them to obtain alcoholic drinks.

The sale and supply of alcohol by self-service and vending machines will be prohibited. This will ensure that the sale

of alcoholic drinks is always supervised, allowing trained staff in a regulated environment the opportunity to monitor alcohol consumption and refuse the sale of alcoholic drinks when necessary.

The Department will be able to approve a code of practice, provided it is produced by a person, or group of persons, with a relevant interest in matters surrounding intoxicating liquor. Courts must then be satisfied, depending on whether a licence is being granted or renewed, that the licence holder is aware of their responsibilities under the code and has been complying with those responsibilities.

A voluntary code of practice currently operates. It was launched in 2012 and outlines the basic standards involved in the promotion, retail and service of alcohol. It applies to on- and off-trade and looks to promote best practice and prevent alcoholic drinks being promoted or sold in an irresponsible fashion. This amendment will allow the Department to approve a code of practice with legal consequences for non-compliance.

Licensed premises and registered clubs will no longer be required to obtain a children's certificate. However, they will have to comply with a number of conditions if children are to be permitted on the premises. All current protections for children will remain in place.

Children's certificates date back to a time when some licensed premises and registered clubs did not have adequate facilities for children, such as toilet facilities or seating and dining areas. The diversification in licensed premises in recent years has resulted in higher-quality facilities, and the time is right to ease the burden on business by removing the requirement to go to court to obtain one of those certificates.

Later opening hours on the Thursday before Good Friday, which previously allowed certain premises and registered clubs to stay open to midnight, now mirrors the later opening available for any other weekday in the year; up to 1.00 am the following day. Easter is a period of special significance in Northern Ireland, which is reflected in licensing law, and I am not prepared to remove the current restrictions entirely.

Moving on to the provisions that affect licensed premises only, liquor licences and entertainment licences will be aligned so that entertainment or refreshment provided during additional permitted hours is not allowed to continue after the end of drinking-up time.

This will make it easier for the police to ensure that all premises are complying with the law. Premises that are already permitted additional hours until 1.00 am will be permitted to apply for one additional hour. The additional hour can be granted for a maximum of 12 days in a year. This will allow certain premises to open later on nights such as New Year's Eve and other special occasions. I am not prepared to move to a general 2.00 am closing.

The law in respect of children will be strengthened to ensure that young people can no longer accept delivery of intoxicating liquor at the home address of the purchaser. Delivery drivers will be required to record in a log book occasions when they requested identification and to detail the form of identification provided. Licensed restaurants will be required to display a notice detailing the conditions under which alcohol may be sold on the premises. This will provide clarity in restaurants by openly showing the

conditions that they are bound by. This will address the growing concerns in relation to licensed restaurants that are operating more like pubs but without the associated overheads of a pub.

Off-sales premises, including supermarkets, will only be permitted to advertise alcoholic drinks in the area that they are permitted to display them within their premises. This is intended to reduce the instances of impulse buys of alcoholic drinks, particularly in supermarkets. They will also be prohibited from advertising alcohol promotions within 200 metres of their premises. Angostura bitters will no longer be exempt from the definition of intoxicating liquor and, as such, may only be sold in licensed premises. This brings duty and licensing regimes into line following the repeal of the excise duty exemption that previously applied to Angostura bitters.

Finally, I come to the provisions of the Bill that apply only to registered clubs. A sporting club will be able to apply on six occasions per year to extend the area of its premises licensed to supply alcohol, provided that certain conditions are met. This will allow sporting clubs to take advantage of events at their clubs, such as captain's day, which attract large numbers of members and guests, by extending the area where they can supply alcohol to club grounds. Young people will be allowed to remain in the bar area of a registered club until 11.00 pm during the summer months, 1 June to 31 August, or to attend an awards ceremony on one occasion in a calendar year. This will allow young people to avail themselves of the full range of sporting activities open to them during the summer months, which often extend into the evening. An awards ceremony allows sporting clubs to celebrate the success of young people who participate in the sporting activities offered by a club.

A registered club will be allowed to advertise any function outside a club premises where the advertisement clearly states that only members of the club and their guests may attend. Currently, members of the general public are permitted to attend functions where the proceeds are devoted to charitable or benevolent purposes. However, the law prohibits a registered club from publicly advertising the function. This provision will ensure that there are no restrictions on the advertising of such events.

Some of the measures in the Bill will, I hope, contribute to a reduction in alcohol-related harm by encouraging those who choose to drink to do so sensibly. I believe that the Bill strikes the right balance between controlling the sale of alcoholic drinks on the one hand and offering some support to the hospitality sector on the other. It is clear from the consultation responses and discussion with stakeholders and other parties that there is significant support for these proposals. On that basis, I hope that all parties will give the Bill their support and allow it to move to Committee Stage.

Ms Gildernew (The Deputy Chairperson of the

Committee for Communities): Many of us in the House and many more outside have been waiting in anticipation for a large number of years for a Bill to address licensing reform. It has been a bit like 'Waiting for Godot' but with less expectation that the Bill will actually arrive first. However, it has arrived, so the Minister deserves credit for that at least. As Members will know, Second Stage is not about discussing the details of the Bill; rather, it is about the principles of the Bill.

The principles are relatively straightforward and easy to agree on. They relate to bringing forward measures that seek to address excessive alcohol consumption and support the hospitality sector. The Committee supports this principle. However, during Committee Stage, we will seek to establish whether the Bill strikes the appropriate balance between these apparently competing objectives.

10.45 am

Clearly, industry sources already feel that the aspects of the Bill that seek to liberalise our licensing laws do not go far enough. Others, who may be concerned with the negative impact of alcohol on health and society in general, might feel that they go too far. We do, of course, have a responsibility to ensure that the legislation does not provide the framework for harm to be visited on society, but neither do we want to be accused of presiding over a nanny state. It will be the job of the Committee to consider these arguments and, on the evidence presented, advise the House accordingly.

All of us will have personal views about alcohol based on experience or perhaps even moral or religious beliefs. It is my opinion, and I hope others share it, that while those personal views should inform our consideration of the Bill, they should not direct it. We are here to legislate for all of society, not just a narrow section of it that may share our beliefs. The Committee acknowledges that it is not easy to strike the right balance between proposals to assist our hospitality industry and the public health concerns about the impact of alcohol. Therefore, a mature, informed discussion is called for, particularly given that the public consultation on the Bill took place four years ago.

If public health concerns are to be addressed, it is important to consider drinking patterns and where people are consuming alcohol. This is important so that we do not end up taking action through the Bill that neither addresses the negative aspects of alcohol consumption nor supports the hospitality industry; in effect, giving the perception of real reform on both key issues when nothing of actual substance has been achieved on either. That is why reference to evidence is so important. For example, in regard to addressing excessive alcohol consumption, the DHSSPS report 'Adult Drinking Patterns in NI 2013' asked people where they consumed alcohol. Around two thirds of respondents who drank said that they did so in their own home — 65% — while around 20% drank in the pub, 17% in a restaurant and 16% in someone else's home. So, over 80% of people drank in either their own home or someone else's home.

It has also been clear for at least a decade that the number of people drinking in pubs has been falling. In fact, the same report notes that there was about a 40% reduction in the number of males drinking in pubs between 1999 and 2013 and a reduction of almost 50% in females drinking in pubs during the same period. The industry is now in a position where only 26% of men and 12% of women who drink do so in pubs. The figures on drinking at home also go some way to explaining the increase in solitary drinking from 17% in 1999 to 22% in 2013. One can only guess at the potential mental health issues that that may contribute to.

The question that the Committee will have to ask is this: is the Bill doing enough to address excessive drinking where most drinking actually takes place — in the home? Indeed,

we will need to consider whether this Bill is even the proper legislative vehicle to do anything about that. On the basis of where people who drink say they consume alcohol, we should at least recognise that the greater problem is more likely to be as a result of home drinking and drinking alone and not necessarily as a result of drinking in the local pub.

As a resident in and representative of a rural constituency, I know that the local pub is often the centre of social gatherings and is used for meetings of local community groups. It often has a significance to the community that perhaps an urban pub does not have because there does not tend to be any other option in rural areas if the local pub closes. These pubs are under severe pressure. In fact, a report carried out this year by the insolvency practitioner Begbies Traynor revealed that one in four pubs in the North were operating under significant financial distress and struggling to remain open. There are roughly 2,000 licence holders here. On that calculation, 500 of them are struggling to remain open. Even taking just three employees per licence holder, which is not unreasonable, that is 1,500 jobs at risk. In February this year, Bombardier announced that 1,000 jobs were to go, and there was absolute uproar. Ministerial statements and calls for action were flying right, left and centre, and this was for a company that, according to then Minister Bell, received £75 million of Executive assistance between 2002 and 2015.

If 1,500 jobs are at risk in the hospitality sector, should we not be making as big a hue and cry as was made in February? Should we not seek to ensure that the sector has the best operating environment in which to survive? Not a penny of Executive financial assistance has been called for. We need to see what is achievable and what is necessary to support the industry. I am sure that, with appropriate counsel, we can do that without contributing to the already significant burdens on the health sector or to the moral degradation of our society, as some might suggest.

Of course, pictures on the TV of antisocial behaviour in town centres as a result of excessive alcohol consumption fan the flames of the negative stereotypes associated with alcohol. However, I suggest that the vast majority of people who drink alcohol do so responsibly. Should we not seek to facilitate good behaviour as well as address the bad? Following that logic, we will need to consider whether we are doing enough via the Bill to support the hospitality industry. By limiting the proposals in the Bill that, in general, may be seen as liberalising our current laws, are we, in fact, inadvertently penalising the hospitality industry because of an erroneous perception of where the alcohol problem lies?

The Committee has been advised by officials that the measures proposed in the Bill are modest. Modesty is often said to be a virtue. In the context of the Bill, it might be considered a vastly overrated virtue; one that is a poor substitute for creative thinking and ambitious proposals for the modernisation of licensing laws and, therefore, the hospitality industry. I also need to point out the importance of the pub industry to our tourism sector. I am sure that other Members will refer to that in their contributions.

If we have a vision of what we want our society to become, and if that is an outward-looking and progressive society framed by legislation that encourages its development, the legislation, if we get it right, can, in a small way, send

out that message. Hopefully, the Minister will work with the Committee, if we believe that changes should be made to strengthen the Bill and make it appropriate for a 21st-century society.

Mr Bell: The legislation — the Minister has given a comprehensive overview of it — will probably be among, if not the, most serious legislation that we will deal with in this mandate. That is not hyperbole. Alcohol-related deaths numbered 238 in 2014 and 236 in 2013. If we compare the 2014 figure for alcohol-related deaths, 238, with the road death statistic of 79, we see that the former is 300% higher. If we were to come to the House with the outrage that we rightly have about road deaths and were experiencing a 300% increase in their number, we would be looking, by accelerated passage or whatever way we could, to introduce legislation to do something about that. Yet, slowly and imperceptibly, we have allowed the real danger of alcohol in our society to continue, with the deaths that it is causing and the severe mental and physical health effects that it has. Year after year, we walk almost blindfolded, ignoring what has occurred.

I spent over two decades in professional practice and have seen the effects of alcohol on individuals. I have seen the increased risk of suicide and suicidal ideation. I witnessed the Royal College of Psychiatrists informing us that alcohol is our favourite drug. Interestingly, one very senior medical person in Northern Ireland told me today that, if alcohol were to come on the market today, there would be serious concerns about whether it would be issued with a licence.

We are dealing with something that is very serious. It is not hyperbole. We are dealing with something that has taken 474 lives in the last couple of years, in 2013 and 2014, and that has had physical and mental health effects on literally tens of thousands of people. In a way, the legislation that we are dealing with today is real politics and will affect real people. We have to be very judicious in how we take it forward. I do not excuse the pun, but we have to be incredibly sober as we look at all the facts that are brought before us. The minimum bar for me and, I think, for the House should be that, whatever we do, the legislation, almost like the Hippocratic oath, must do no harm. In fact, our legislation should be about the reduction and, indeed, the prevention of that harm.

Personally, having seen the effects in professional practice in the health service, I came at this with the very simple point of view that extension of opening hours and changing arrangements, on the one hand, looks like it will allow for more alcohol-related harm. My gut reaction was that we should not do it. I will be absolutely straight about that. I have seen too much, and my gut reaction was that we should not do it. That was the simple response. Having considered all the evidence, I now realise that it was the wrong one. I believe that the Bill that the Minister is bringing forward will lead to a reduction in alcohol-related harm. It goes further than holding it where it is and tries to reduce it. I will develop the points as I go along in this piece of legislation.

We have to tackle some of the practices of the licensed trade. It is imperative that we regulate the sale and the supply of alcohol in Northern Ireland. Critically — and this is what I love about it — the Bill strengthens the protections for children and young people. It does not take away any of the current protections. All those protections for children and young people are maintained. The Bill

then goes further: it strengthens the protections that are available for children and young people. My reason for saying that —

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way on that point. I agree that it is important that we consider how children and young people are introduced to alcohol. Does he agree, though, that many other countries where alcohol is more available to young people under the supervision of their parents have less of an alcohol problem than here, where it is absolutely prohibited for them to be in a place where alcohol is served?

Mr Bell: The Member makes a very interesting point. I have two views on it, which are not necessarily contradictory. I looked at some of the evidence from Belgium. I remember being out on business and noticing in the early hours of the morning that there did not appear to be the same alcohol-related problems that we have here. When I asked some Belgian politicians and community representatives why this was, they made a point similar to the one just made by the honourable Member. They said that children in Belgium grow up with beer in the fridge. Very often, the way we would normally say, “Do you want some tea or coffee?”, when we are looking for a mortgage, consulting our solicitor or speaking to our bank manager, in Belgium they will say, “Would you like some tea, coffee or beer?”. It is just in that manner. However, they made the point that young people are taught the dangers of alcohol from a very early age. I am very loath to go along fully with what the honourable Member has said, for these reasons: all the medical evidence that I have seen is that a child’s body, a child’s body going through puberty, a pubescent child or an adolescent — there is really no argument that allows for a safe amount of alcohol for the child, given their physical development. We have to be very careful, because alcohol affects all of us in medical terms at different stages.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for being so gracious as to give way a second time. To be clear, the point I was making was not that I want children to be able to drink. That is not my point. My point is that children in such places can have a moderating influence on adults’ behaviour.

For example, you will very rarely see the kind of behaviour that you often see outside a pub happening at a family wedding because there is the moderating influence of having younger people around throughout that event. People moderate their intake as a result.

*(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)*

11.00 am

Mr Bell: I apologise for picking the Member up wrongly at first. Yes, I agree with her about that moderating influence. I have to say that it is the first time in six years in the House that I have been accused of being gracious, but I respect that.

Let us move on to address some of the concerns that very legitimately exist in the hospitality industry, some of which the Deputy Chair of the Committee has outlined. I have spoken at reasonable length to representative bodies and to individual retailers and suppliers — whatever the proper term is — in my constituency. I have to say that, when I look at the voluntary regulatory code that Hospitality

Ulster has developed — professional men and women of the highest standard in Northern Ireland, who do not take the attitude of, “Let us make the biggest buck and the devil take the hindmost” — I see in it expertise; genuine appreciation of the health issues regarding alcohol, which I will outline further; and genuine commitment to the society that they serve. It ultimately makes sense for the likes of Hospitality Ulster to develop that excellence because it knows that, if we get this legislation right, the hospitality industry can only grow in the long term and the future benefits to society can also grow.

When I look at those different bodies, not just Hospitality Ulster and Colin Neill, but Michael of Cafolla’s, Newtownards, and the Old Cross Inn, and listen to what they do with regard to first aid, personal safety, protecting young people and females, ensuring that people have proper transport, I see people who are in the hospitality industry for the long term and who are operating to the highest standards of integrity in the industry. I am very proud to represent them and their commitment.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. He made the point earlier about alcohol-related deaths, and, of course, we should be concerned about them. He has outlined the role of Hospitality Ulster and the code in moderating alcohol consumption in pubs and clubs. Is that not an argument for why we need to ensure that we support the industry to promote responsible drinking and reduce alcohol-related harm from the more harmful practice of drinking cheap supermarket alcohol at home?

Mr Bell: I think that the Minister has outlined already some of the responses to what you said — and said well — about harmful drinking and how patterns have changed over time. That is why the Minister has referred to advertising and where advertisements are placed. That is why what the Minister outlined in allowing children to be part of functions where there is more safety, more protection, and that moderating influence that Mrs Long referred to, is so critical.

However, we must realise that we have sleepwalked into a situation where we are quite happy — actually, not quite happy but almost ambivalent to the facts of hundreds of deaths — 300% more than on our roads — and must do something to contribute to a reduction in alcohol-related harm. That is why it is not an easy thing for the Minister to take forward, given some of the difficulties that I will outline shortly; the alcohol-related problems that the medical, psychiatric and psychology professions will tell of, to do something that has a genuine chance of reducing alcohol-related harm.

That is why it is courageous legislation for the Minister to take forward. I know about the difficulties and the many views on the issue. It is important to take an evidence-based approach, informed by medical knowledge, best retail practice and people’s alcohol consumption habits in 2016.

We know that some 73% — just short of three quarters — of our population in Northern Ireland consume alcohol: 76% of men and 70% of women. We are talking about legislation that is directly relevant to three quarters of our population. I appreciated the honesty of people when they informed us of their personal binge-drinking habits. The Good Book is absolutely correct:

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

I am not going to stand in judgement of anybody, but I appreciate people’s honesty. We are told that 31% — basically, one in three — of the three quarters of the population who take alcohol are binge drinking: 35% of males and 24% of females. I will put that binge drinking into perspective: for a man, I am talking about 10 or more units — five pints — and, for a female, seven or more units — four medium glasses of wine.

As somebody with a background in psychology, I say to you, as, I think, nearly any nurse, doctor or mental health social worker will tell you, that most people are not, to put it politely, entirely truthful about their drinking habits. That is for a number of reasons, whether societal or individual pressures. With what we know, we can reasonably assume that to be an underestimation of the difficulties. We know that 31% of the three quarters of the population who drink alcohol are binge drinking to seriously harmful effect. Of those, 11% have an identified severe alcohol problem. That is why I appreciate the Minister’s courage in taking the Bill forward. The DUP committed to do it in the run-up to the Northern Ireland Assembly election because we saw the need to change legislation to better society and to make alcohol less harmful to individuals.

We all know the pressures on the National Health Service, and I know the pressures in my Strangford constituency, particularly in accident and emergency departments, due to alcohol-related harm. Those pressures will, if anything, increase. In my constituency, we are preparing for a new town the size of Ballynahinch every 25 years because of the success of our health service in combating mortality. However, we also know that, with that increased population, we will have to deal with more problems with morbidity, and we have to do something to try to alleviate the pressure on the health service.

If the Minister, in bringing forward a Bill, were to say, “I can bring forward something that can lead to a 12,010-person reduction in admissions to acute hospitals”, I think that we would be cheering on every side of the House. We have to acknowledge the reality that, in a certain period, 12,010 people in our society can be admitted to hospital with an alcohol-related problem. It is impossible to quantify the cost of that in human terms, in mental health and physical health terms, in damage to families and society, in breakdown in families and in domestic violence, which are all issues connected to alcohol-related harm. A useful guide is that alcohol excess is costing Northern Ireland in the region of £900 million every year.

To people who are looking for simplistic solutions that seem to suggest that we should just reduce the hospitality industry, I say to them that not to change anything out of fear that you will be accused, and that by not changing something you will have increased the problem, is wrong. It would be disingenuous of a Minister not to bring forward a Bill when all the evidence coming before him is that, with the changed drinking habits of 2016, there are proposals that have been examined, have had the expertise fed into them and have the potential to contribute to a reduction in alcohol-related harm. Those proposals have the potential to reduce the 238 deaths a year that I can find from 2014, reduce the 12,000 admissions to our acute hospitals due to alcohol-related harm and save some of the £900 million that we are spending in Northern Ireland and that we could use for a better purpose.

As we go through the Bill — I know Members will have gone through the 27 clauses and are probably delighted that I am not going to take them all individually — I ask everybody not to take a knee-jerk reaction to what is being proposed and to look at the bigger picture. There will be a review of some of the clauses in 12 months; so no one is saying that this is a blanket issue. This legislation will be reviewed and, if we find that it is not doing what we believe it should do, which is to reduce alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland, we will have the opportunity to change it.

Members, if we are in a position where we have the opportunity to change legislation for the betterment of an individual, family, children, our health service or to reduce the costs and the mortality rate associated with alcohol-related harm, we need to have the courage to go ahead and do so regardless of some ill-informed criticism that may come about. There will be a trial period for allowing longer drinking-up time. We all know that alcohol affects your judgement and will lead you to take greater risks. Take someone whose judgement is affected — I am not standing in judgement, I am just talking reality — who hears the call for last orders, we know from practice that they will purchase a stockpile of alcohol. People are buying excess alcohol that, if they had the time, they would not possibly drink. If they had a space in which to wait for their taxi to get them home safely, they would not stockpile.

The hospitality industry has been very clear that it is concerned about stockpiling, not because it can make more money out of that but because it knows that, in the long term, the danger of alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland is quite literally unsustainable. We cannot go on with the situation we are in. So, allowing that 30 minutes to 60 minutes' trial period will give people a clear indication that there is no need to stockpile and that they should not be stockpiling at a time, largely late in the evening or in the early hours of the morning, in which their judgement is impaired and they cannot make a proper decision for their own health — physical and mental — as to how much alcohol they need. They are responding to the fact that someone has put a time frame on them. They do not need to stockpile and drink that amount of alcohol in such a short period of time. This is a reasonable and proportionate response that has, as its background, the need to ensure the security, safety and long-term interests of the individual.

I have two teenagers, and, let us face it, we live in an alcohol-saturated society. In preparation for the debate, I had an evening of watching television and saw the number of times that alcohol was advertised or appeared in dramas, soap operas and films. All of us watching it would almost perceive that this is the norm.

Yes, it is alcohol-related harm, but it is the norm, so do not do anything about it; let people continue to die; let society continue to suffer; let the National Health Service deal with it. This is the norm, everybody does it, therefore we do it as well.

11.15 am

That is where we need to really stress to young people the damage that alcohol does to the pubescent body and to inform them, in advance, of the danger to them and the potential harm to their physical and mental health. Then we should do what the Minister said: put strict regulations in place to ensure that those young people can have access

to the music and access to the school formal — I have two teenagers, so I know the importance of the school formal. I am a governor, and I know that it is a very good and healthy development of young people as they progress to whatever they are going to do at the next stage of their life. But, allowing it to happen in an alcohol-free and safe environment is the right thing to do. It says to young people, “Yes, you can have a good time, but you do not need the danger of alcohol and the harm that it can do to you”.

What the Minister and the Bill have cleverly done is put a prohibition on alcohol from self-service and vending machines. That way, we have some form of regulation; we can have some form of control; and we can have responsible people — in many cases, people trained in basic first aid — in charge of the sale of alcohol, and they can ask for ID. Minister, over the next number of decades, the prohibition on the sale of alcohol from self-service and vending machines will, critically, be very beneficial to young people, because it will allow control, it will allow proper care and, most importantly of all, it will allow proper responsibility. If our professionals are properly trained — there are people who are more expert in this, but I have spoken to dozens of people in the hospitality industry, and not one of them is not prepared to refuse alcohol to a young person if it is illegal and that young person does not make the grade. So not allowing young people to self-serve or use a vending machine for alcohol and maintaining that prohibition is a particular piece of excellence in the Bill.

The responsibilities under the code that I mentioned earlier were developed by Hospitality Ulster itself. Let us scotch any idea — that is probably the wrong pun, again — of the hospitality industry being interested only in profit. Hospitality Ulster, the hotels federation and many others that I have spoken to about this Bill are very clear: they are looking for a long-term, viable future for their industry that is sustainable and healthy. The Deputy Chair outlined very well the importance to the tourism and hospitality industries of local hospitality and the local product. The people running those local industries are often families and generations of families, and they too know the long-term interest for their business is responsibility and a contributing to a reduction in alcohol-related harm, while, at the same time, ensuring that the people who come to Northern Ireland can enjoy our hospitality and the excellent food and drink offering that is available.

Hospitality Ulster developed that responsible retail code and their members voluntarily signed up to it, and when I talk to them, I find that what they really want the Bill to do — and I raised this in Committee — is give it teeth. Skinner's theory of classical conditioning states that you should always reward good behaviour. Here is an industry that has behaved intelligently, that has developed the code, that has self-disciplined itself to that code and is now looking to all of us to give that Hospitality Ulster code real teeth. I believe that the Bill will allow for real teeth to be given where we have an approval and a code of practice that has legal consequences, that looks at promotion, the retailing and the serving of alcohol.

People have raised the issue of Easter with me. Easter has a special significance to Northern Ireland. I believe that it is the highlight of any particular year when I remember the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that there are people of different faiths and no faith who do

not share my views, but I have found that, when I talk to them about the importance of Easter to Northern Ireland, I do not get dismissed; I do not get the cavalier attitude of, "Well, you think that. You might believe that, but we don't, so let's get on with it". When I have spoken to people about how we address the issue of Easter — we will allow the normal procedures that apply throughout the rest of the year to apply for the Thursday in the Bill — I hear respect. To all the people out there who do not share my beliefs — I hope that, one day, they will believe in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and its significance — I say that I deeply appreciate the respect that they have shown for my faith and the significance of Easter to a huge number of people in Northern Ireland. I appreciate their tolerance and the sensitivity with which they have approached that. That is why the protection of Easter and its maintenance in the Bill is particularly critical.

I mentioned earlier that, for children, all certificates remain in place. We are not reducing anything for children or young people; we are maintaining everything and enhancing protection in the Bill. I value the fact that the liquor and entertainment licences will run concurrently. I understand that that will help the Police Service to deal with and uphold compliance with the law.

I want to say a special word of thanks to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Hopefully, towards the end, I will thank the Ambulance Service, the paramedics, the nurses, the A&E staff and the hospital staff. I remember watching how the police police what is a very difficult issue. I remember, on a historic night in Northern Ireland, walking from Belfast city centre up to Windsor Park. Northern Ireland were playing Greece. We all know about the brilliance of that night. I am not sure whether we all fully appreciated, at about 5.00 pm that evening, that it was going to be as good as it was. I had the opportunity to watch police policing thousands of people, sometimes only two or three at a time in different spots of the city centre, all the way out to Windsor Park and back again. I saw policing in Northern Ireland at its best. I saw person-centred policing. I saw police helping people who had taken too much to drink. I saw police making sure that people received the proper level of first aid. In the throng of thousands of people and all the celebrations, including disabled people and people who were on crutches and different things, I watched police providing the highest level of service. I did not see any difficulties, but that was not a surprise; I am sure that Brother Humphrey will remind me that the Northern Ireland fans received the best fans in Europe award and have subsequently been re-awarded what they obtained more recently after the Euros.

I watched the police apply, uphold and protect the licensing laws with the utmost sensitivity in very difficult circumstances, with tens of thousands of people — I am not exaggerating — on the streets and going to the match or watching it in bars, clubs and different things. I watched them do it with sheer professionalism. That is why I like the fact that we are responding to what the police are saying; we are going to bring the liquor and entertainment licences together to assist the brilliant men and women in the police with upholding the licensing law in a professional and very person-centred way.

I think that the Minister is correct to not just go to a blanket ban for 2.00 am. I understand that he will be criticised on all sides. Some of us who were Ministers know that it can

be a very difficult and lonely place to be when you seek to do what is right. My apologies to John Bew if I have this quote wrong from his brilliant book on Lord Castlereagh, but he referred to Viscount Wellington as saying that you have to do what is right for people, sometimes more than what people want you to do.

I believe that, in the Bill, the Minister has got it absolutely right. There will be a demand for a blanket extension to 2.00 am, and I understand where that is coming from. However, the Minister is right: he has a responsibility not just to the industry but to society in Northern Ireland to take a judicious approach. The allowance of up to one hour extra on 12 days, with protections for Easter, Christmas and everything else built in, is proportionate. It is a reasonable demand, and it contributes to the overall balance of reducing alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland and not extending it. I hope that he gets support from every section of the House for the Bill and what it seeks to do as a measured approach with the aim of reducing alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland.

Let me turn to a very insidious, disgusting industry that has developed in Northern Ireland and to which Mrs Mallon and others referred in Committee: taxi drivers supplying alcohol to minors who know that, because of the professionalism of the industry, off-licences will not supply alcohol to young people. There are those who, for a quick buck, are prepared to buy alcohol for young people. They often sell it on to them at an increased profit and provide them with alcohol that will seriously damage their developing bodies and affect their physical and mental health.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: Sure.

Mr F McCann: When you make a statement like that, you have to quantify it. The vast majority of taxi drivers are good, decent people who are out to make a living and do not take part in the practice that you are talking about.

Mr Bell: I am happy to underline everything that you have said. My constituency is exactly the same as yours, and the vast majority of taxi drivers are responsible. However, when you, Nichola and I looked at it in Committee, we realised that there were some who are not. They are the minority, as the Member was right to correct me. I did not mean it to come out like that, and, if that is the way that it came out, I stand corrected. That minority — not just taxi drivers but people using their personal vehicles — supply alcohol. The Minister has sought to deal accurately with a problem identified in 2016. The requirement in the Bill is that we will check that the reception of alcohol from taxi drivers and others who deliver it cannot be by a minor. That logbook will send out a clear warning that, as the honourable Member Mr McCann said, we will stand with all responsible taxi drivers and everybody else who refuses to engage in this abusive behaviour. We will require the logbook to be held because we want to ensure that we stamp on this practice that is going on.

I have talked to police in my constituency, and there are concerns about public venues such as public parks. We have tried to tackle it as best we can, but, in dealing with community safety, we know that young people are gathering, taking serious levels of alcohol and ending up in our A&E wards. It appears from anecdotal and other evidence that the alcohol has been provided to them by adults. Sometimes, that alcohol has come out of the boot

of a personal vehicle or whatever vehicle it is. It is given to young people illegally, and the people practising that trade know that they are doing it illegally. We are on to them, and we serve warning to them that we will check those logbooks to ensure that there is a proper log of any alcohol being transported and that no minor can receive it. That is responsible.

11.30 am

I turn to the issue of advertising. It must be reasonable and proportionate. We know that, at times, alcohol can appear cheaper than some of the more expensive bottled waters. What message are we sending out in our advertising? We referred to children earlier: when they go to a supermarket with their family, they are hit first with an offer, perhaps a loss-leading offer, to get people in, on the balance that they take a loss on the alcohol but will make the profit up on the food and everything else that is retailed. We do not let children walk through the alcohol aisles, and we do that for very good reasons. We are not going to create a society where we tell children, "This is the norm; this is OK. Walk through the aisles, and it's just like picking up a Coca-Cola or a bottle of water". It is not. We are dealing with a very serious drug. If we are not prepared to let children walk through the alcohol aisles, we should follow the logic of that and not allow them to see the advertisements in other parts of the supermarkets and other places that take away from the message that this is a serious matter and should only be dealt with by reasonable and responsible adults. The regulation by the Bill of where advertising can be placed — it has to be kept within the alcohol areas, in boundaries and other areas — is there to protect young people and make them aware and take away from them the power of advertising a serious drug that they know will harm their physical health.

I support the regulation of clubs, too. I know from my constituency and across Belfast that the responsibilities are taken seriously by the people who run the clubs. It is right, when we do promotions and things, that we make it clear that it is for the members of the club. It is also reasonable, as the law currently allows, that, where there is a charitable or benevolent purpose, people can be allowed in for that reason. That is a measure of responsibility and reasonableness, but in the other terms — where it is for the club — it is for club members only.

I have seen sports clubs do a tremendous job for Northern Ireland. My children participated in many of them, and I watched for years as my son went through from primary school to captain Ards Rangers — better skills in football than his dad. I watched those sports clubs teach young people personal responsibility. Ards Rangers can have up to 300 young people two nights a week and in matches on a Saturday morning and afternoon, but I watched them help young people with their personal development. Those of us psychologists who believe in the link between physical fitness and mental fitness watched them develop in all aspects of their educational career. It is right that we look at those summer months and allow the young people on one occasion in a calendar year to be part of their sporting club, with all the protections that are there. That is saying to people that we are not taking a blanket unreasonable approach; we will enhance the protection for young people, but we will allow them the full range of benefits of their sports clubs. If we were to put a value on that, it would be worth millions of pounds to Northern

Ireland, with all the volunteers in those clubs. We are recognising the value of sports clubs, enhancing protection for children and allowing them, on one occasion, to participate within their club.

Let me go back to why we need the Bill. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, alcohol is our favourite drug. Let us be very clear on that.

Alcohol is our favourite drug. That is not my observation nor the observation of research; rather, it is the observation in a detailed report from the Royal College of Psychiatrists. I encourage people to read the report, 'Alcohol: Our Favourite Drug', which is available on the Internet. We need to wake up to the fact that, while we live in an alcohol-saturated society, alcohol does more harm than illegal drugs. When I talk to teachers and youth workers — I am involved in some voluntary youth work myself — I find that there does not seem to be the level of understanding that, factually, alcohol is more harmful than illegal drugs. Alcohol is more harmful than cannabis; it has done more harm in Northern Ireland than heroin. That puts what we are dealing with into perspective.

As I conclude, I want to look at how alcohol affects our judgement. People in Northern Ireland take risks when they have abused alcohol; they enter into arguments that they would not normally enter into; and families experience financial trouble as a result of excess and abuse. Sadly, there are family incidents, violence, harm, verbal abuse, domestic violence; there are, in cases, sexual abuse, irresponsible sexual behaviour, and an increase in accidents on roads, at home, in water or on sports playing fields. All those tell us that the Bill is absolutely necessary.

I go beyond the mere severe hangover that people talk about as being the punishment that they experience for alcohol. I look to the medical evidence that says that you will have not only a severe hangover but, likely, gastritis, stomach pains and vomiting, and that you can go into unconsciousness. We in Northern Ireland know that you can experience death. That is before we deal with liver disease and the increased risk that alcohol poses to both you and any future career that you may have. I conclude with the mental health problems and the proven links to depression, suicidal ideation and, sadly, suicide itself, as well as memory loss, brain damage, and hearing noises and voices that are not there.

I say to all Members that, when I approached the issue, I took the position, "Let's not do anything. It's bad enough as it is. Let's be careful". However, on examination of the Bill and its real potential to reduce alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland, to protect Easter, to allow young people to have not only all the protections they currently experience but enhanced protections, and given the 236-plus deaths in Northern Ireland, I believe that the Bill's time has come and that it should have the support of everyone in the House.

Mr Allen: I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party on the Second Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2016 and to indicate our support for the Bill's progress to Committee Stage. I will state clearly, however, that the Bill, as presented, does not go far enough and needs to be amended. I believe that the purpose of the Bill should be crystal clear: the modernisation of Northern Ireland's liquor licensing laws. Modern licensing laws intelligently

implemented could actually help to alleviate problems as well as help to revive the night-time economy in our provincial towns and villages.

This is the first Bill of this mandate and the first that the new Committee for Communities has been tasked with scrutinising. As a relatively new MLA, I have, in recent weeks, researched the licensing laws in Northern Ireland and the background to the new Bill. There have been over 12 years of false starts, false promises, delays and disappointments. As the Minister outlined, the Bill, as presented, contains some useful improvements to the law; however, there are gaps. No mention is made of microbrewery licensing, dog tracks on a Sunday, or the minimum pricing of alcohol.

I recognise that some progress has been made in Northern Ireland, albeit at a slow pace. In 2007, former Minister Margaret Ritchie piloted a Bill that ended up as the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

It was a short Bill that covered areas such as the closure of licensed premises and clubs; penalty points; proof of age; irresponsible drinks promotions; pricing; and authorisations for special occasions. It was, however, to be the first stage in a process. The second stage — further legislation — was never progressed under Ministers from 2011. What we had under former Minister McCausland was another consultation process in 2011, which eventually led to a press statement, made during the summer recess of 2014, promising new legislation, but none emerged before the end of the previous mandate.

According to Hospitality Ulster, this version of the Bill is less impactful than the draft Bill written a number of years ago and does not reflect recent changes in consumer and industry trends. One change that I will briefly highlight is the growth of microbreweries developing local, home-grown craft beers and ciders. At present, local companies are being massively restricted by our licensing laws, and there is nothing in the Bill to give them any help whatsoever. They cannot sell their wares on their premises or avail themselves of the opportunity to sell their produce at farmers' markets or shows. Surely now is the time to introduce a new category of licence so that small breweries can apply for permission to sell at source —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member take a point?

Mr Allen: I will finish these points and then let you in. The Bill should also contain options for them to apply for occasional extensions to sell at local events.

Mr Stalford: Thank you, Mr Allen, for giving way. In conversation at the Committee for Communities, there has been agreement across parties on the need to address the issue of microbreweries. Had the Minister sought in legislation at this juncture to address it, it would have entailed an entirely new consultation process. There is nothing to prevent the Committee from bringing forward an amendment and dealing with the issue in that way. As I said, I do not think that there is any disagreement over the issue and the need to address it.

Mr Allen: I thank the Member for his intervention. I will come to that. I recognise that there is broad support for microbreweries on the Committee, and that is why I raise the matter here in the House.

Given that the BBC Good Food Show is happening at the Belfast Waterfront in a few weeks, it is an issue that should have been dealt with long ago. Microbreweries' licensing is something on which, I hope, the Committee can come to a consensus with future amendments, as is the whole issue of Easter opening and wider opening hours for licensed premises. The Committee can get its teeth into the detail, but, suffice it to say, we really need to look seriously at the issue and take the opportunity to make the law fit for purpose.

Many in the Assembly will say that alcohol is a social evil and that an unacceptable burden is placed on the NHS. I absolutely agree that there are many problems associated with alcohol abuse. However, those who say that the answer is to enforce highly restrictive practices on the hospitality industry are getting it completely wrong. As Hospitality Ulster has pointed out, the problem of alcohol abuse cannot be laid solely at the doors of licensed premises. The Department of Health's 2013 survey, which was mentioned, showed that 65% of alcohol consumption happened at home, with only 20% in pubs and 17% in restaurants. I firmly believe that we need to support our hospitality industry. Surely we should all be trying to help the sector and the tourist trade.

In closing, I commend the Minister for bringing forward this proactive Bill, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in Committee to improve it.

Ms Hanna: I will try to be brief, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I know that a lot of Members are down to speak, and I do not want you to have to call last orders on me. Nichola Mallon will outline our thinking more fully shortly.

The SDLP supports the Bill, because our licensing laws are in dire need of reform. We hope, however, that it will go further by amendment. I commend the Minister for being out of the traps this early in the mandate. It was frustrating for many people that, on this issue, as on several others, we ran out of time before the election. It is good to see some movement.

Updating the licensing laws will have a very positive effect on the hospitality sector, which is vital to our wider tourism and economic pitch. Hopefully, it will also be a small factor in encouraging our own brightest and best young people to stay here, because people are frustrated that they do not feel that they can use their leisure time as they want to, and would elsewhere.

11.45 am

We agree very much that many people in this society have a very unhealthy and destructive relationship with alcohol. We believe that this reform can assist with the regulation and control of alcohol to that end and, hopefully, reduce some of the antisocial behaviour associated with binge drinking. We support that as a stated aim of the Bill but we will say that it is absolutely not just down to the licensed premises. It is easy to see that longer drinking hours do not necessarily result in more antisocial behaviour. If you want a case study, you can go and look at almost all of mainland Europe, which has much more liberal licensing laws than we have but does not seem to have the same level of antisocial behaviour — unless people from these islands are over visiting.

While it held the Social Development Ministry, the SDLP initiated a consultation with a view to reforming licensing and achieved some liberalisation of the licensing of clubs. I

note that the Department carried out a public consultation in 2012 and received over 2,500 responses which, I imagine, even though it was four years ago, was reflective of the urgency required by the sector as well as the frustration of many members of the public.

As other Members have outlined very thoroughly, it is estimated that approximately one fifth of alcohol consumption is in pubs, with 80% of it taking place in the private homes of individuals or in somebody else's home. As such, it is unfair to place almost the entire regulatory burden on venues that account for 20% of consumption, as well as the fact that pubs can be considerably more controlled environments. In a former life, I was a personal licence holder in Lambeth. In England, the licence is attached to the individual and not the pub, and I had to go through a lot of training and licensing exams to be a designated person. There are a lot of burdens on licence holders here and most licence holders and pubs take those very seriously in terms of selling to underage people and intoxicated people. The conditions of the licence are strict and stringent and a lot of that regulation is available in pubs while it is certainly not available in private homes. It is the "below the radar" drinking that we need to —

Mr Butler: I thank the Member for giving way. In July, I asked the Health Minister about underage drinking and hospital admissions and treatments. Sadly, the answer was that there were no statistics for underage drinking. I agree with the Member about the burden of responsibility being borne not just by proprietors but by Departments. Does she agree that there needs to be a closer working relationship between the Health and Communities Departments to look at this issue in particular because we are not collecting statistics to address the problem properly?

Ms Hanna: I do agree, and I think that it is worrying that we do not have that information. Unfortunately, underage alcohol consumption is visible to any of us when we are out, and I am sure that, as elected representatives, we hear about the negative effects of that and try to mitigate it. It is worrying if we do not have a statistical basis to help us tackle that. Actually, it is about the societal relationship with alcohol and, in fact, we can use licensing control and licensed premises to demonstrate how alcohol can be consumed responsibly.

The Minister and others have outlined the provisions of the Bill regarding Easter. It will permit normal opening on the Thursday before Good Friday. We support that, but we support it being enhanced and extended. For many of us, Easter is a time for family, for reflection and for religion, but we cannot tell everybody that they have to sit in their homes and reflect all weekend. It is a bank holiday weekend and many people will find it literally ridiculous that they cannot have a glass of wine with their lunch on a bank holiday Friday. I believe that Hospitality Ulster quantifies the loss to the sector at about £16 million. It is an important tourism weekend as well. People might go home and say that they had a good night out but had to go home at 11.00 pm, which will not encourage them to come back on another weekend. Concerns have been expressed in the media discussions about staff not being able to have that weekend off. Yes, it is nice that there is shutdown time for everybody, but I am very comfortable that this can be accommodated by individual businesses and within the framework of existing labour law.

The changes to additional hours are reasonable, but we understand that many licence holders will want a dependable, year-round licensing framework that will assist them with their staff planning and with marketing and so on. Drinking-up time is the key to reducing the antisocial behaviour that we see on our streets in the wee small hours. As the Member outlined, it will discourage people from stockpiling and buying double rounds and so on just before last orders. Crucially, it will stagger — pardon the pun — reduce and spread out the number of people on the streets at closing time seeking taxis, fast food or whatever, some of which frequently leads to antisocial behaviour.

Children's attendance at functions and the related provisions will be explored by colleagues later. This issue has also been well aired recently in the media, and it is very appropriate that we regularise the ways in which premises that sell alcohol can be used, because they do not just sell alcohol. In many cases, they do have a wider social function.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. At least two premises in my constituency have been hit with this balk in the legislation, which actually creates more of a problem. I heard Mr Bell referring to taxis delivering drink. Where you have young people in a controlled, monitored and supervised environment, I feel that that is much better than them roaming the streets with drink, as they do on many occasions, that may have been bought by other adults for them.

Ms Hanna: I agree with that. As I said, it is an opportunity to show younger people how alcohol can be consumed. There are many more protections that we can give young people than when they are getting together in a bandstand in a park, or wherever.

Additional issues that we hope can be incorporated by amendment have been mentioned by others. One is provision for microbreweries. Craft brewing is a growing industry here, and it very much promotes quality over quantity. It is not about firing a whole load of alcohol into you. The legislation in this area needs to be amended to allow breweries to sell the product on their premises or at trade shows. These beers do not have the big networks that others have. If people like them, they cannot say that they will go down to Tesco and buy a whole load of it. The major BBC Good Food Show, which is coming to Belfast next month, cannot operate here the way that it will elsewhere, where people can sample alcohol-related products and buy them to take away. This was flagged up by the industry in January or February, and the show takes place next month, in October. The Executive did not have time to respond. That is an issue where a wee royal prerogative would have come in handy, and I think that people will be frustrated that it is only used to help the Executive and not to help the wider sector.

Also, I remember that we had a blip in 2011, when Belfast City Council put on and supported the MTV music awards. That was supposed to be about a big pitch to event organisers that Belfast and Northern Ireland are suitable venues for big events, but, as it was on a Sunday, it was lights out and bedtime at midnight. There was no flexibility and no ability for the council to respond to that. It was supposed to be a big sales pitch to a lot of those —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Ms Hanna: I am happy to give way.

Mr Stalford: The Member will be aware that, in mainland GB, many places have 24-hour opening hours. I assume that the Member does not want South Belfast, the constituency that we both represent, to become like Blackpool at the weekend.

Ms Hanna: You assume correctly, and the Member has in no way called for that. I think that that is the point. It is not about absolute liberalisation with 24-hour opening or what we have now. There are very many positions between the antiquated licensing laws that we have and one that is fit for purpose. In fact, there are various bodies of evidence on how that has and has not worked out. I have said that I think people do have a poor relationship with alcohol here, and, as I said, when you are on the Continent, you see that the natives are enjoying a quiet beer at 1.00 am while it is the British and Irish people who are going hell for leather and causing all the trouble. I do not think that it is just the licensing hours; there are other things. We have not at any point called for 24-hour licensing.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. She has twice made that point, but I ask her to desist from labelling everyone with that sort of behaviour when they are on the Continent. The Member will know that the Northern Ireland supporters and the Republic of Ireland supporters both received awards. They may have consumed some alcohol, and I was there at one of the games and saw it being consumed, and I may have consumed some myself. They did not behave in the way that the Member has just outlined to the House.

Ms Hanna: I am happy to respond to that. I do not think that anybody here will judge you for having a drink on your holidays. This reinforces my point. It is not the licensing laws that are the issue. In the places where they were celebrating, alcohol was available. It does not have to mean that everybody is going to lose the run of themselves. That is why there is a problem in having a regulatory framework that implies that, if we open the pubs a little later, we will all lose our minds. That is where we can get the balance correct.

In summary, this is both an economic and a social issue. The hospitality sector provides 60,000 jobs and over £1 billion to our economy. As well as the fact that it is time for our laws to come into the 21st century and reflect how people consume alcohol, this is the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink. Discover NI has a big flagship promotion to support our growers, our brewers, our cooks and so on, but we are in ways holding back this sector.

Of course we need a robust regulatory framework, but we cannot put all the burden on the licensed premises that are so important to our economy.

It is also a societal issue. As I said, we have societal problems with alcohol, which puts enormous pressure on our health service and other public services, and nobody is denying that, but we are here to develop evidence-based policy. There is no evidence that those problems are all coming from the licensed sector; it simply is not there. The Member has shown that pubs opening later does not mean that people will act in negative ways. So, it is right that we use the evidence and make the Bill, now that it has come forward, as strong and as useful as possible.

Mrs Long: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. The Bill is a long overdue step in trying to benefit our tourism and hospitality industry in Northern Ireland, so I welcome the fact that the Minister has brought it before the Chamber.

We recognise that alcohol is a controlled substance with the potential, when it is abused, to cause significant damage to the health of the individual and to cause public nuisance or disorder. Therefore, we are not seeking, and nor is the industry, complete deregulation. However, it is recognised that the majority of alcohol is consumed at home. Up to 70% of the alcohol that is drunk in society is consumed at home, where there are no limitations on what people can drink, no safe measures, no one to intervene and say that someone has had enough and no going home time because people are already there. So, the issue around public health is more to do with trying to get people to have a responsible attitude towards alcohol, rather than simply constraining those who are already drinking responsibly in the hospitality sector and in bars and clubs.

People purchasing cheap alcohol and drinking it at home, because they are staying at home or before going out, is a much bigger challenge than what people are consuming in pubs and clubs. Many of the difficulties that we see in society, which have been reflected by Members who have spoken, are not the result of people drinking in bars and clubs in licensed premises; they are the result of people drinking off-sales either in a place where they should not be or at home with no supervision or control. We need to take that into account.

I welcome the restrictions that the Minister has discussed with regard to advertising in supermarkets, because impulse purchases are a challenge in terms of the health demands that we are looking at. There is a wider issue here, both in advertising and in how we integrate children into more adult environments. We need to better educate our young people to move away from a binge-drinking culture towards responsible drinking. The best way to do that is to demystify alcohol instead of making it something that people are rushing to get because it is forbidden and making it a big deal for people to get their hands on it. There is nothing like telling young people, through the power of negative persuasion, that something is not allowed to encourage them to do it.

So, the more we integrate young people into environments where people are drinking responsibly and sensibly — their presence will moderate behaviour — the healthier our attitude to drinking will be. That is reflected when you go to the Continent and see young people sitting in bars with their parents and families. That curtails the tendency for adults to overindulge in alcohol, but it also demystifies what happens in a bar or a pub or club and what alcohol is about. Young people on the Continent — in countries where that is the norm — are much less likely to resort to binge drinking than young people here.

There is a genuine issue with how we get the balance right in aiming for responsible drinking and better educating young people. The difficulty is that we risk punishing the licensed trade for problems that are not of its making and are connected to what other people are doing, such as the rogue taxi driver who takes the drink to young people in the park. We should not be looking at those issues as part of this, because licensed traders are not the main problem.

The licensed trade and hospitality industry have a vested interest in trying to ensure that people drink responsibly, because to do otherwise could risk their licence and livelihood. Far from trying to put overly weighty restrictions on licensed premises, we should be ensuring that, when we have those restrictions in place, they are sensible and properly enforced. That is the best way to ensure that those who have licences are responsible in how they deal with alcohol and encourage their patrons to do likewise.

12.00 noon

For the last number of years, the Alliance Party has called for licensing reform in Northern Ireland. That was demonstrated just last year when my colleague Judith Cochrane made small but significant amendments to alcohol licensing for the three national stadia in Northern Ireland. Just as that private Member's Bill was a common-sense approach to licensing that removed the lack of certainty that had accompanied applying for occasional licences, today's Bill represents an opportunity not only to modernise our licensing laws but, hopefully, to simplify them significantly in a way that will restore the faith of licence holders, brewers and the general public in the Assembly's ability to respond to their needs.

I do not want to list all the changes that the Bill will bring. The most pertinent are the modest increases in opening hours, particularly over the Easter weekend; a modest relaxation of licensing rules; a modest increase in opening and drinking-up hours, which is welcome; and restrictions on the advertising of intoxicating liquor in certain licensed premises. All are things that, in general, we can support. We believe, however, that the Bill could go much further in the reform of our licensing laws and, in particular, to address emerging areas of growth in the sector. As it stands, it is a foundation to make a significant stride forward in supporting the tourism and entertainment industry. I hope that the Minister and his team will be open to any amendments that may come from the Chamber or the Committee to try to improve the Bill as it goes through its scrutiny stages. The hospitality industry is worth £1.1 billion to the Northern Ireland economy, and 60,000 jobs are reliant on it, so it is important that we respond to the needs of that industry, particularly given the constructive way that it has engaged and the responsible way that it has addressed what it wants to achieve.

I will mention a number of things that could be done. We have a number of licensing challenges. The Easter weekend is always the one that people focus on. They do so for the obvious reason that, from a tourism and hospitality point of view, it is almost the exception, in that it is a four-day bank holiday weekend and, therefore, quite important. A modest change has been made to the drinking time on the Thursday prior to Easter. However, the Bill has failed to simplify the opening hours over that bank holiday weekend or introduce any increases that would make a significant difference to the perception of tourists who come here for that period.

I recognise, as other Members do, the importance of Easter as a Christian festival, and it is important that that is respected. However, if people do not wish to avail themselves of licensed premises over that weekend, they are, of course, free not to do so. This restriction tends to lead to people drinking at home over the Easter weekend, which is precisely the behaviour that is problematic to

health. People who want to drink will drink anyway, but they will do it at home in less controlled circumstances, and people who do not want to drink will not have to. For me, it is about trying to get a balance. It would be possible to extend and regularise the hours in a way that makes it simpler and less costly for the industry, as well as easier for people to understand.

That is one of the other things that I want to raise. In general, we need to simplify licensing so that those who run licensed premises, the police and councils who have to enforce licences, and the public are clear about the licensing hours. People should know when they can and cannot drink and what their drinking-up time is. At the minute, it is a bit of a hotchpotch, with a series of entertainment licences, late licences and so on. That is much more difficult from an enforcement perspective. It is also much more difficult for the public to respect the licensing laws if they are not really sure what the rules are when they set out for the evening. Work can be done on that, and I hope that the Minister will be open to listening to the case that others and I will put to him over the coming weeks and months.

There is also an issue with supermarkets purchasing the licences of former licensed premises solely to use the licensing certificate of owners. That can lead to a switch from people having a local pub in a small village in a rural neighbourhood to that licence being transferred to a large supermarket that is only interested in off-sales. There is a contentious issue about the fact that no additional licences are created in Northern Ireland. Changing that has implications for licence holders because it devalues their licence itself, but not changing it is a constraint on expansion of the industry and the growth of new business, particularly in areas where that business might thrive. You can have licences essentially being bought from rural areas where pubs are struggling and transferred to more urban areas where the businesses are sustainable, but that can have a knock-on effect on local communities. The release of a small number of new licences each year is one solution that should be considered and at least investigated as the Bill goes through.

There is also an opportunity to shift some of the powers of the courts to local authorities as part of the Bill, in order to streamline processes for licensing and to save considerable amounts of money when it comes to how licences are handled. Councils generally are effective and efficient in their licensing processes, and it may well be that they can handle some of the more routine matters that currently require a publican to go in front of a magistrate. That should be considered as a way of trying to streamline the process.

The issue of microbreweries and craft distillers in Northern Ireland has been referred to. It is a rapidly expanding sector and, given Northern Ireland's reputation for outstanding food and drink, one that we have the potential to grow much more rapidly in the future. It deserves support. As others have mentioned, there are reasons why it has not been included in the Bill. Four years ago, this was much less of an issue. It is worth noting that the only distiller that can currently allow you to taste and then purchase on site is Bushmills. It is the only one that has a licence to allow that. To do so, it must have a full off-sales licence. There is an opportunity to create a class of licence that would allow people to sample the wares

of craft brewers and craft distillers and then to purchase. For example, when people go abroad and visit places like Napa Valley or Hunter Valley, they taste the wine, visit the vineyards and buy a bottle of wine. It is what people do. They purchase the local produce and bring it home as a gift for family and friends. We want people, when they come to Northern Ireland, to purchase things that are uniquely about us and that benefit our local economy. One opportunity to do that is for them to visit one of the craft distillers, particularly the gin distilleries that have grown up over recent years, but also the craft breweries. I have three in my constituency: Boundary, Knockout and — I have gone blank. I have spoken to them of late, particularly about this element. For many people who come to Northern Ireland on a short break or even on a business trip, being able to take something home that is uniquely about the place that they have visited is much more meaningful than taking some kind of other souvenirs home. There is a real opportunity for us to support local business and entrepreneurial activity and to encourage people to sell their wares.

There is also a need to look at the issue of artisan fairs. People have talked, for example, about the food and drink events, but there are also craft fairs, artisan fairs and so on. People could sell their wares at those but, currently, under the law, cannot. That needs to change. We are not talking here about the kind of go-to alcohol purchases that are problematic for society. If people want to drink to excess, they do not buy craft beer and craft gin to do it. We need to be aware that this is potentially a growth industry. It is counterintuitive not to create that opportunity, so it would be useful to specifically have a licence class that would allow people to do that.

The other issue raised was the one affecting Drumbo racecourse, which has been caught between two pieces of reform. Initially, there was no need for it to have a licence on a Sunday because you could not gamble on a Sunday. Now, you can gamble on a Sunday and have a meal on a Sunday, but you cannot have a glass of wine with your meal because there is no licence for it. It is a very small change, but it would make a significant difference to the business, and we should consider it. It seems counterintuitive to constrain a business that could otherwise grow by preventing that from happening.

On that basis and on behalf of the party, I support the Bill and look forward to assisting it on its way through Committee. I hope that the Minister is open to considering the things raised in the Chamber by members of the Committee and will give thought to them. Given how long this legislation has been in gestation, it is important that, when we pass it, it is something for the future and not something that is dated before it is even enacted. It is important that we are at the very front of what we want to do and that we do something that modernises and simplifies a business that is of huge importance to the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for introducing the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill and welcome moving forward with our licensing laws in Northern Ireland. It is hugely important in growing our hospitality industry, and I have every confidence that we can see the Bill through to its Final Stage and full implementation. The Bill was introduced as a result of a public consultation in which over 2,500 responses were

received. That shows the vast public support for change to our licensing laws.

I welcome the change to the Easter opening hours to allow later hours on the Thursday before Good Friday. Currently, premises and registered clubs with additional opening hours are allowed to stay open until midnight. However, the provision will mean that late opening on the Thursday before Good Friday will be the same as the late opening available for any other weekday in the year, which is 1.00 am. We realise that that may not go as far as the licensed trade would like; however, it is a step in the right direction. It is important to consider the balance between the licensing trade and the health and well-being of our constituents.

I am disappointed that we have not yet made any provision for the inclusion of microbreweries in the Bill. However, I understand that microbreweries were not as popular when the Bill was first drafted in 2012. There are over 30 microbreweries in Northern Ireland, and they have become increasingly popular in recent years. The craft beer industry is continually growing and is an important aspect of tourism in Northern Ireland, as it introduces something new and local to our tourists. Craft breweries have been a popular tourist aspect in the UK for a number of years, and there are also many craft brewery tours in England. I feel that we could introduce those here. However, there needs to be relevant legislation in place to allow visitors to buy the product at the end of a tour.

Breweries are not included in the 13 categories of premises that are eligible for a licence, and that prevents them from selling at source. Visitors can take tours of microbreweries and sample the produce, but, at the end of the tour, they cannot purchase what they have sampled. That is counterproductive and stunts business opportunities, job growth and tourism. Many microbreweries home-brew from very small premises, and the ability to sell at farmers' markets and festivals would allow for better business sustainability. I understand that if the breweries were big enough and had enough money they could purchase an off-sales licence to sell their liquor. However, most microbreweries are co-operatives and do not have the cash flow to facilitate that. The lack of legislation affects my constituency and the Lacada brewery in Portrush, which I visited with the First Minister in February. When Minister Givan is next in my constituency, it is somewhere that I would like to take him to show him, at first hand, the negative effects of not having relevant legislation in place.

I also welcome the proposal to allow under-18s into licensed premises, providing that alcohol is not available. That will enable hotels to provide safe and controlled environments to hold events such as teenage discos and school formals and to help to sustain hotels' incomes during off-peak seasons and provide more jobs and a boost to the economy.

I welcome the Bill and hope that MLAs can see it through to provide a fully functional liquor licensing Bill that considers the hospitality sector and the health and well-being of our constituents.

12.15 pm

Mr F McCann: Like Adrian, I will try to be brief, because there will be a number of other opportunities to discuss the Bill, including in Committee.

This has been much anticipated legislation, and I have no doubt that, over the next few weeks, we will hear a wide range of opinion and listen to the experts on the important decisions that the Assembly needs to make on the sale and consumption of alcohol. We have been advised by the Department that the purpose of the Bill is to place restrictions on the advertisement of intoxicating liquor in supermarkets and off-sale premises; to introduce occasional additional late opening for certain licensed premises; to make modest changes to the Easter opening hours for certain licensed premises and registered clubs; to extend drinking-up time for a trial period of one year; and to align intoxicating liquor and entertainment licences to licensed premises allowed late opening. It will also remove the requirement for children's certificates in licensed premises and registered clubs and permit underage functions in licensed premises and registered clubs, as long as certain conditions are met. It will require licensed restaurants to display the conditions of their licence and will place a requirement on delivery people to record the details of identification shown, if there is any doubt that the person might not be over 18 years of age. The Bill will also permit the formal approval of codes of practice on responsible retailing and make minor changes to the law affecting private members' clubs. These are very modest proposals indeed.

I was on the Committee for Social Development for some years, and my party has always argued that, whilst we need to deal with all the problems thrown up by the sale and consumption of alcohol, including poor health, scenes of excessive drunkenness and antisocial behaviour, we also need to look at the impact that legislation has on wider society. In fact, we as legislators need to find a happy medium that not only deals with the above problems but recognises the rights of citizens to enjoy all aspects of social interaction, much of which is connected with the provision of entertainment, the sale of food and the sale of alcohol. We have all seen on TV ugly scenes of public disorder, which is one of the effects of the sale of alcohol on people and communities. We have also heard of the dangers to health of consuming alcohol and the cost to our health service of treating the after-effects of alcohol abuse. We as legislators need to look at ways of dealing with this and take into consideration the best ways of moving the debate forward. I have been concerned for a number of years that we have not effectively dealt with the issue; in fact, we seem to have taken one step forward and two steps backwards, certainly during my time on the Committee. We need to find a happy medium, but, in doing so, we need to recognise what people want from us in the legislation.

Over the next weeks, we will hear from an industry that is in the business of providing places of entertainment, hotel accommodation, restaurants, bed and breakfasts and registered clubs, which provide tens of thousands of jobs and serve increasing numbers of tourists. The industry is fast becoming one of the success stories of our economy and brings in an estimated £1.1 billion annually. I have been told that the industry continues to modernise but says that the legislation has not been modernised to meet the pace of changing circumstances, something that I do not believe a light-touch approach, or what the Department and Minister call "modest proposals", will do.

If we fail to grasp the nettle this time, we will be back in the Chamber in another few years speaking of missed opportunities. Legislation needs to recognise the changing

society in which we live. It needs to recognise that almost 70% of alcohol is bought in supermarkets and off-sales for consumption at home. It is also estimated that 22% of people drink at home alone. Those are frightening statistics. That is where the main problem exists, and the only proposal that we have in front of us is to ban the advertisement of alcohol 700 yards from a shopping complex. A chairde, the battle that we need to win is against the increasing consumption of alcohol at home. I understand from figures supplied in lobby letters and by Hospitality Ulster that just 20% of alcohol is consumed in pubs, 16% in restaurants and 9% in hotels, which, we are told, is a heavily regulated environment. All that needs to be taken into consideration when making decisions. There is no control over the sale of alcohol in supermarkets, shopping centres and off-sales. People can go freely. At least within the confines of the places that I have spoken about, there is direct control, professionalism and a will to move this forward.

I live close enough to Belfast city centre to be in it quite regularly. Over the Easter period, you meet tourists and other people who are in the city centre to eat. They find it difficult to socialise and tap into the entertainment that can be expected in other countries 52 weeks a year. I believe that there are other anomalies in the legislation that need to be dealt with, not least the whole question of Drumbo racetrack, which Naomi mentioned; the prohibition of young people going to entertainment in licensed premises; and microbreweries and what they can offer for employment in the future.

Mr Stalford: Of the constituencies that will be directly affected by the legislation and the problems that it seeks to address, my constituency of South Belfast probably ranks very high up the list, because, on any given weekend, you can see the problems that are associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol, particularly in the city centre.

I welcome the fact that the focus that has driven forward these measures is protecting local communities and their interests. I sense — I think that this is a good thing — that there is broad consensus around the Chamber on the direction in which people want to go. There might be some differences in emphasis, but I think that there is broad consensus. I sensed that in the Committee. I was therefore a bit disappointed when my constituency colleague Claire Hanna seemed to set up some straw man arguments and then knock them down again. They were arguments that actually neither the Minister nor anybody from these Benches had been making about the licensing regulations. It might be a source of disappointment to some people that the arguments that they were anticipating have not actually been made and that the legislation that has been produced by the Minister is a rounded piece that strikes a balance — an important balance — between promoting jobs and growth in the economy and protecting young people, in particular, and wider society.

In that vein, I welcome various measures that are contained in the draft legislation. I welcome the fact that we will ban vending machines that dispense alcohol. I also welcome the fact, however, that the ancient and noble tradition of the school formal will be allowed to continue in Northern Ireland because of the measures that have been brought in, whereas it had previously been under threat as a consequence of the existing regulations. I am pleased that the Minister has taken action on drinks promotions. I

welcome that. I also welcome the fact that the phenomena of dial-a-drink or dial-a-carry-out is to be tackled. As has been said numerous times by many Members, we need to take action in that area.

I am pleased that there is agreement across the Committee that more must be done to help microbreweries and craft distillers. I think that there is agreement in that regard. I agree absolutely with what the Member for East Belfast Mrs Long said with regard to the tourism value and potential that those outlets have. That is something that can be uniquely Northern Ireland —

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. I just felt that I had to mention Yardsman, because I went blank at the time and I do not want anybody in the constituency to think that I favour one brewery over another. I am sure that they would welcome you to come and visit as well.

Mr Stalford: Well, I am not going to pass comment on where and when the Member for East Belfast drinks, but I am sure that it would never be before she gets to her feet in this place.

It is important that we recognise that this is a potential growth area for the economy and tourism.

I am pleased that the Minister will indicate — or I hope he will — a preparedness to work with us to accommodate those establishments in the legislation.

I do listen sometimes to some of the contributions that are made, and they almost make continental Europe sound like some sort of Utopia, where everything is open all the time and everyone is allowed to do whatever they want, but they all do it moderately, and everyone gets along terribly well. We need to be slightly more realistic about that when everyone is holding up the great continental model of how to do things. I am not saying that just because I am an anti-federalist. We need to be a bit more realistic, reasoned and grounded in the arguments that we make.

I am pleased that it was acknowledged that complete liberalisation and 24-hour opening was not a path that people wanted to go down. I am pleased that people recognise that increased liberalisation of opening hours does present particular challenges. I welcome the massive uptake that we have had in tourism in this city over the past 15 years. That is a good thing, but I for one would hate to see Belfast, Londonderry or any other part of Northern Ireland become like some seaside resorts in England, where people go for hen and stag weekends and just ruin the town and its reputation. They make eejits of themselves and make life miserable for the people who live there.

We all want tourism, but we want tourism that brings with it benefits for the community. There are more important things sometimes than just money. It is important that we use this as an opportunity to —

Mr E McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: Yes, of course.

Mr E McCann: In light of the Member's accurate remarks about the dreadful effect that overconsumption of alcohol can have in certain places, would he agree that there is a contradiction and anomaly lurking in the Chamber in that we are discussing during what hours alcohol can legally be sold while at the same time in our society there is an absolute restriction on the possession, much less the

sale, of the relatively benign, harmless, non-existent drug cannabis? Should not that be resolved at the same time as we decide on the opening hours for pubs and clubs?

Mr Stalford: I was going to say that the Member is at perfect liberty to bring in private Member's legislation in that regard, but he is not any more. I am certain that if the Member was to bring a motion or what have you before the House on that, there would be a full and varied discussion. He probably knows what side of that discussion I would be on, as I do not support the legalisation of cannabis, but I recognise the very negative impact that alcohol can have on our society. I also recognise that there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that cannabis is not a benign substance and it does have a negative impact on people who use it frequently or over any sustained period.

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: I will.

Mr Bell: I appreciate the Member highlighting that matter, because much of the professional medical psychological and psychiatric opinion is what the Member says. We are speaking of licensing today, and I have raised the increased dangers, according to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, of alcohol over cannabis. However, it should be remembered that cannabis is known as the gateway drug. It does lead to mental health problems, particularly among young people. So, to send out the message that this is harmless is not only wrong but has the potential to significantly damage young people's mental health.

Mr Stalford: I thank the Member for his point, and he is obviously much more qualified in these matters than I am. It is probably better that we —

Mr Kennedy: — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Stalford: Through his professional career, Mr Kennedy, not through consumption. *[Laughter.]* I think Mr Bell now has grounds for a defamation action.

We recognise that this legislation is a positive step forward. I think there is a genuine spirit not only in the Committee but around the Chamber to bring this process to a quick conclusion by putting in place a framework that allows for the expansion of vital tourism sectors but that also protects wider society. I commend the Minister for bringing the measures before the House, and I look forward to working not only as a member of the Committee but with all Members around the Chamber to see them progress.

12.30 pm

Ms Mallon: Although I am still a new Member in the House, I am aware of the deep sense of relief, particularly in the hospitality and tourism industries, that the Bill is finally making its way through the Assembly, and I want to pay tribute to the Minister for bringing it forward so early in his tenure.

As many Members have pointed out, the purpose of the Bill must be to modernise liquor licensing legislation whilst working to reduce alcohol-related harm. Absolutely no one, especially in the hospitality sector, is making a case for deregulation. Therefore, the fear of a leap to deregulation should not cloud consideration of the merits of any amendments which might subsequently come forward in respect of the Bill. If we are serious about

joined-up government, then the Bill should seek to make the licensing trade offering more sustainable and attractive to tourists. This is a strategic objective that is necessary if we are serious about meeting targets in tourism income and delivering the 50,000 jobs related to it by 2020.

As this is only the Second Stage of the Bill, the Committee for Communities, as Mr Stalford pointed out, has not yet had time to reach a considered and agreed view on any amendments that it intends to bring forward. It is fair to say that there is a degree of consensus emerging but it is not for me to pre-empt that discussion or process.

The SDLP, recognising the critical role that the hospitality sector plays in shaping the visitor experience and in providing a controlled environment in which to consume alcohol, would be in favour of extending opening hours, increasing the number of nights applicable under additional hours late licences and increasing the extended hours late licence per year beyond what is currently proposed in the Bill. This is not to advocate or create a situation where we have 24-hour access to alcohol in clubs and bars; these increases would be intended to moderately and modestly build on those proposed by the Minister.

Regarding the anomaly affecting under-18s at functions like school formals, the SDLP welcomes the proposals contained in the Bill permitting the attendance of under-18s at functions in licensed premises provided the bar remains closed. However, we are also sympathetic to the amendment being suggested by Hospitality Ulster to allow under-18s to remain in licensed premises after 9.00 pm when attending a family function. It is unnecessarily harsh, for example, to send a 16- or 17-year-old away at 9.25 pm from the birthday party of a father, mother or grandmother where there are responsible adults and family members present. The proposed amendment adds a helpful degree of common sense in a responsible manner, which is, I believe, the balance we should be seeking to strike in this legislation.

When we are talking about responsibility, it is important to acknowledge and recognise the great strides that have been made by the hospitality sector to promote the responsible sale and consumption of alcohol. The industry itself, as many Members have pointed out, has voluntarily led the way when it comes to developing and implementing an industry-wide, high standard code of practice. I welcome the fact that the Bill intends to give statutory recognition to that effort and the industry code of practice, which, I would argue, provides a model for other industries to learn from.

The SDLP's current thinking is to welcome key aspects of the Bill and expand on others. We also believe that a gap exists in the legislation through the fact that it omits the licensing of craft breweries and distillery premises. I believe that this fails to recognise the unique and bespoke offering that many microbreweries and distilleries offer in the industry and in enhancing our tourism offer. There has been much consensus on this point during the debate today and I look forward to seeing it evolving and being shaped as the Bill moves forward.

Ms S Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. When talking about the industry, bringing things up to date and, obviously, craft beer, you rightly point out that there is agreement here. There are barriers but there is also the aspect of actual sales outputs and looking at online sales to be considered. This is a new venture for a lot of those

industries and it may be worth looking at the context of the online sale of alcohol as well.

Ms Mallon: I agree with the Member; it is something that we need to take a serious look at to reflect the reality of the current situation. I also agree with Mr McCann that the anomaly and omission of Drumbo racetrack is another matter that we should explore further as the Bill progresses.

As Members who have spoken before me have rightly pointed out, 70% of alcohol in the North is consumed at home. In a vast number of situations, that is fine and poses no problem, as it is taken in moderation; in other instances, however, it is much more harmful, and I understand the rationale for a debate on minimum unit pricing.

In my constituency — this has been referred to a number of times in the debate — we have the harmful and illegal phenomenon of “dial-a-drink”, as it is known. It certainly needs to be tackled more robustly. I do not believe that enough is being done to tackle it, considering the very harmful nature of the activity.

We cannot address all of our concerns about the harmful overconsumption of alcohol in this Bill, but it must modernise our outdated licensing legislation and do so in a way that supports and encourages the consumption of alcohol in a controlled and safe environment.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. Given that Hospitality Ulster has made a case for the modernisation of legislation to include one extra hour for the sale of alcohol on two nights per week, it might be useful, as we work through the Bill, for the Minister to explain why he proposes to allow an additional hour for the sale of alcohol on only 12 occasions a year. What is the rationale for that proposal?

Ms Mallon: Thank you, Mr McGlone. I am sure that the Minister will take the time to explain the rationale of the Bill as currently proposed.

I will take some time to outline the SDLP's current thinking on amendments — undoubtedly, we will table others as the Bill progresses. We seek the right balance between a robust and attractive hospitality and tourism sector and ensuring that we do what we can to reduce the harm caused by drinking, particularly drinking in the home. We look forward to considering the Bill in Committee and to working with the Minister as we shape the Bill going forward.

Mr Agnew: In the Bill and in our discussion of the issues with alcohol we have to balance personal freedoms with the need for public health and safety. In at least one aspect of the Bill, we have to look at respect for religious practice, but we have to balance freedom from religion with freedom of religion. I hold the pillar of personal freedom very highly, and we should restrict personal freedom only where we can demonstrate through sound evidence that there is a need to do so for reasons of public health and safety. The difficulty with our licensing laws as they currently exist and, indeed, as they would exist if the Bill were passed unamended is that they place significant restrictions on personal freedoms without the evidence that they do what they purport to do, which is to reduce alcohol-related harm.

Jonathan Bell spoke at length — I think that he took the extra half hour of winding-up time that debating a Bill allows for — and he highlighted the dangers of alcohol. Nobody can say that alcohol is a benign drug. Without

getting into the debate about cannabis, I do not think that anyone would make the point that alcohol is a benign drug. We know the harm that it does in our society. Jonathan Bell read out the number of deaths each year, and we know about the impact on families and the alcohol-related acts of domestic violence. I do not want to stand here and say that alcohol cannot be harmful. However, that does not necessarily justify the restrictions in our licensing laws, unless we can demonstrate that they reduce that harm. I put that out there. That is why, although the Bill is coming from the Minister for Communities, we need input from Health and, in terms of crime and public safety, the Department of Justice. I hope that, in the four years since the initial consultation on the Bill, that evidence-gathering has taken place and that perhaps the Minister will refer to some of it as he winds up. Those are the types of question that I, as a member of the Communities Committee, will tease out as part of the deliberations.

I support and welcome the Bill today. It has been a long time coming, but, to be fair to the Minister, he has acted quickly to bring forward what is the first piece of significant primary legislation in this Assembly mandate. I welcome the Bill, but it needs my significant amendment. As a member of the Committee, I will hear the briefings from the industry, which has been referred to a lot. It is important that we look at how we support not just our tourism and hospitality industry but the constituents who elected us, who enjoy their evening social life and do not feel that it is the Government's place to tell them what time they should finish drinking and what time they should be home and in their bed by.

Let us look at some of the key provisions in the Bill. We have the welcome proposal to have extended opening hours, but it is limited to 12 days a year. I do not know some of the evidence that the Minister has available on how that helps to improve public health and safety. Why was 12 days chosen? Why such a restriction? Why not more frequently? To me, it seems reasonable to look at whether that could be common and normal practice at weekends, but I do not have set views on that. I am open to hearing the evidence and the debate.

I welcome the half an hour extra drink-up time. It is a one-year trial. I do not think that it will see the decay of our civilisation, so I suspect that it will be a successful trial. I hope that, after the one year, the Minister will be open to extending it. To be fair to the Minister, I am taking it as read because it is in there that he is open to that. I hope that the one-year trial becomes normal in future.

Easter opening hours have caused much debate, certainly on radio phone-in programmes. They have certainly caused much consternation in the industry but also among our constituents, who want to enjoy the extended bank holiday weekend in licensed premises. I said at the start that I fully respected the religious views that exist in our society and the right of people to uphold religious practice and customs, but I do not see where those who do not subscribe to those values in any way impinge on those who do by consuming alcohol in licensed premises as opposed to at home, which is clearly what takes place instead. I do not fully understand the need for our restrictive licensing laws over Easter. I welcome the small step that has been made in extending the opening hours for the Thursday before Easter, but we can and should go

further than that and normalise the licensing laws for the Easter weekend.

12.45 pm

I have no set position on this at this point in time, but I have some concern about the proposal to align entertainment licences with liquor licences. I suppose that there are two ways that you can do that. You can move liquor licences to entertainment licences, and I would have perhaps been more positively disposed to that. Instead, we have gone the other way and seek to further restrict entertainment licences. A lot of the drive behind the need to reform our licensing laws has come from those who want to see a degree of liberalisation or modernisation — the term that is often used — of our laws. This proposal runs contrary to that. I will listen to the evidence as to why they feel the need to do that. The Minister said that it would assist the police. I have not seen the briefings from the police that say that it is necessary, so I will look at those. I will listen and make a decision, but my instinct is that the extra restriction is the wrong direction of travel.

That may be a counterexample, where there is arguably a simplification in aligning entertainment and liquor licences. Although, as I said, in my view, it is moving in the wrong direction. Overall, however, there has been a strong, justified call to simplify our licensing laws. I am not sure that the Bill meets that challenge, and, through the Committee, I am happy to interrogate how we can do that on a wider basis. Our licensing laws are undoubtedly complicated, and, having researched them, I am still unclear as to what some of them are, so those who have not had cause to look into our licensing laws in great detail can only be confused.

Reference was made to an example of where we are further complicating things, and that is the requirement on restaurants to display on signage when and in what circumstances they can and will serve alcohol. The Minister referred to restaurants acting like bars. I am interested to see why we need that distinction in our licensing laws and why we feel the need to have so many different categories of licence.

As I said at the outset, the Bill is a long time coming. It is to be welcomed. Even if the detail and the progress that I would like to see is not all contained in it, it is at least a vehicle for change, debate and the modernisation of our licensing laws. However, I see it as baby steps, and I hope that, over the passage of the Bill, we can grow up a lot when it comes to how we regulate and license alcohol sales in our society. I support the Bill's progress, but I hope that it will see major reforms before its Final Stage.

Mr E McCann: One of the issues that arises from the debate is this: what is it about our society that causes so many people, and particularly young people, to want to get out of their heads over weekends and, indeed, on weekdays? The point has already been made, but it is worth underlining. You cannot walk through many of our city centres late at night or early in the morning at weekends without seeing squares and streets in city centres carpeted with young people out of their heads on drink. There is a very interesting question as to why that happens. What is it about alcohol that leads that to happen? That needs investigation. It needs medical and social evidence to be brought before us before we can

make a determination as to what conclusion shall be drawn from that.

Let me make it clear: I am not saying this in any killjoy sense. I support the Bill and see no reason for restrictions on the sale of alcohol or, indeed, of anything else. If it is already legal in some circumstances, I can think of no argument why the hours should not be expanded or people prevented from exercising their choice. However, I do say this: when we are discussing the availability of mind-altering substances — that is what alcohol is — we must see it in the round. I see no point at all in isolating alcohol from other drugs. Incidentally, it was said during the debate that cannabis is a gateway drug to more dangerous drugs. No, it is not. There is no evidence — none whatsoever — for this proposition, despite the fact that it is trotted out over and over again by people who claim to be experts. I ask them to produce the evidence and to examine the situation in Portugal between alcohol, which is sold on a non-restrictive basis —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr E McCann: Yes, I will.

Mr Agnew: I previously worked in the field of community drug and alcohol awareness. I saw evidence that the gateway drugs are tobacco and alcohol, not cannabis.

Mr E McCann: Absolutely. Fortunately, or unfortunately, in my career as a journalist, and simply because of growing up and living in this society, North and South, I have known quite a number of people who, sadly, were addicted to heroin and many who died from heroin. I had a good friend — a flatmate — who died from heroin. He had wanted to get off the heroin but simply could not. He began on alcohol. I have never known a junkie who did not start on alcohol before going on to heroin; I have never known a junkie who went on to heroin as a result of smoking cannabis.

There is a connection between alcohol, which we are discussing here, and harder drugs: unlike alcohol, cannabis is illegal. To get your hands on cannabis, you have to go into murky territory outside the law, where all sorts of other substances might be offered to you, particularly by the people who are selling you cannabis. It is absolutely true that there are people whose health is being harmed by cannabis. Any mind-altering substance is bound to do you harm.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: This is the Second Stage of the Bill. I ask all Members to stick to the principles of the Bill rather than departing into another debate.

Mr E McCann: I will, of course, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. We might come back to the other subject that I referred to. If there was not a restriction on the introduction of private Member's Bills, there would have been a Bill along the lines that the Member suggested. There will be such a Bill before this session is over.

Mr Bell: I appreciate what the Principal Deputy Speaker said, and it is part of the debate I mentioned. I accept what the Member said. We need this Bill. I have used evidence from the Royal College of Psychiatrists to say that alcohol is more harmful than illegal drugs. I make the caveat — this evidence is available from the NHS — that cannabis will damage your mental health, give you a link to schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses, damage your fertility and your ability to drive.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind all Members that we are debating the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. The debate being entered into is another debate and another discussion.

Mr E McCann: Thank you very much. There is an answer, but I will not give it now. In response to the Member, there is a comprehensive answer that I hope to be able to discuss at length in the House.

We are talking about dangers. The point has been made previously, and it is worth underlining. I doubt that there is one Member of the Assembly who does not know somebody, either a family member, a neighbour or a friend, who has died from alcohol. I do not believe that there is one Member who does not know families who have been torn apart by alcohol. That is one of the distinctive features of alcohol in our society.

If you turn on your television at night, you will see adverts telling you that, if you drink alcohol, you will have a wonderful time, you will be freed from your inhibitions, and no harm will come to you. Who has ever seen an advert for Guinness ending with the sight of young people lying on the pavement being sick into the gutter? Who has ever seen that, yet it is not an untypical result of overindulgence in alcohol?

I am a liberal. I believe in having as few restrictions on our behaviour as possible. I support the Bill, but I would go further, as I say. I think we are discussing it in an extremely narrow way. It has to be seen in the context of all sorts of other forms of human behaviour and the use of mind-altering substances, which is what we are talking about. They are all bad for you. It is a fact that, of all the substances mentioned here, particularly alcohol, the younger you are when you start, the more damage they will do to you on a permanent basis. There is a simple reason for that: the brain of a child or an adolescent is not yet fully formed and is going to be more damaged by alcohol or any other such drug than it would be if you began when you were 20, 25 or a much later age. We have to take all that into account. I am in favour of liberalising the laws, but I am also —

Mr Stalford: I thank the Member for giving way. Very briefly, he says that the younger you start, the more damage it does. Does he agree with me, then, that that is a solid argument against the Continental approach to alcohol whereby young people are exposed to it from a very early age?

Mr E McCann: I think that it is an argument for looking at this thing seriously and for saying that what we need here is not to have restrictions on when you can drink, at any age. Rather, what we need is education. We need people to understand the dangers of it and not to take it casually. In our society, over and over again, if you walk around the streets, you will see billboards, television screens and the rest of it urging you to drink alcohol. After all, why do companies like Diageo, which makes Guinness, spend millions of pounds making very well-made, artistically very impressive adverts to put on television? They do so to invite people to drink and drink more. That happens all the time, and there is no real debate about it.

I am not suggesting, again, that we put restrictions on advertisements on television or anywhere else. What I am saying, however, is that there are huge dangers here that can only be addressed by education, in every sense, for people from a very young age about the dangers of

alcohol. When we do that, without transgressing on the rulings you made, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, we should also include information and education about what other drugs will do and point out that, among the drugs that are freely available in our society, alcohol is the most dangerous, and some of the drugs that are illegal are much less dangerous. What sense can this make? Where is the rationality in this situation?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 1.00 pm 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 first person to speak after Question Time will be the Minister.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.58 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Business Skills

1. **Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Education how he is developing the skills of young people to meet the needs of the business sector. (AQO 323/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The statutory curriculum places significant emphasis on developing the core skills sought by employers and on preparing young people for the workplace. Pupils have opportunities to acquire and develop the cross-curricular skills of communication, using mathematics and using ICT. Thinking skills and personal capabilities, problem-solving, self-management and working with others are also mandated in the curriculum. At post-primary level, the curriculum covers the local and global economy, career management and enterprise and entrepreneurship. Young people investigate the need for creativity and enterprise, whether as an employer or employee, and identify and develop skills and attributes associated with being enterprising.

The entitlement framework ensures that pupils studying at Key Stage 4 or post-16 have access to a broad and balanced range of economically relevant and individually engaging courses. It requires all post-primary schools to provide pupils with access to a minimum of 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and 27 at post-16, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. To enhance the delivery of the curriculum, my Department provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise, employability and innovation programmes and events for primary and post-primary pupils, inside and outside school. Developing effective links between schools and the business sector is also an important aspect of developing business skills in schools and ensuring that our young people can appreciate the full range of progression routes open to them.

Mr Smith: I thank the Minister for his answer. Has he considered cross-departmental cooperation on the issue, such as the implementation of projects such as university technical colleges for 14- to 19-year-olds, as is done in England?

Mr Weir: There is always merit in exploring where we can have cross-departmental working, particularly with this aspect. That applies both between Departments and outside into industry. Particularly as we move ahead with looking at the curriculum, I am struck by the need for a degree of cooperation between schools and further education colleges. That impacts on the Department for the Economy, and there are opportunities for a greater level of nexus between the two Departments and between the skills involved.

It is also important that we have a high level of engagement with those at the coalface. For instance, I

recently met the CBI to discuss its thoughts. I know that, in the relatively near future, it is due to produce a report looking at better linkages across the whole UK. I am keen to tap into that and to carry on those discussions. There is already a range of activities involving schools with outside bodies such as Young Enterprise. It is important that those linkages exist.

The more that we can encourage those from a business background to have direct, hands-on involvement in schools, the better. As opportunities arise for school governorships, I will certainly encourage those from a business background to apply, because if we can broaden the skill set of the volunteers on boards of governors, that is also something that will be useful. It is about embracing all of that. I am certainly open to seeing a greater level of cross-departmental work.

Ms Bunting: What is being done to promote digital skills in schools?

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for her question. Work is being progressed by my Department. Without having pre-empted Mr Smith's previous question, I say that it is done on a cross-departmental basis. Work is being done by my Department, the Executive Office, the Department for Communities and the Department for the Economy to progress a digital skills programme, DigiSkillsNI. It has three main aims: to create an innovative, long-term strategic partnership among industry, education and communities; to maximise sustainable development, building capacity and empowering education; and to develop a skills pipeline for a generation of young people, creating an informed society and developing synergies between industry and education.

DigiSkillsNI believes that its digital learning in schools programme will help build that capacity in formal education for digital skills and computing. It therefore works at an early stage. The hope is that we will have an innovative and collaborative programme. That will help to ensure that we are on track to position Northern Ireland as a leading provider of digital skills in education. On this aspect, as with other things, it is important that our society is, as much as possible, ahead of the curve rather than simply trying to play catch-up with other societies.

Ms J McCann: The Minister mentioned the curriculum. Will he ensure that vocational subjects are given the same priority as academic subjects in schools and that children will have a broad-based curriculum to choose from when they are choosing what they want to do?

Mr Weir: That is an important issue. It has been approximately 10 years since the last overall review of the curriculum. That is something that we will be doing in this term. Even if everybody thought that everything in the curriculum was absolutely perfect, it is something that needs to be looked at in the primary and post-primary settings. It is important that we develop pathways to give that level of clear recognition and regard, particularly to vocational subjects.

I want to be careful that those operate in tandem so that they are not necessarily seen as an either/or. If it is seen as a zero-sum game of improving provision for vocational subjects at the expense of academic subjects, or some sort of rebalancing in that sense, that would be the wrong way to look at it. We need to ensure that a range of different pathways are available to pupils so that their

opportunities are maximised in the world of work and for the rest of their lives and that they are well prepared for that. That work will be a key element as we move forward on the issue of the curriculum.

As part of that, I have mentioned the role of the Department for the Economy and the CBI and other organisations. The involvement of some of those bodies, external to the Department of Education and to schools, will also be critical because we need to look at this in a slightly more holistic way and not simply look at what can be delivered by schools. It is about trying to ensure that we get the needs of all our young people fit for the 21st century.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Keith Buchanan, I remind Members that this question is specific to the Mid Ulster constituency.

Special Needs Schools: Mid Ulster

2. **Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of investment, including capital investment, that his Department has made to special needs schools in Mid Ulster since 2013. (AQO 324/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his question. There is one special school in Mid Ulster, which is Kilonan School. Since 1 April 2013, the Department has invested approximately £8 million in the school, of which £6.7 million was in resource funding and £1.3 million was in capital investment for minor works such as an extension to the building and the creation of a sensory garden.

Mr K Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. What action is he taking regarding the overall funding pressure on and in relation to special educational needs (SEN)?

Mr Weir: We are in a particular situation when it comes to special educational needs. Thankfully, for instance, we are seeing earlier diagnosis of special needs problems, which allows us to have an earlier level of intervention. Obviously, that will mean that there is an increasing level of demand for SEN support and the costs associated with that. For example, if we take a snapshot of the children with an SEN statement as one measure of that, the percentage of all students with an SEN statement has increased from 4.3% four years ago to the latest figure of 4.9%. A significant amount of the Education Authority's (EA) budget is being spent on special educational services, comprising a range of things, including special schools' support services, classroom assistants and transport costs.

Special education funding has been prioritised as much as possible as part of the budget-setting process over the last number of years and additional funding for SEN has been secured. For instance, in the last monitoring round, £5 million was secured from the Finance Minister as part of in-year monitoring. This is very much a demand-led service, so, should the EA identify budget pressures for SEN that cannot be met from the existing education budget, I will continue to work with Executive colleagues to ensure that we secure additional funding.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that response. I do not know whether he has the statistics to hand, but can he detail the number of pupils attending Kilonan School and whether the school has met the demand for places over the past five years? I know from speaking to people in the school that that is an issue in our local area in Mid Ulster.

Will he give serious consideration to a new capital build for Kilronan special school?

Mr Weir: I do not have the exact figures to hand. Kilronan covers the full remit of special needs schools, covering children aged three to 19. Therefore, it is a very productive model. The assessment of numbers for a special school is on a slightly different basis from the assessment for mainstream schools. I am happy to get the detail on the number of pupils to the Member.

All of these issues are considered as part of the overall calls for capital build, in which there is a level of open competition. One of the restrictions and, maybe, frustrations that all of us have is that a capital budget could be spent at least three or four times over in any one year. When there are calls for capital build, be it by way of a school enhancement programme or major capital works, there will be the opportunity for all schools to bid. They will then be graded according to the matrix of need and a scoring system. Given the nature of that, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on an individual school and say that it will be given priority. There will be fair and open competition for those places. I think that everybody is aware of the need to provide a particular level of support for special schools. In the near future, as we move towards the area-planning process, there will be a specific section on special schools. That will also form part of the assessment on the way forward.

Mr Milne: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will the Minister ensure that nursery-school provision for special needs schools such as Kilronan will meet the needs of children with complex needs and the needs of their families?

Mr Weir: The placement of children in nursery schools, particularly on the special needs side, is an operational matter directly for the Education Authority (EA). We always want to make sure that our provision is entirely adequate and fit for purpose. If it is an issue of a capital project or a development proposal, a particular decision will have to be taken. There is a limited amount that I can comment on directly, but I want to try to ensure that any facilities, particularly those for special needs children, are adequate for what is needed. We have to realise, particularly when dealing with special needs, that we are talking about what has been, in a virtuous way, a changing picture over the years. Particularly in the case of severe learning difficulties, children who many years ago would not have survived to school age are now able to enter the school system and go on to adulthood. There is a constantly changing position in special needs, and we must keep constantly up to date to ensure that what we get for that category of children meets their needs.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Ms Bradshaw, I remind her that any supplementary must be specific to the constituency.

Ms Bradshaw: I will leave it.

Minister for Education and Skills: Meetings

3. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Education for an update on any meetings he has had, or is scheduled to have, with the Minister for Education and Skills. (AQO 325/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for her question. I have met the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Bruton, formally twice since coming into office. The first occasion was an

introductory meeting before the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) plenary meeting, and it was, largely, a “getting to know you” session. Despite getting to know me, he was not put off meeting me on a second occasion. Last week, I had the opportunity to meet him again at the North/South Ministerial Council education sectoral meeting in Armagh on 21 September. At that meeting, I was accompanied by junior Minister Megan Fearon. I am slightly restricted in what I can say because I will make a statement to the House next week on that meeting, but I will give the Member a little bit of a taster to tantalise her so that she is here next week.

We discussed a range of education issues, including the implications of the UK referendum; educational underachievement; special education needs; school, youth and teacher exchanges; teacher qualification; and cooperation between education inspectorates. I will be able to go into those in greater detail when I make the statement next week. I am committed to developing in particular the opportunities for sharing best practice between our two Departments, and I look forward to continuing engagement with Minister Bruton over the months and years to come.

2.15 pm

Ms Dillon: I thank the Minister for his response. Has he read the Irish Government’s recently published action plan for education? If so, is he familiar with its specific proposals for reducing inequality and tackling disadvantage, including cycles of disadvantage within families and communities? It is important for both Administrations on the island of Ireland to work closely together on tackling disadvantage and underachievement.

Mr Weir: I have not read that specific report. Obviously, certain decisions will lie purely within the remit of the Minister for Education and Skills and relate to his own jurisdiction. There is a conference scheduled for fairly soon on learning exchanges between the two jurisdictions, and particularly on tackling educational underachievement. I think I am due to address that. As we all appreciate, Ministers on both sides of the border are trying to deliver the best we can in education, particularly in educational underachievement, with a limited level of resources. What is important for all jurisdictions is the learning of best practice. Even within Northern Ireland, I sometimes wonder whether there is knowledge of the very good things that happen.

I am keen to see, both on a North/South basis and within Northern Ireland, that learning experience. As I mentioned — I will go into in slightly greater detail next week — one of the agenda items we discussed was educational underachievement and how we can take forward a level of learning by way of practitioners exchanging views. I stand to be corrected, but I think that relatively soon there is a seminar in Newry — it may even be in the next few days — that I will be speaking at and trying to get that level of learning between both jurisdictions on the subject.

Mr McGrath: Does the Minister agree with me that having meetings with Education Ministers from other legislatures in relation to youth service provision would be a worthwhile exercise? Will he be able to keep the provision of youth services on the agenda for discussion with those other Ministers, to share good practice?

Mr Weir: As I said, I am always mindful of the need to, as much as possible, share good practice. That is about learning experiences. It is also sometimes about learning from where a jurisdiction has tried something that has not worked. That can also be a very good object lesson. There is the old saying that a wise person learns from their mistakes and that an even wiser person learns from somebody else's mistakes. I do not know, from that point of view, whether those of us in Northern Ireland will be the ones giving the education or having the learning experience.

In trying to learn best practice, whether that is on the basis of educational underachievement or youth provision, none of us in this House should be so arrogant as to believe that everything that we have done in every service in Northern Ireland, whether it is education or any other subject, is so perfect that we cannot learn lessons from elsewhere, or spread lessons. Whether that involves the Republic of Ireland, some of the other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom or indeed further afield, I am very happy to have those exchanges and try to learn those lessons. All of us in this House will be collectively focused on trying to provide the best possible services for all our young people. If we can learn from what has happened elsewhere to improve our provision, none of us should be so proud as to think that everything that we have done has been 100% correct.

Mr Hilditch: What are the NSMC areas of cooperation within the education sector?

Mr Weir: Specifically, the council meets on common policies and approaches. It will be areas such as education for children with special needs. Very specifically, obviously, on a North/South basis we have the Middletown centre. I have mentioned educational underachievement. There is the issue of teacher qualifications and trying to ensure that there are no artificial barriers there, and there are exchanges, which can happen at school, teacher or youth level. In each of the areas of cooperation, there are common policies and approaches that are agreed by the North/South Ministerial Council but implemented separately in each jurisdiction. There will be a relationship between the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and its counterparts at Westminster or other jurisdictions. One of the issues where there is a mismatch is in the remit of the Department of Education, because it concentrates on children's services through primary schools and secondary education.

For instance, the Department of Education and Skills in the Republic of Ireland is closer to, if you like, a DE plus the Department for Employment and Learning. It deals with issues of training and skills and further and higher education. There will be some aspects where there is not a particular match-up in that regard. The main issues that I have listed are where there is the most direct interface.

Improving Literacy and Numeracy

4. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the value added by the Delivering Social Change improving literacy and numeracy signature programme. (AQO 326/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his question. The Delivering Social Change literacy and numeracy signature project has been shown to be successful, in particular in enabling schools to develop effective ways of developing and targeting underachievement and putting in place

appropriate intervention strategies to raise attainment. As part of the dissemination of the legacy of the programme, the Education Authority produced publications for primary and post-primary schools entitled 'Literacy and Numeracy Legacy'. Those resources identified a number of longer-term benefits derived by schools, teachers and pupils from taking part in the programme: the value of increased external collaboration by teachers in and across schools; the positive impact of the professional development opportunities provided by the programme; and the benefits of effective parental engagement. Perhaps most importantly, pupils supported by the programme showed an increase in self-confidence and greater engagement with the whole curriculum. The legacy publications have been circulated to all schools, and I am aware that some school leaders are already mainstreaming the effective approaches to targeting and tackling underachievement that were developed under Delivering Social Change. We have a lot to learn from the signature programme, and I will be exploring further ways in which I can help to take forward the legacy of the signature project.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Minister, have your Department and the Executive any plans to reintroduce the literacy and numeracy programme? Do you agree that it has made a massive difference to young people by widening the net for free school meal entitlement? Can you give an assurance that you will think about reintroducing it?

Mr Weir: It is certainly something that I will always keep open. There are a number of aspects to this. There is taking the lessons that have already been learned and ensuring that they are mainstreamed and legaced. I certainly concur about the positive response as a result of the programme. We have to remember how it was funded, which is why, to some extent, this is also a question for the wider Executive. The programme was centrally funded and time-limited by the Executive. The cost of the programme was £15.8 million over three financial years, of which £13.8 million was provided centrally by the Executive. If central funding is provided by the Executive for this programme or for a successor in title, I would certainly be keen to see it rolled out. In the absence of central funding, I will look at ways in which successful interventions developed by schools can be sustained in the long term.

As with other things, it is also about learning a level of lessons. In the short term, primarily it is for school leaders to mainstream the approaches to tackling underachievement that have been shown to be effective in many of the schools supported by Delivering Social Change. I am aware from the feedback and the evaluation programme that that already happens in many schools. The managing authorities — the Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) — also have a role to play. They will use what they have learned from the implementation and management of the programmes to support schools in their work to target and address underachievement and to try to raise attainment levels across the school system.

Mr Lyttle: Why does the Minister think approximately 35% of pupils in Northern Ireland are not achieving numeracy at grade C or above in GCSE maths? What reforms or investments has he planned to increase attainment in that area?

Mr Weir: We have to remember that there have been improvements in our overall performance at GCSE and A level. In recent years, the gaps between the level of attainment of those on free school meals and those not on free school meals has been closing. There has been a greater and swifter level of improvement among free school meals-entitled pupils than non-free school meals-entitled pupils, and I want to see that increasing. There has also been a much greater uptake of mathematics. There may be a question mark over whether that also means that the standard dips slightly. I think that I am right in saying that, for the second year running, mathematics is the most popular GCSE subject. From that point of view, there are lessons to be learned from the mainstreaming of the delivery of numeracy and literacy. As with a lot of interventions, particularly for tackling underachievement, there has to be a bit of patience. The most effective intervention is early intervention, but, with various early intervention schemes, it might be 10 or 12 years before you see the direct dividends. We always have to ensure that we do not simply have quick fixes. If there is any way in which I can assist that process when we come to look at curriculum review, that should be encouraged. One encouraging thing is that we have seen a steady increase in the number of pupils taking mathematics, in particular, and STEM subjects. That is positive and is to be welcomed. Maybe the only difference between the Member and me is that I am looking at it as glass half-full, and he might be looking at it a little more as glass half-empty.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members who wish to ask a question that they should continually rise in their seat.

Mrs Palmer: I thank the Minister for his response thus far. The Minister indicated that the funding was over £15 million centrally to deliver the literacy and numeracy signature programme. Will he give a commitment that, in the interim, he will provide at least some of the budget to deliver it through the mainstream programme in schools?

Mr Weir: The project has completed, so it is not a question of its continuing; it is about trying to ensure that the lessons from it are mainstreamed. The bulk of the money, as I said, came centrally, and a range of activities are already happening on that basis. Am I in a position to give additional funding for that? No, I cannot give that commitment today. The Executive as a whole need to look at how we could take this forward. In particular, there has been widespread concern over the level of direct funding of schools, and we need to look at that. To some extent, before we look at additional or new programmes, we need to ensure that we get the maximum amount to existing resources and existing need. That question, from a funding point of view, is for the Executive as a whole.

Autism Support

5. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education how his Department provides help and support to children with autism. (AQO 327/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for the question. I know that he has a particular interest in the issue. I look forward to visiting Ballybeen to look at the issue with him in the near future.

I am committed to ensuring that every child receives high-quality education that enables them to fulfil their potential. Funding to the Education Authority ensures that there is

a range of educational provision to support children with SEN, including autism, and that includes mainstream provision, learning support centres attached to mainstream schools and special school provision. The authority is, I think, working to enhance autism-specific learning support centre provision throughout the region.

The Education Authority's autism activity and intervention service provides support to pupils in schools through training and advice for teachers and individual interventions with pupils. It also provides support to parents. In addition, my Department provides funding to the Middletown Centre for Autism, which has been able to expand its programme with direct support and intervention to children with complex autism who are referred by the Education Authority and to provide professional and parental training and research services. For anybody who has an interest in the subject and wants to learn a great deal more about it, a visit to Middletown — I did it earlier this year — is extremely worthwhile. Since the launch of the Northern Ireland Executive's autism strategy and action plan, the Department of Education has been working closely with the Education Authority, Middletown Centre for Autism and other Departments on the implementation of its actions. They include delivering training programmes for teachers, education professionals, youth workers and parents; providing effective support for pupils with autism; and working in collaboration with health and social care trusts. At that point, I will curtail my answer, as my time appears to have run out.

Mr Speaker: Members, that ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

2.30 pm

Area-based Plans: Update

T1. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Education Authority's preparation and publication of area-based plans. (AQT 236/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his question. That is likely to happen imminently. On Friday, I chaired a meeting of the area planning strategic group. In the past, everybody has accepted the concept of area planning, but I know from the previous Education Committee, for instance, that there has been a degree of criticism about its implementation. One of the things that we have very much tried to get right this time is ensuring that representatives of all the sectors are around the table. Arising from that meeting, I anticipate that the Education Authority will publish its overall area plan for Northern Ireland imminently, probably within the next week or two. That will then go out to consultation for about two months.

There is a limited amount that I can directly say about the area plan. It will be high-level and strategic in nature, but it is likely to contain particular provisions for special needs schools and will drill down into overall needs, divided up into the 11 council areas. The aim is then to move ahead with whatever changes happen after consultation and look at annual plans — the area plan is due to be on a three-year basis from 2017 to 2020 — and move towards specific, more localised plans to put more meat on the bones.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for his reply. Given the historical delays involved in all those processes, what is the timescale for the area plans to be completed? How will he and his Department encourage those deadlines to be met?

Mr Weir: I think that there is a realisation that there needs to be a step change in the work that happens on area planning. Simply letting things drift at times does not help anyone. It does not help any of the schools, it creates greater uncertainty and it means that the reallocation of resources within the broader schools area plan does not happen when it is needed.

As I said, the main plan should be published imminently, and there will be a two-month consultation period. I am acutely aware that that will probably require a re-profiling of a certain amount of resources within the Education Authority, and, indeed, the Department will provide whatever support the Education Authority needs to ensure that we move ahead in a timely fashion. Uncertainty, whether at a broader area level or at the level of individual schools, does not help anyone. I want to see us moving ahead as quickly as possible on some things, while ensuring that there is proper consultation alongside that.

Preschool Provision: Children with Special Needs

T2. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that all children with special needs who were seeking admission to preschool provision in mainstream schools have secured a place and to acknowledge that, four weeks into the school term, not all the children who were seeking preschool admission in a special school have been placed. (AQT 237/16-21)

Mr Weir: I will check, but my understanding is that places have been provided for all children with special needs. I think that I am due to appear in front of the Committee on 12 October, and I will be able to provide a greater level of statistics then.

There was an increase, particularly at nursery level. The advantage of early diagnosis means that we can tackle problems at an earlier stage. The problem with that for the education system is that it has to react a lot more quickly to find places for people. Consequently, particularly on nursery provision for special needs, there will be an ongoing process with the EA to try to provide a much more strategic direction for that. That will obviously be grounded in proper discussion and consultation, particularly with experts and parents' groups, as we move ahead.

As with all nursery provision, the vast bulk of those who seek a preschool place are able to be catered for, but not everybody will necessarily get their first choice. If there are specific issues in individual areas or there has been a problem with someone not obtaining a place at all, the Member should provide me with details of those and I will be happy to try to get answers for him.

Mr Maskey: I appreciate the Minister making that commitment. I will come back to him on that with some details. My understanding is that a number of children have applied for preschool special school provision and that has not yet fully been met. I make the point to the Minister that, although I am grateful for his commitment to look into this, if that were the case, we would have to say that it would amount not only to disparity but possibly to discrimination

against a very important sector of our community. I will come back to the Minister on that.

Mr Weir: Although direct placements are an operational matter for the Education Authority, my understanding is that places have been found for everybody. The issue to some extent is whether those are in the places that people wanted as their first choice and whether the provision is of exactly the nature that the parents wanted. We have a situation where, across the board with preschool places, there is a mix: about 62% of children will get part-time places, and 38% will get full-time places. There will not always be a match with what the parents want. I suppose the issue is whether someone has been denied a place entirely or whether there was a desire to have a place in a particular location or, indeed, whether someone wanted a full-time place but only a part-time place was available. The key bit is ensuring that at least there is a place for everyone, but it will not necessarily be that everyone gets precisely what they are looking for. If it is a question of people being denied a place entirely, again, I would be happy to take up any specific examples of that.

QUB Nurture Unit Evaluation Report

T3. **Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Queen's University nurture unit evaluation report. (AQT 238/16-21)

Mr Weir: I attended the launch of the report, and I heard about some of the worked examples in schools. The scheme, if you like, covers 32 primary schools. I was very encouraged by the response we got at that. One of the clear indications is that intervention has been of tremendous value to children, particularly to some vulnerable children and those who need that degree of help. The report draws a clear distinction between children in schools where nurture units have been made available and those outside the system. Another thing that came across clearly from the report was that, even though only a limited number of children are directly involved in a unit, intervention through nurture units in schools creates a whole-school improvement and children across the board get that. I have taken that not simply from the direct evidence in the report; I have had the opportunity, in my time as Minister and briefly before, to visit schools where nurture units have been made available. It is undoubtedly the case that you get a real sense of pastoral support for children in the units, and I think they have been able to take full advantage of that.

Mr Logan: I thank the Minister for his answer. What assurances can he give to schools currently in receipt of funding for nurture units?

Mr Weir: We are in the position where the next step is to look at how this can be in some way mainstreamed. There is a range of options in that, and some of it will depend on the funding that will be made available. There is a strong desire to see an expansion if possible, but we also live within a level of budgetary constraint. Designing a way forward in the system will take time and may take different directions, but I want to place it on record very clearly that, until we have a new scheme agreed and in a position to be implemented, funding will continue for the nurture units at all 32 schools currently funded under the nurture unit provision. It is important that there are no gaps in provision and that people are not left in a situation where it

is stopped in their school but then, because of a different scheme, reinstated at a later stage. It is important that, at the very least until we reach the point of having a new scheme that may benefit more schools or different schools — there is a range of models — there is an absolute guarantee that I will make it a priority to ensure that those schools are funded during that period.

St Mary's High School, Brollagh

T4. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Education whether he can reassure the pupils and families connected to St Mary's High School, Brollagh, Belleek that the school will not close in the foreseeable future, given that he will be aware that, in June last year, St Mary's ranked tenth for GCSE results out of all the schools across the North, albeit that it has been threatened with closure for a number of years, with plans to merge it with a school in Donegal seeming to have stalled. (AQT 239/16-21)

Mr Weir: In speaking directly on potential development proposals, there is a legal restriction on what I can say. The Member says that I will be aware of the situation at St Mary's: I would say that if I were not aware of it, the Member would be quick to remind me. I know that he has been very proactive on behalf of the school.

I understand that the previous Minister asked CCMS to look at the options and the possibility of a cross-border delivery model as an alternative to closure. At that stage, work was developed by CCMS. I think that there was analysis at that stage, dated from 2014 into 2015, that the cross-border approach would neither be cost-effective nor its quality threshold assured. That clearly did not appear to be a runner. What I think is the case is that the proposal simply does not appear to be doable. What is important is that the first level of engagement is with CCMS, as it is essentially the provider body. I have asked that it engages with the school, particularly on future provision. Clearly a conversation needs to be held to see what other options or alternatives are there.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for his response. Obviously the concerns about closure have been looming for the last number of years. I am aware that he is relatively new to the post. In that context, with closure looming — I was made perfectly aware of that when I visited a board of governors meeting recently with my party colleagues Councillors Coyle and Gallagher — will the Minister give a commitment to visit the school with me and meet the board of governors to hear their concerns?

Mr Weir: I am happy, sir, to go to the ends of the earth with you with regard to school visits. Seriously, if an invitation comes in, I would be more than happy to consider it. I am happy to visit schools. Again, simply visiting a school does not mean either the kiss of death or alternatively some level of revival for that school. Initial discussion of any possibilities cannot be on the basis of what was there previously. I think that that was explored very thoroughly by CCMS and by officials and was found not to be a runner. We probably need some level of fresh thinking. As CCMS is the managing authority, that discussion probably needs to be concentrated between CCMS and the school in the first instance. I am sure that I would be happy to accommodate visiting St Mary's as part of my general tour of schools in Northern Ireland. I am sure that, if the

invitation comes through him, the Member will ensure that he is invited on that visit as well.

Mr Speaker: I call Ms Clare Bailey for a quick question and a quick response from the Minister.

Relationship and Sexuality Education

T5. **Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of whether a consistent approach to the teaching of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in all our schools would help to reduce educational inequalities. (AQT 240/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are important issues for RSE teaching in that regard. From that point of view, we want to see as much consistency as possible. It may be less about removing inequality than about trying to make sure that all children are equipped to deal with the complex questions that face them regularly. As regards pure implementation, I will not be in a position necessarily to micromanage what happens directly in the classroom. I am not there correcting textbooks or ensuring precisely what the lesson plan is. I think that as much consistency as possible is something of advantage, but I appreciate that there will be sensitivities around the issue. It is important that we give schools a little space to deliver on that curriculum.

Mr Speaker: There is time for a very quick supplementary and a very quick response.

Ms Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for your answer, Minister. That being the case, can you let us know how the Department evaluates the education that happens in our schools?

Mr Weir: The evaluation, with a range of other issues, will be subject to Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspection, which will look at a wide range of subjects that are provided in schools. While it is funded via the Department, it is essentially at arm's length and will provide that level of independent evaluation. It is important that the relationship in that sense is not so close that there is any question of bias.

I have great faith in the ETI's ability to provide that level of inspection. It already does that for RSE and will continue to do that in an effective and professional manner.

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

2.45 pm

Finance

NAMA: Project Eagle

1. **Mr Overend** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the discussions he has had with the Public Accounts Committee in the Republic of Ireland regarding the sale of Project Eagle. (AQO 338/16-21)

7. **Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Finance to outline how his Department is cooperating with the Irish Government's investigation into the National Asset Management Agency's Northern Ireland property sale. (AQO 344/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Ba mhaith liom ceist 1 agus 7 a thabhairt le chéile. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 7 together.

I have written to the Taoiseach and the Finance Minister in the South of Ireland, assuring them of my Department's full cooperation with any investigation by the Irish Government into Project Eagle and the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)/Cerberus deal. I have not had any specific contact with the Public Accounts Committee — it has not been in touch with me — but I will, of course, offer any support that the PAC needs in the conduct of its inquiry, inquiries or investigations. The Member can rest assured that all efforts and investigations to reveal the truth of what happened with Project Eagle, and what happened subsequent to that in relation to NAMA and Cerberus, will have my total backing.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that response. During yesterday's Opposition day debate on NAMA, Sinn Féin and the DUP combined to remove from the motion references to damage to Northern Ireland's international reputation. As a frequent visitor to our key market of the United States of America, does the Minister not agree that the NAMA scandal has had a negative impact on our political and business reputation?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Member for her supplementary. It is, perhaps, worth putting on record what happened yesterday. The House united, through a majority vote, to ask for a full investigation into the NAMA/Cerberus deal and to say that it would support all investigations.

The Member will be aware that I spoke yesterday about meeting the National Crime Agency (NCA), but the NCA is not the only law enforcement agency investigating. An Garda Síochána and, in the States, the FBI and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) are also investigating.

As I travel, it is my opinion that businesspeople, particularly in North America, look on this deal in two ways. They believe, as do most of us in the House, that there was something rotten in how the deal was fixed, formed and brought over the line, as well as in how £7 million ended up in the Isle of Man. Businesspeople who I meet are heartened by the fact that people are revolted by that and determined to get at the truth.

There is an added layer that will, I think, give the Member some heart and confidence in how we are viewed abroad. Those in high positions in corporate boardrooms in North America also welcome the fact that, on the American side, the purchase of Project Eagle by Cerberus is the subject of intense investigation by the FBI and the SEC. They are two almost parallel but separate lines of investigation.

The people who I meet are confident that the FBI and the SEC have the resources to get to the truth of what happened. I have said this before, and I will say it again, Mrs Overend: it is my opinion that getting to the truth will not be easy, and I really think that we need an all-island investigation. However, I have a lot of faith in the agencies — starting at the level of the FBI and the SEC, and then, of course, the NCA and the gardaí — bringing to book and to justice those who are guilty of what I believe was wrongdoing.

Mr Speaker: May I remind the Minister, at this very early stage of Question Time, about the two-minute rule?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Apologies.

Mr Mullan: Minister, despite your protestations, I have to say that, during yesterday's debate, it was hugely disappointing that the DUP and Sinn Féin prevented moves for a new inquiry and an all-island investigation. Does the Minister agree that the actions taken by the Executive parties to create a smokescreen around issues with NAMA's sale of Project Eagle have only further damaged the credibility of the Executive and Government?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Member may have been at a different debate yesterday but I would say this to him: the debate I was at yesterday, and how I voted, was to support an all-island commission of investigation into the NAMA/Cerberus deal in the sale of Project Eagle. The Member is new to the House, but I have spent the last 24 months probing this issue and it is my contention and resolve to get to the heart of the corruption regarding the Project Eagle deal. I remain absolutely determined and will not be deflected from my desire and resolve to deliver what the people want, which is the truth about the sale of Project Eagle. The Member might have been at a different debate, but Sinn Féin in this House — if I may speak for Sinn Féin for a moment, Mr Speaker — and I, as Minister of Finance, will do everything in our power to get the people the result they deserve, which is to have the truth and have the wrongdoers brought to book.

Mr Milne: Buíochas fosta leis an Aire as na freagraí sin. Will the Minister provide us with an update on his recent meeting with the NCA?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. I thank the Member for his question. I met the NCA in Lisburn last Thursday. Finance Committee members will know, as they have been briefed repeatedly, that the NCA remains on course. All of us share the frustration of how slow and meticulous these investigations are, which is of necessity. That said, the NCA has delivered in the course of the inquiry, as it pledged to us, and has reported back to the Finance Committee and to me. While the nature of our discussions have to remain confidential, I am pleased that there has been no let-up in the NCA's intent to not only find out what happened in terms of the Project Eagle sale but to bring those involved to book.

I hope that the commission of investigation that is being suggested and proposed by the Taoiseach comes about and that it has an all-island brief. In the time ahead, there will be ample opportunity to test the resolve of the NCA on this issue. Like the Executive, the Minister of Finance, Assembly Members and the Finance Committee, the NCA will be tested on its delivery, and the officers I met understand this. In this test, they are determined to succeed.

Mrs Long: The Minister said that it is a test that this is properly investigated, not just for the Department of Finance and the Executive but for Members of the Assembly. Does he agree with my party leader, David Ford, who suggested that party leaders in the Assembly should come together and agree a means by which these matters can be investigated where there is common agreement around how this is taken forward, particularly in relation to the non-criminal matters and allegations relating to inappropriate behaviour in public office?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mrs Long for her question. I thought that that was Stephen Farry's idea yesterday.

Dr Farry: No, no.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Well if David Ford wishes to claim —

Dr Farry: It all starts with David Ford.

Mrs Long: Everything comes from David down.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There are many masters when there is a good decision like that.

My approach, as the Member knows, is one of inclusion. The Finance Committee has not decided the most appropriate way forward for it. The Executive have many ways to continue to support the many investigations into this matter and I hope that they step up and support all the investigations. I have no hesitation in saying that if parties want to gather together and consider a way forward they should do that. However, Mrs Long, perhaps the way to do it is through the Finance Committee where all parties are represented. The Committee is taking its own counsel as regards its next best steps.

For my part, I agree, and Mr Farry said — I am not sure whether I caught Mr Ford saying it — that it is essential, if we are going to get to the truth, that the commission of investigation has to have a wide ranging all-island brief. I hesitate to say that it has to go off the island as well, because some of the goings on and shenanigans happened in other jurisdictions, but I agree with Mr Farry that the commission of investigation needs to be all-island and we need to make sure that it can do its work north of the border as well.

Civil Service Wage Bill

2. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the total wage cost for the Northern Ireland Civil Service in each of the last four years. (AQO 339/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. The Northern Ireland Civil Service wage cost for the last four full financial years is as follows: for 2012-13, it was £927 million; for 2013-14, it was £951 million; for 2014-15, it was £943 million, and for 2015-16, it was £901 million.

The wage cost will materially reduce further in 2016-17 as the effect of the NICS voluntary exit scheme, which closed in May 2016, has a full-year impact.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his answer. It is encouraging to see that there has been a reduction in the wage bill. It will give us more money to go out to front-line services, although, obviously, some Civil Service work is front-line service. Can the Minister give some indication of what the likely spend will be over the next couple of years? Will it remain static, or are we likely to see a significant increase?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Member concentrates on the NICS — I understand that, as I have responsibility for the Civil Service — but he will know that the voluntary exit scheme extends beyond that. The reason that we can make the books balance, the reason that Mr Givan was recently able to give extra money to libraries, the reason that I was able to pledge more money for life-prolonging drugs, the reason that we are able to put more money into entrepreneurship and building the economy is that we have reduced the size of government. We have made sure that our colleagues in the Civil Service and the public sector were able to exit with good terms and a great package, but, at the same time, if we have only nine Departments, we do not need as many people to provide the services.

The Civil Service has done its bit; it has lost over 10% of its workforce under the voluntary exit scheme. However, I hope that people in the back-office jobs who want to retire in the years ahead will have the opportunity to do so and that, without affecting the quality or the excellence of the service, some of those back-office jobs can go. In that respect, Mr McCausland, I think that you will acknowledge that the digital revolution that we are in the midst of gives us the opportunity to do jobs more efficiently and, perhaps, not with the same number of staff.

Mr Butler: Last week, it was revealed that the Northern Ireland Civil Service absence rate had increased again to 11.7 days. Is the Minister concerned that the unsystematic roll-out of the voluntary exit scheme contributed to that deteriorating performance?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I am always concerned when we get sickness figures, and I studied them in depth at the time. I resisted the temptation that the UUP could not resist to have a dig at the public sector and the Civil Service. In my opinion, our public sector performs heroics every day, whether it is in our museums, our art galleries, our libraries, our hospitals or our schools, and we need to stand behind the Civil Service and applaud and commend its work.

Sickness levels are higher than I wish them to be. However, I wonder whether the Ulster Unionist Party would like to give us its sickness tables for the year and compare them with the Civil Service. People get sick. It is a tough job that people do in the public sector. Instead of sniping at those who have been ill during the year, we should reinforce our determination to build an excellent public sector and provide our people with the front-line services that they need.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Can the Minister tell us what savings the voluntary exit scheme has produced that can be reinvested in front-line services in our communities?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Yes, I can. I do not think that I mentioned the figure earlier in response to Mr McCausland, but the global figure for savings in the wage bill is around £150 million. I know that the Opposition are always interested in contributing to the debate on the Budget and where money should be spent, but they should acknowledge for a minute that the reason that there is additional money to spend on front-line services is the prudent way that we have managed the voluntary exit scheme. People leave with good packages, they are rewarded and thanked for their contribution, and we take the money that we save and put it right back out — right back out — to build the shared and prosperous future that we wish to see. In that regard, it is around £150 million saved per year that goes right back into the Budget.

Mr McPhillips: Can the Minister advise how many civil servants and employees of public bodies earn in excess of £100,000 per annum?

3.00 pm

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I cannot, but I am happy to get that figure for the Member. I suspect that, at the top grades, we have about 120 civil servants. I am happy to report to the Member in writing on exactly what wages those people get.

Dr Farry: Given the voluntary exit scheme, combined with the reorganisation of Departments and the warnings that we are getting about difficulties with the relocation of DAERA to Ballykelly, does the Minister, given his responsibility for the Civil Service, have any concerns about business continuity into the future?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I advise him not to listen too much to warnings. Listen to the AERA Minister when she comes in.

Dr Farry: What about the Brexit warnings?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: You really should spend more time listening to me, Stephen, and stop watching the news. I think that you will find that concerns on those issues have been exaggerated.

Is it a time of turbulence? Yes, it is, Mr Farry. Is it difficult for our public-sector workers to take on more responsibilities? Yes, it is. Despite that, the evidence that I have — I have travelled round many offices and activities that my Department is involved in from NISRA and the LPS to those who work with me directly, our economists and those working on European funding — is that business continuity is there to see. Rest assured, Mr Farry: you should not listen to any warnings in that regard.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Colin McGrath, I remind Members that the next question is a constituency-specific question.

Rathkeltair House, Downpatrick

3. **Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to allow land at the rear of the Rathkeltair House in Downpatrick to be used to promote access between businesses in the town centre. (AQO 340/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you, Mr McGrath. I thought that you might help us by mentioning the word “Rathkeltair”, so that we would find out whether it is pronounced “Rathkeltair” or “Rathkeeltair”.

I am advised that neither my officials nor the staff in Rathkeltair House — is it “Rathkeeltair”? — are aware of any contact enquiring about the use of the land for the promotion of access between businesses and Downpatrick town centre. However, Mr McGrath is obviously, I presume, working on the issue as a constituency issue with local traders. I am happy to discuss the issue further with Mr McGrath if he wishes to write to me or bring it up directly with me in my office. We are always willing to consider any plan that would help our town centres, which are under considerable pressure.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Minister for his response about Rathkeltair House. The land prevents people from accessing a retail park, which results, essentially, in Downpatrick having an out-of-town retail park. People are not able to get onto the main street. Whilst I welcome the Minister’s remarks, I ask him to instruct officials to meet the local council — the issue was raised as part of the master plan — and maybe with the Department for Communities. The initiative will breathe life back into the town centre of Downpatrick. We desperately need it, and I hope that we can get your support.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his supplementary. As Carla Lockhart did in relation to a health centre in Banbridge, you are making commonsensical points about

joined-up government and how government should help to revive our town centres. You have my pledge that I will do all in my power to bring the council together with my officials to make sure that the arrangement in Rathkeltair House — the pronunciation was 50:50; I got it wrong — is to the benefit of the town.

Mr McKee: Will the Minister consider allowing pedestrian access across that or any other piece of land under the control of his Department to encourage footfall from out-of-town shopping to the high street?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: “Any piece of land” might be a bit too generous, even for me, but, in this case, it is certainly a reasonable proposition. I know that Mr McGrath will bring that forward. If the Member wishes to join him in that, I am content. There are certainly a number of issues with government buildings where they are not doing what they could to build community in the areas that they are in. In this case, I am certainly happy to investigate whether we can do exactly what you are talking about.

Council Leaders: Meeting

4. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Finance to report on his meeting with local council leaders that took place on 22 September 2016. (AQO 341/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabhail leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I had a very positive meeting with council mayors and chief executives last Thursday, 22 September. It was perhaps the first time that any Minister had had the chance to meet all the councils; as you know, they have just reorganised. We discussed the range of options available to councils that could facilitate greater investment.

I view the meeting as the beginning of a new conversation with local authorities. I was delighted to see so many mayors present and represented, as well as CEOs. I heard their ideas and plans for economic development in their areas and outlined some of the alternative funding sources that could help them realise their ambitions. My Department stands ready to assist our councils in this regard. I will continue to engage with councils on this and other issues and I look forward to attending the next partnership panel meeting led by Minister Givan between Executive Ministers and local government elected members on 12 October.

I met mayors from all parties in Lisburn civic centre last Thursday, and I think that this is an issue that crosses party political boundaries. I see more and more evidence of the amalgamated councils wanting to step up and increase the pace of investment. When I said at that meeting that I would be a champion for councils that wish to step up at the Executive table, I think that I echoed the views of every Member here who would like to be a champion for their local council and step up for them if they will step up as well.

Ms Hanna: Is the Minister aware of the concept of a city deal? By way of context, Glasgow leveraged an extra £1.1 billion of infrastructural funding for their city. Did the concept of a regional city deal for NI come up, and did the Minister support it?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Ms Hanna, I see that you bumped Philip McGuigan down the list, but he may come back later.

A city deal did come up, but the young gentleman who brought it up, Councillor Tim Attwood, was outside the meeting for the bit that I was at. I know that he is an advocate for a city deal, a business zone, a city zone or even a west Belfast zone in his constituency. I have an open mind in that regard. I told the councils that have no problem with them exploring alternative ways of building up their council area, whether Belfast, Derry or Ballymena, but, in the here and now, we can deliver short-term to medium-term transformative projects, policies and strategies in each council area from our own resources.

If we ask the British Government for a city deal, that will bring us down a different path. I am not necessarily against that, but, in the here and now, the Executive control Invest NI's grant allocation, so we could influence that. We have good strong local influence over the transport infrastructure. We control the rates and we should have, within our gift, enough powers, resources and ability to make a difference in our council areas. If people want to come up with other ideas, I am happy for them to pursue those, but the things that I am interested in are what will really make a difference today and tomorrow.

Mr Speaker: I passed over Mr McGuigan for a supplementary question.

Mr McGuigan: Fadhb ar bith, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá sin ceart go leor. Given that the Minister spoke in glowing terms about the new councils and the fact that European funding is essential to them, was any concern expressed during the meeting regarding the future of EU funding?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist. As we left the meeting, the councils said, "You are going to be our champion", and I said that I would be champion for the councils that want to borrow, invest and build their cities, towns and villages. So I commend the great work that is being done to rationalise councils, but the people who want to take the next step forward are those who I would really like to partner in government.

EU funding came up at the meeting and was raised by some of the representatives from Newry, Mourne and Down — I do not know whether I have that order correct. In relation to Peace funding and, in particular, INTERREG funding, which I know is of grave, deep interest to Members, the statement from the British Chancellor, Mr Hammond, on 12 August falls short, as you know, of what I would have liked to have seen, particularly in relation to Peace and INTERREG cross-border programmes. The Chancellor made a commitment to underwrite project approvals and letters of offer and contracts made in advance of the autumn statement on 23 November. I believe that this is insufficient because it leaves €1.1 billion in other European funds at risk in the time ahead; funding for contracts that we expect to be signed off post-November.

It is important to say that I am also concerned about the €500 million that was to go out before 23 November. I think most of us thought that we had done marvellous work on expediting the application process. All the bodies had stepped up, including councils and the INTERREG partners, to ensure this money got out the door. At present, we have €120 million of letters of offer for cross-border job, environmental and health projects, and they are logjammed in the system.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister —

Mr Ó Muilleoir: With your permission, Mr Speaker, if I could continue.

The Executive, the Finance Department, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and the INTERREG panels have all stepped up to expedite those funding applications. In fact, I think they have done Trojan work to speed up the process to ensure that money is released to the peacemakers, the bridge builders, the entrepreneurs and the job creators on the ground. I respectfully suggest that their efforts need to be matched by the Irish Government, the British Government and the EU Commission. Notwithstanding the grave difficulties surrounding the EU referendum, all three of those institutions should commit to releasing this €120 million as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister that, when you wish to give a prolonged and detailed answer, you should ask for an extra minute at the beginning of your answer.

Mr Smith: The Minister will be aware that the rate of transferred functions grant was going to be reviewed when regeneration powers were devolved to councils to give them the resources necessary to deal with their extra RPA powers. Given the decision by the Executive to walk away from this previous commitment to transfer these functions, this review never happened and councils are still working from a figure that is now a year old. Can the Minister give a commitment that the Executive will now bring forward a new 2016 regulation to increase the grant?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Smith. I will not be over two minutes with this particular answer. That issue also came up at the meeting of councils last week. I want to see them have more powers and more competencies and to see them be able to step up. I also said to them, "Don't hesitate, don't delay, don't make any excuses". They have enough genius, ability, talent and resources to make a difference in their communities. I understand everyone is often focused on the next day and more powers, and sometimes the fact is that government is not joined-up enough. What I have said to all 11 councils is, "Press on, move forward, build the type of community you know your ratepayers are entitled to and we will support you."

I hope all these issues are resolved in the time ahead, Mr Smith, but, for now, let no one suggest that the councils should pause for a moment in doing the work that they can do in leading economic growth.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. In relation to an earlier answer he gave on Peace funds, can the Minister confirm that there is a very particular problem and challenge at the moment with the Republic of Ireland Government on stepping up to the mark? Does he agree with me, as I am sure he does, that this hesitancy by the Republic of Ireland Government could cost Northern Ireland a significant amount of money? What plans does he have to ensure they step up to the mark to make sure this money will come through in a timely way?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The €120 million I refer to, Madam Chairwoman, relates particularly to INTERREG funding, but you are right: the Peace money is going to come on stream and the Peace letters of offer will be ready to go out when the panels meet in short order. I do not want to get into blaming anyone for the hold up, but I have said that we have done our bit. InterTradeIreland, which is waiting for over €10 million to support small business in the border region, has done its work, and the letters of offer are ready to go.

The health boards on both sides of the border have done their work and are waiting for vital money to fund cross-border health initiatives. The Donegal, Derry and Strabane councils have done their bit on the greenways and are waiting for €15 million of funding to make that happen. We all have stepped up to the plate. I have asked that the three other bodies involved — the European Commission, the Irish Government and the British Government — match the intense effort we have put into this. I do not want to get into a blame game, but someone needs to match our efforts. This money is vital and urgent, and we need to get it released. In my view it is shameful that the money is logjammed at this stage.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Members, that ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions. I have to inform the House that topical questions 1, 6 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Brexit: OFMDFM Paper

T2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Finance whether he has seen the paper that was produced in May 2015 by the European policy and coordination unit in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, entitled 'Preliminary Analysis on the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union'. (AQT 247/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. A good sign of the importance of a document is how long the title is and how difficult it is to pronounce it. The Member will be aware that, when I came into this post, I commissioned my Department to carry out contingency planning on the effects of a "Leave" vote in the EU referendum. I think that that contingency planning, while relevant only to my Department, emphasised and highlighted the veracity of the report prepared by Neil Gibson for Oxford Economics about the potential downside of a "Leave" vote in all aspects of our economy — tourism, manufacturing, trade and services. I think that the issues highlighted in that document reflect that. I did not see anything additional there, but it is, I suppose, added evidence that we are set on a course that, I think, will be very challenging in the time ahead.

Mrs Overend: The Minister successfully managed not to answer my initial question about whether he had or had not seen the document. Is he as surprised as I am that that document, which forecasts such a major impact on the Northern Ireland economy and finances, was not disclosed either before or during the referendum or even in last week's Brexit debate?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her supplementary. As she will know, I am never surprised when people agree with me; that does not happen very often, mind you. I think she will accept that the case I have made for remaining in Europe is based not on the politics — set the politics to the side for the moment — but on the detrimental impact that it would have on our community, our economy, our tourism and our education sector. I think that that is held up by the evidence in the document that she refers to. What I will say — I perhaps have the privilege of doing this, since I am not wearing a political hat for this discussion — is that there is a real need for all of us to speak to, in

particular, our partners in the Irish Government, which is one of the reasons why I was a bit more circumspect than Mrs Little Pengelly in that regard. The Irish Government have a special obligation to make a case to the British Government at this early juncture about how best the crisis unfolding around the EU referendum can be handled. I have no doubt that the document to which you refer, with its very long title, would be helpful to the Irish Government in that regard.

Air Links: NI and Continental Europe

T3. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister of Finance whether he will work with the Minister for the Economy to make finance available to develop further air links between Northern Ireland and continental Europe. (AQT 248/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Robinson for his question. I met the Economy Minister yesterday, and among the topics we discussed was the need to try to improve connectivity. He recently visited Germany; you know that the prize we were seeking for a long time was a direct link from Belfast to Germany. I believe that the Berlin flight has started. I have a relative in Germany; he is not very interested in coming home, but he if were, it is now a lot cheaper and easier to come back to Belfast. I think that the Minister is pleased that we have delivered that. The use of the air connectivity fund is a matter for the Minister.

I also met recently Brian Ambrose at the City Airport, Graham Keddie at the International Airport and, of course, our friends in the smaller airport in Eglinton. All of them, I know, are determined to get more connections. In my view, it is essential. If we want to reap the benefits of the tourism infrastructure we are putting in place, never mind reap the benefits of our efforts to grow the economy, we need to have more flights coming into the two large local airports.

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the recent financial package announced for Londonderry airport is vital investment in the north-west's economic future?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I do not rise often enough to say that I am very pleased that there has been investment in the north-west, so you can be sure that, on this occasion, I am very pleased to hear that. I hope that it is just the start of a series of investments that we can all agree on. I know that Ballykelly was discussed in my Department earlier today. We are working on other pivotal, transformative projects, not least two roads into the north-west and Magee college, but I believe that the efforts by Eglinton to try to focus on manufacturing in order to get an extra impetus and stimulus to leverage the asset that it has is the right way forward. I hope that we can stand here in the time ahead, Mr Robinson, and commend it on winning that contract for manufacturing, which I know that it is chasing.

Business Start-ups: Rate Relief

T4. **Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Finance whether he would consider rate relief for new business start-ups to help provide an incentive for such start-ups and encourage growth in the sector. (AQT 249/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: We have a very complex, complicated and generous rate relief system, but, notwithstanding that, if we do not get the entrepreneurship piece right, we will not be

able to build our economy at the pace at which we wish to build it. I am therefore happy to look at ways in which we can encourage entrepreneurial hubs. We have at least two in Belfast: the Propeller PR idea and Entrepreneurial Spark in Lombard Street. I think that there is one in Ballymena as well, and, if we can look at innovative ways in which to make it worthwhile for people to set up businesses, especially by way of clustering, I am happy to look at that.

I am convinced that one of the ways in which to grow our small businesses is to keep them alive for as long as possible. Capital is very scarce and hard to get, and I would not like to think that entrepreneurial young people are being put out of business because of rates. If the Member wants to come forward with thoughts on the issue, I will look at them sympathetically. Of course, it will be a matter for the Assembly to decide on, but the matter does require looking at sympathetically.

Mr Logan: Thanks to the Minister for his answer. Do you have any plans for a new targeted rate relief scheme for small independent retailers?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: That goes back to Mr McGrath's earlier question about Downpatrick. Other areas, such as Banbridge, were mentioned. How do we bring life and vitality back to town centres, which have taken a bit of a hammering over recent years? I have been to Portadown town centre and Newry town centre. Some of this is to do with out-of-town supermarkets, but much of it is to do with there not being enough support for town-centre businesses.

I am therefore looking seriously at a new approach to the small business rate relief that would focus on the independent retailers, because they live locally. The money that they bring in is distributed around the economy. Every pound that we spend locally has a 70p benefit to the economy, whereas every pound that we spend in the large supermarkets may have only a 15p or 20p benefit.

Yes, I will bring some ideas forward. For me, the key areas are independent retailers and anything that helps to build our tourism product. Hospitality, tourism and independent retailers are the key areas, and I will hopefully be able to bring some suggestions to you.

Government Art Collection

T5. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his plans for the Government art collection. (AQT 250/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Some Ministers heard that there was a Government art collection only last week when it was mentioned on the radio. I had lots of people rapping the door trying to get some of the beautiful Neville Johnsons, William Conors and other wonderful pieces.

We have 1,400 pieces of magnificent work in our art collection. My desire is to liberate it so that it is not the preserve of Ministers or senior civil servants but can be seen when you visit your local hospital, health centre or job advice centre. My desire is that we make sure that the collection — this wonderful treasure that we have — is shared with our citizens.

I have brought together a panel of experts, led by Dr Denise Ferran, who is the president of the Royal Ulster Academy and also an artist. The other conviction that I

have, and I hope that Members will support it, is that we need to invest in our young artists. Earlier, Mrs Overend mentioned travelling and trying to promote business and make business contacts, but culture counts. People say that they want to come and take up jobs in this jurisdiction because they know that there is a strong cultural base, yet we do not invest in our artists.

After four years, when the graduates leave Ulster University, they have a beautiful end-of-year show. Representatives from the Office of Public Works (OPW) in Dublin come up to buy some of the work, but we do not buy any of it. We used to; we used to believe in investing in our artists. It would be a small amount of money, but artists have to eat too. We need to put our money where our mouth is and we need to invest in our artists, but we then need to share their fabulous work with the rest of the community.

I hope that the little panel of experts that I brought together, which includes Roisin McDonough, the CEO of the Arts Council, Paul Seawright, who is a great artist and the head of the Belfast School of Art, Deirdre Mackel from west Belfast and Paul Terrington from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), will come forward with some ideas around liberating the Government art collection and starting to restore it. I do not think that we have bought any of the artwork produced by our local artists in this century. Terence O'Neill revived —

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: — his collection in the 60s, but I do not think he would be very pleased with what we are doing today, which is disinvesting and divesting ourselves of our artists. I hope that the Member will come back again —

Mr Speaker: I again remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. He mentioned it in his answer, but are there any lessons that we can learn from the Irish Government's use of their art collection?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Mr Speaker, I thought I was Simon Hamilton for a moment there; I got carried away. *[Laughter.]* The OPW has 16,000 works. You can see them all online in a beautiful online catalogue, but we do not even have an online catalogue for all the artistic treasures that we have.

If I may, Mr Speaker, I will share one quick story, which will take less than two minutes. When Dr Denise Ferran came in to view the art collection, she discovered one of her own artworks which she did 30 years ago. That was good, but as an added bonus she discovered a work by her husband Brian Ferran, which we had bought in 1967. I hope that we can match the Office of Public Works in the South and have a really vibrant online catalogue as well as getting the works out to the public.

Brexit: OFMDFM Paper

T7. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance, in the interests of clarity, while giving him a third opportunity to answer such a question, whether he did or did not have knowledge of the 'Preliminary Analysis on the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union' paper. (AQT 252/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Ms Bradley for her question, and I will repeat myself again. When you examine the decision I took on the EU referendum, setting aside party politics, it was about saying that there was no upside economically in this particular vista for us, if there was a vote to leave or if we were forced to leave on the back of a vote in England and Wales. I stand over that. If you view the work that I did around my contingency paper, you will see that it is reflected in the predictions in the document to which you refer.

Mr Speaker: We have time for only a quick supplementary question and a quick answer from the Minister.

Ms S Bradley: Can I assume, then, from the Minister's answer that he did have sight of the document ahead of the referendum?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am happy to repeat to Ms Bradley that I am content that the position I took around the contingency plan and the position that we outlined is correct. Without going into the politics of it, time will tell whether we have huge challenges ahead in terms of offsetting the impact of the efforts to push us out of Europe.

Mr Speaker: The benefit of a brief answer means that Mr Chris Lyttle gets a question.

Cost of Division

T9. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Finance what work he has undertaken to tackle the cost of division, which an Ulster University report puts in the region of £850 million a year to Northern Ireland. (AQT 254/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I hope he is thankful to me for letting him in by my brevity. I support many of the measures that his party has championed around reducing the cost to our society of division. Of course, these matters do not fall to my Department, but I have made clear to every Department I deal with, including those of Minister Givan, who has just joined us, and Minister Weir, that where they can bring people together they should do so, and I believe that there is a cost saving in that.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Finance. I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Second Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/16-21] be agreed.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I thank the Members who took part in the debate for their contributions. There is no doubt that the Bill's Committee Stage will be a very interesting session when the members of the Committee explore the range of issues that were discussed. I outlined in my opening statement the broad principles of the Bill. Members got into specific detail on the Bill, but now the Committee will go into detailed evidence-gathering and, I have no doubt, will bring forward issues that we will seek to try to find an accommodation on. Let me give an undertaking to the Committee that my officials will be available; we will proactively engage with the Committee. Where we can find common ground on issues that Members have touched upon that were not consulted upon in the Bill, I will want to work towards that. Where we cannot find common ground will be a matter for Consideration Stage, and we will have to take positions on amendments that come forward on those issues.

Members' contributions were, in the round, well informed. However, it is always important to recognise that alcohol, as the Member for Foyle Eamonn McCann said, is a mind-altering substance, and it is important that we have that foremost in our thinking. Members indicated that, on the one hand, we need to tackle alcohol abuse, and I very much want to tackle the misuse of alcohol in our society; on the other hand, we want to support the hospitality industry where we can, and the Bill will introduce a much more regulated framework. Members may have other suggestions on how they believe that can be added to, and I will be open to that for consideration.

I will pick up on some things that Members said in the debate. Ms Gildernew, who spoke first, talked about some of those issues and used language about making sure that the Bill represents an outward and progressive Northern Ireland; she said that we need to use the Bill as a vision for Northern Ireland. Claire Hanna indicated that Northern Ireland needs to come into the 21st century. In response to those kind of comments, I make the point that one person's version of what is progressive and modern may not be the same as other people's interpretation of what represents a modern and progressive society.

Let me pick up on what Ms Gildernew said. Let us have a mature and informed discussion about all these issues and take evidence-based decisions. It is easy to fly the flag of continental Europe, and my colleague Mr Stalford touched on that point. People say that they do it there and ask why we cannot do it here. When I have been to continental Europe, the experience that I have had is of shops shutting in the middle of the day and not being open. When I come back to Northern Ireland, I find that shops are open more frequently than they are in continental Europe. That tells me that different approaches need to be taken in different

societies, not just in the United Kingdom but across Europe. We need legislation based on the particular needs of our community; we need to address our own drinking culture in Northern Ireland. Rightly, all Members who commented on this identified that there is a specific culture where binge drinking is prevalent, and that needs to be tackled.

People will have different approaches as to the best way to tackle it, but we have distinct issues in Northern Ireland when it comes to alcohol misuse.

Let me crystallise the financial cost across government of alcohol misuse: every year, it costs £900 million. That figure comes from a report compiled by the Department of Justice, when we were looking at the impact of alcohol misuse. Twenty per cent of all crimes in Northern Ireland are the result of people suffering from the consequences of intoxication of liquor; 45% of all crimes that relate to violence against persons are the direct result of individuals being intoxicated by liquor. One in six admissions to accident and emergency units is the result of alcohol misuse, which increases to 80% at peak times at weekends. We need to be careful that people do not take a blasé attitude to alcohol and frame their arguments in a way that can at times be dismissive to the real consequences of alcohol misuse.

There are approximately 12,000 admissions each year to acute hospitals as a result of alcohol misuse. Four thousand people in Northern Ireland are being treated for alcohol misuse. When we get down to the impact that it can have on younger people, 38% of 11- to 16-year-olds have consumed alcohol. There are dire consequences, and Mr McCann painted a very bleak picture of people lying on the streets vomiting. He said that advertisements always glamorise the consumption of alcohol and never show what it is like to live in a home where the mum or dad has an alcohol problem and how the children can live in a difficult environment as a result. The advertisements never take you to the scene in a hospital bed, where someone has organ failure as a result of a lifetime of alcohol abuse. You will never see that in advertising. How do we address that?

I accept that the vast majority of alcohol is now consumed in people's homes. Around 70% of all alcohol is bought in off-licences and supermarkets, taken home and consumed, often in social isolation. That is where the primary cause of concern lies. If people are going to drink, I would much rather they did so in a regulated framework, where it is an offence for publicans in licensed premises to serve people who are drunk. It is not an offence at home to continue to drink and drink and drink, but it is an offence to serve someone who is already intoxicated by alcohol in a licensed premises, and you will be fined £2,500 for doing so. The Committee might want to look at how hard such cases are pursued. In a licensed premises, there is a more regulated framework, where some social responsibility is at least being exercised on individuals who want to drink alcohol.

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

It is wrong for people to then say that that means that licensed premises and the regulated framework should not be subject to regulation. Here is where I part company with Mr McCann and some of his contribution. He described himself as a liberal on the issue and said that he would go much further. I did not take an exact quote of what he said, but I note that he indicated that there should be "no restrictions whatsoever". I stand corrected if that is

not an accurate quotation, but advocating no restrictions whatsoever is not being a liberal; that is being absolutely lawless on a very important issue whereby people should be entirely free to do whatever they want. We need to take a much broader, more sensible approach that balances the needs of the industry. The hospitality sector will, rightly, pursue greater flexibility. We need to ensure that, in that context, we take in the whole industry. It is not beneficial for people to be drinking to 2.00 am or 3.00 am. What impact will that have on our economy when it comes to 8.00 am and you are meant to be out at work? The hospitality industry and tourism sector will pursue a particular narrow remit, but we need to take a much broader look.

I am not aware of people being attracted to Northern Ireland for that reason or looking at Northern Ireland and saying, "I am not going on holiday there because the pubs do not have long enough opening hours". I am not aware of that being a big issue in people determining whether they come to Northern Ireland on holiday. In fact, it would concern me if we wanted to make a tourism pitch for Northern Ireland based on saying, "Come to the Province, and you will be able to consume as much alcohol as you want at whatever time you want". We would need to be careful of that. We have a tourism product in Northern Ireland that, in my view, is much better than having unlimited opening hours. We need to strike the balance.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not think that anyone was suggesting that more people would come to Northern Ireland simply because they would be able to drink more. The issue is that about 35% of what people spend when they are here is spent on food and drink in the hospitality sector. It could certainly enhance their spend while they are here.

Mr Givan: I am all for trying to enhance people's spend when they come here. I would like to encourage people to spend money on tourist attractions and going to facilities and not market Northern Ireland on the basis of the availability of alcohol. I do not think that that is the vision that we want for Northern Ireland. I do not believe that it is the progressive vision that people want for Northern Ireland, and I do not believe that it would deal with some of the issues that are being raised.

I outlined at the start that there were some aspects of the Bill that are very beneficial for the industry. I accept that they will want a lot more, and it is their right to make that argument. However, we as legislators need to take this in the round and address the important issue of alcohol consumption and, in particular, how we deal with the misuse of alcohol.

Mr Chambers: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Givan: I will give way in one moment.

Mrs Long and other Members talked about whether we should expose young people to this. I think it was specifically around demystifying alcohol for children and almost how moderation is the best practice in dealing with this. I would be wary about that approach. You could apply that approach not just to the consumption of alcohol but to a lot of things in life. That would be exposing children to something that, I believe, is absolutely harmful for them. Nobody here at any time advocated that children should be encouraged to drink alcohol — in fact, quite the opposite. When you bear in mind the devastating consequences of the misuse of alcohol, we would need to be cautious

about how we would introduce alcohol into the attitudes of children and the educational approach to them. We would need to be careful about that.

I will take personal responsibility for how I bring up my children, and I will certainly not expose them to an approach of moderation being OK when it comes to drinking alcohol. There is a wider issue of parental responsibility. I look at what happened at the MTV awards up in Londonderry. Streams of teenagers were piling out, intoxicated, of an event that had a licence. Where was the parental control? Where were the adults over 18 who are meant to accompany children of that age? It did not work. If people look at that, it should help to inform the approach that we take to what is a very important issue.

Mr Chambers: I thank the Minister for giving way. On cigarette sales, we have recently put doors on cigarette cabinets, introduced plain packaging, cut the size of cigarette packets and so forth because of the health implications for smokers and the strain on the health service. You have shared some horrendous figures with us on the effect that alcohol has in crime and the cost to the National Health Service. Does the Minister agree that there may be a case for considering some limitation of the display of alcohol in off-licences? You can go into an off-licence as a non-drinker and almost want to buy a bottle of alcohol because it is laid out so attractively and so colourfully. Does the Minister think that there is a case for bringing in some control on how alcohol is displayed in off-licences?

3.45 pm

Mr Givan: This will be an issue that Members will want to explore in more detail. There are proposals in the Bill by which I will restrict, through legislation and subject to the will of the Assembly, the ability to advertise within 200 metres of premises. We want to make sure that, when supermarkets have areas in their premises that are zoned off for selling alcohol, they are not able to advertise outside that area as well. That is something on which, I suspect, Members will feel we should go even further in tightening, and again I encourage the Committee to consider what areas we need to go further on to make sure we tighten it up as far as possible.

Members touched on Easter, and I think Mr Agnew commented about freedom of religion and freedom from religion. What I will say to Members is this: Northern Ireland rightly, in my view, recognises Easter, both in the Protestant and Catholic community, as a time of significance for religious belief. Without the basis of Easter, which is grounded on religious belief, there would not be a public holiday. You cannot on the one hand argue that we want to avail ourselves of the right of having a public holiday that is given to you on the basis of religious belief but then not expect that, in some way, respect should be given to that holiday period. That is something we should bear in mind.

There has been some proposal about the Thursday that goes into Good Friday, but, again, in the Irish Republic, the law prohibits the opening at all of any licensed premises pub in the South on Good Friday. They cannot open — full stop — on Good Friday. In Northern Ireland, obviously, on Good Friday, you are able to open. Yes, the opening hours during the Easter period are not what they normally are throughout the rest of the year, but Easter is not what

it is throughout the rest of the year, given the religious significance of it. We need to be mindful of that and take the balanced approach that we are taking to it.

Without going into any more detail, this will obviously be something the Committee will engage on. I think there are grounds where we can find commonality, but I have no doubt — I have every confidence in the Committee — that it will explore this in great detail. When we come back at Consideration Stage, there will be amendments that will need to be properly considered. The House, ultimately, is responsible for the legislation. It will be passed by the will of the Assembly, but we need to come to it on the basis of a mature and informed discussion. If we do that, we will reach a satisfactory outcome at the end of the process.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/16-21] be agreed.

BBC Royal Charter and Framework Agreement

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The Minister will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other speakers will have five minutes.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the content of the draft BBC Royal Charter and Framework Agreement.

As Minister with responsibility for broadcasting matters in Northern Ireland, I am pleased to be here today to debate the draft BBC Royal Charter and Framework Agreement. BBC charter renewal is a very important issue for the broadcasting sector in Northern Ireland. People here attach a great value to having a comprehensive public service broadcasting service that reflects all aspects of our social, cultural and political life.

The Royal Charter is the constitutional basis for the BBC. It sets out its public purposes, guarantees its independence and outlines the various duties placed upon it. The current charter outlines the duties of the BBC Trust and the executive board. The proposed new charter will come into effect on 1 January 2017. The BBC's Framework Agreement is an agreement between the UK Government and the BBC, and it sits alongside the charter. It provides detail on many of the issues outlined in the charter and also covers the BBC's funding and regulatory duties. The BBC charter renewal is a very important issue for our broadcasting sector, and it is essential that the needs of Northern Ireland are catered for in the new charter and Framework Agreement.

I want to see opportunities in the TV and film industry being maximised for local workers and companies, and it is essential that we receive fair treatment in regard to public service broadcasting spend on commissioning, particularly in relation to spending on Irish language and Ulster-Scots broadcasting. The BBC should meet its obligations within the charter to provide services for all its communities, including indigenous language broadcasting. It is also important that the portrayal of Northern Ireland on the networks shows a fuller picture of us as a modern society. It is essential, and increasingly so, that the role that diverse groups play within our society is reflected and that people are not portrayed by a single aspect of their identity, such as ethnicity or disability. The creative industries are important to our economy, and the BBC is a major player in the creative industries ecosystem. As a result, it is essential that we have strengthened links and meaningful collaboration between the BBC and the wider creative industries.

Essential changes, some of which I touched on earlier, include that there needs to be a full, authentic, accurate and more up-to-date portrayal of Northern Ireland on the networks that shows a fuller picture of our society. We have been underserved by public service broadcasting spend up to now, and we therefore need to see an increase and improvement in the commissioning of original programming that showcases our local communities. There also needs to be more local cultural TV and radio coverage, and opportunities for local workers and companies must be maximised, with greater emphasis

placed on home-grown productions and the harnessing of local talent. There must be increased commissioning of original programming that showcases our local communities and what they have to offer.

It is crucial that the BBC has governance, management and funding structures that reflect the needs of each devolved Administration and region and better support the development, production and delivery of content from us — content that is available not just to our own audiences but to wider audiences within the United Kingdom and internationally. There should be a simple and transparent BBC strategy for Northern Ireland that is not only available for scrutiny by those responsible for governance but available as a road map and an empowering authority for the executives in the BBC and BBC NI.

It is also essential that the Assembly has some means of holding the UK Government and the BBC to account to ensure that they provide for a truly representative service that is fit for purpose in the 21st century. Our memorandum of understanding gives the Assembly a formal scrutiny role in regard to the BBC. It also provides for BBC officials appearing before Northern Ireland Assembly Committees on matters relating to Northern Ireland on the same basis as it does in Westminster. Those arrangements will be enshrined in the new charter and should provide a mechanism that makes the public service broadcaster accountable and answerable to the Assembly. Accountability should help to ensure that we receive the economic and cultural value that we deserve and warrant from the BBC. In the past, there was a failure to ensure that Northern Ireland received the cultural and economic value from BBC network production that our population and devolved status demands. We need to be certain that that will not happen again, and the proposals set out in the draft charter will go a long way towards ensuring that it will not.

Provisions of particular interest to Northern Ireland include that specific provision is made for the nations in the new licensing regime. In addition, the new charter commits the BBC to continued support for the minority languages of the United Kingdom. In respect of accountability and governance, the BBC must reflect the constitutional arrangements within the United Kingdom. All the devolved Administrations will be able to agree to the appointment of their respective member to the new BBC board before they are appointed. The BBC has committed to improving representation and portrayal of the nations and regions of the United Kingdom through its services.

The nations and regions public purpose will emphasise the need for the BBC to support the creative economy of each nation of the United Kingdom through the delivery of its mission and public purposes. The BBC must now report against the creative remits set out in the annual plan on a nation-by-nation basis. The UK Government have recognised that the BBC's impact on and contribution to the creative economy, particularly in the nations, is an important one, and I welcome that recognition.

In conclusion, at this stage, the BBC charter review has given us in Northern Ireland a formal role in contributing fully to the review process. The current drafts mirror many of the demands of the devolved Administrations, and my officials and I will continue to engage with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) over the next number

of weeks as we seek to ensure that our interests are clearly reflected in the final documents.

Ms Gildernew (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Communities): The Committee received and noted copies of the draft charter and the draft agreement that the House is being asked to take note of today. The Committee has been offered a briefing by the current BBC Trust member and will decide at its meeting on Thursday whether that is required on foot of today's debate.

The future of the BBC has been much debated by the media over recent months, but I suspect that much of the detail of the debate has been of real concern only to those in the media. There seemed to be a question at certain points in the charter discussions whether the BBC would survive at all as a public broadcaster, given what appeared to be ideological opposition to public-sector broadcasting from the two previous Conservative Culture Secretaries, Sajid Javid and John Whittingdale. That argument has been settled, at least for the next 11 years, given that the charter lasts until 2027.

I respectfully suggest that the details of the charter and draft agreement are of little relevance or interest to the ordinary person in the street. Of course, there are issues that do generate interest, such as the requirement to name people in the organisation who earn over £150,000, including the people who think of themselves as big stars. In the overall scheme of things, however, that is not important. What is, or should be, important to us all is that we have the confidence that the BBC here is well governed and managed; that the licence fee is value for money; and that the BBC maintains its independence from Government. I think that it is broadly accepted that the new arrangements go some way to embedding processes within the structures of the BBC that seek to achieve those objectives.

As mentioned, a key issue for the BBC throughout the charter discussions was certainty about funding. The renewal of the charter is for a further 11 years and should provide stable funding for the organisation. Arguments over the continuation of the licence fee have been put to bed, and the BBC should be able to get on with its mandate of providing broadcasting to the public that will educate, inform and entertain.

It is also important to note the change in governance arrangements, with the establishment of a new board rather than the current system of trustees. The role of the board will be extensive, but it is important to highlight the requirement for transparency in the workings of the board and the independence from Government of each member. It is to be noted that the Government will directly appoint five of the 14-strong board, including a new chair and the four national directors for the North of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. That leaves the BBC able to appoint four executive members of the board alongside another five independent members. This should provide some assurance that the board is independent.

The change to the regulation of the BBC is a fundamental one. Currently, the BBC is self-regulating, but from next year Ofcom will take on the responsibility, and it will have extensive powers. Of particular interest are the powers of Ofcom to determine whether the BBC's commercial activities, because of their link to public services, give it an unfair competitive advantage. An operating framework will be produced in which Ofcom will set requirements

that define what the relationship between the BBC and its commercial activities should be. This will be crucial, given that Ofcom's powers in relation to the BBC are extensive. They include the power to order the BBC to cease activity that Ofcom judges to be anti-competitive.

4.00 pm

In principle, most of us support the idea of external, independent regulation, but it will be important to see to what extent the new arrangements restrict the BBC's commercial activity. That will be important in the context of section 13 of the charter, which seeks to promote and establish creative partnerships with other organisations where they would be in the public interest. We have seen the growth of the creative industries here over a number of years. According to the Department, 36,000 people — 4.6% of the workforce — are employed in the creative industries or creative occupations. We do not want to see the potential of the BBC to assist with that burgeoning industry curtailed by regulation.

In addition, the National Audit Office will report on the group accounts. The Secretary of State must then lay the group accounts and the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General before Parliament, and these must be subsequently published by the BBC. Similarly, they have to be laid before our Assembly on the same day as, or as soon as possible after, they have been laid before Parliament in Westminster. This should afford transparency on the organisation's expenditure activities.

Turning to the local, as well as to the "big ticket" programmes that have proved popular —

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

Ms Gildernew: OK. Local programming is also important to people, whether that be stories about our communities, local sports programming or a locally produced series with wider appeal, such as 'The Fall'. The Committee has received an offer —

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

Ms Gildernew: OK. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Bell: It is an important debate. As I understand it, while it is down as a take-note debate, the UK Government will look at what comes from the Northern Ireland Assembly and from Scotland and Wales. That will then be factored into the report that the UK Government will present on the charter and the agreement to the Privy Council in time for it to come into force on 1 January 2017. The points that we can make today, albeit within five minutes, should be those that we want carried through.

Indeed, the BBC has come a long way from the British Broadcasting Company, as it was in 1922. Then, I think that it was — I will probably not get the pronunciation correct — the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres who chaired the committee that, in 1926, looked at the United States and said, "We do not want to see unregulated broadcasting", and produced a report, which was accepted. I think that that has been a very good thing. The BBC became the British Broadcasting Corporation, deriving its authority from a Royal Charter.

We now have an opportunity to present the points that Northern Ireland wants to see within the report. I note with a lot of alarm that the BBC has developed production centres in England, Glasgow and Cardiff, but none in Northern Ireland. I congratulate the former Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for the work that it did in its legacy report on this, because it is not acceptable to have production centres in England, Cardiff and Glasgow, but not in Northern Ireland. If we had a BBC production centre in Northern Ireland, it would give our licence fee payers a proper return for the investment that they have put into the BBC.

There is a lot that we want to see. We want to see independence and transparency. I know that Gregory Campbell MP, formerly of this parish, will be delighted if journalists — particularly one, I suspect — have to declare anything over £150,000 in earnings. It is really important for Northern Ireland that we take a strategic approach to supporting the creative industries here. Over the years we have seen so much, not just by the BBC but others, from 'Line of Duty' right through to other productions outside the BBC, such as 'Game of Thrones', where you have had some excellent productions and millions of pounds brought into the economy as a result of the creative industries. The demand that we should place here, through to the UK Government, is that we want a production centre in Northern Ireland to allow us to take a strategic approach and, as I say, give the licence fee payers some sort of return for their money.

I like the fact that the BBC will be put on a proper financial footing that should enable it to plan properly for the future. I also like the changes that will take it outside political cycles because I believe that there is a role for the BBC to be independent into the future.

Can I say one particular thing? I do not know whether I am having a midlife crisis or it is just whatever age I am getting to, but I am listening more to radio and podcasts than I am watching television. I understand that Northern Ireland's listenership to BBC radio is much higher than it is in any other part of the UK, so there is a strong argument for radio services to be more appreciated by the BBC. There is some excellent radio — from BBC4 podcasts that I enjoy to conspiracy thrillers from Matthew Broughton down. Wonderful creative radio and news. We should recognise, particularly in Northern Ireland, where we have an ageing demographic, that many older people look to their radios as a form of company; it is their choice of what to listen to in the media. Given a higher radio listenership in Northern Ireland, we should have an increased investment in radio.

For me, critically, we need a proper BBC production centre in Northern Ireland, as we have already shown that we can outperform in the creative industries. Such a centre would be an asset for the BBC, an asset for us, and an asset for the licence payer.

Mr Allen: In opening on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I will, if I may, pay our condolences to the renowned BBC NI broadcaster and journalist Paddy O'Flaherty. Our sympathies are with his family at this time.

The BBC charter review is timely and necessary. The BBC is a national institution that contributes greatly to the cultural life of the United Kingdom and, on the whole, enjoys a great deal of public support. In return for the licence fee, the audience, rightly, expects the BBC to

continue to produce high-quality, creative and innovative content.

In my party's response to the BBC charter review, we recognised that this was a time of change for the UK, not least in how devolution is impacting on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The BBC needs to adapt to these changes and ensure at the same time that the interests of the nations and regions are given a voice. One of the most important changes that the news and current affairs departments in BBC Northern Ireland have to adapt to is to recognise the existence of an official Opposition at Stormont and to balance its reporting accordingly.

In fairness, the BBC does not have an easy job, given that it has to cater for an extremely wide range of age groups, ethnicities and communities, including, of course, those in the devolved nations and UK regions, where audiences' needs and expectations can, and often do, vary widely. Quite correctly, all feel that they have a stake in the BBC and that they all should be reflected in what the BBC does.

We are well aware of the debate about how well the BBC services licence payers in the devolved regions. Regional opt-outs ensure that local news and programming fit within the BBC nationally. It is extremely important that the people of Northern Ireland have access to a respected national broadcaster.

We note in schedule 2, paragraph 6 of the draft agreement, that Ofcom has a great deal of discretion. It states:

"Ofcom must impose on the BBC the requirements they consider appropriate, having regard to the needs of the nations and regions".

Many of the following clauses begin with "what appears to Ofcom" or "such provision as Ofcom consider appropriate". That theme is continued in schedule 2, paragraph 7, "Programme making in the nations and regions", which states:

"Ofcom must impose on the BBC the requirements they consider appropriate for securing ... what appears to Ofcom to be a suitable proportion of all the network programmes made in the United Kingdom are programmes made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland;"

Again, the phrase "what appears to Ofcom" keeps cropping up, and the role of Ofcom is obviously key in ensuring that the nations and regions receive fair and equitable treatment. The Ulster Unionist Party greatly values the importance of locally produced and commissioned programming. However, it must be of high quality. There is no doubt that the creative industries have been a real Northern Ireland success story in recent times. The BBC has a major role to play in commissioning programmes and working with external producers in making programmes. This is an area where the BBC can make a real, positive impact on Northern Ireland plc and help the local economy in the process.

I will return to the issue of BBC funding. The BBC faces challenges that were unforeseen even 20 years ago. The success and popularity of Sky TV and the growth of digital media platforms provide a very different operating environment from the days when the only competition came from ITV and independent radio. It is crucial that the BBC has a stable funding framework in order to enable forward planning. The 2006 charter will extend for a further

10 years until the end of 2027, and the 2006 agreement will be revoked and replaced by a new framework agreement.

That is a time frame that should provide sufficient security and stability for the BBC going forward.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the key role that the BBC plays, both UK-wide and at local level. We want to see a BBC that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the people of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as we progress into the 21st century.

Ms Mallon: I fervently believe in the importance of having a reliable public broadcaster that acts in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services that inform, educate and entertain. You will find no disagreement here on this objective of the BBC's mission in its Royal Charter, but the real test is in how those objectives are put into practice. I do not intend to go through the charter comprehensively — I know that other Members will point out issues of importance to them — but there are just a few things I would like to touch on. The SDLP welcomes the out-of-London quotas, but that must extend beyond the outer suburbs of London. It must reflect the cultural and social —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Sorry. I am picking up a number of conversations. Perhaps Members would, if they wish to conduct conversations, conduct them elsewhere or less audibly at least.

Ms Mallon: We are very clear that the out-of-London quotas must extend beyond the Outer Hebrides and include the social and cultural distinctiveness of Northern Ireland. In the North, for example, Derry and Belfast have clear cultural and social distinctions that must be protected and reflected through local services like Radio Foyle. The SDLP also welcomes the extension to the Assembly of parity with Scotland and Wales in relation to the appointments of nation members to the new unitary board. That is an accountability step that is long overdue. Members also touched on the issue of salaries.

Mr Stalford: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member will be aware that I raised the issue of public appointments in the Committee for Communities. I suspect that there is a coterie of about 100 people in Northern Ireland who absolutely dominate all public appointments. Does she agree that, if the BBC is to be a truly national broadcaster, it is essential that it is reflective of the public? That includes not just the usual definitions but things like social class.

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

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his intervention. I firmly believe that all appointments should be done in an open and transparent manner, whether for a spin doctor or for appointments to the new unitary board.

Members passed comment on salaries, which is only right. We welcome the move to greater openness and transparency regarding the salaries of the BBC's highest earners. The public have a right to know how public money is spent, and it is as simple as that.

Just to air a note of caution, the SDLP would be strongly against any suggestion of a move to introduce subscription charges for the BBC. We do not want to see a first-class and second-class system in which people can access

their public service broadcaster only on the basis of their ability to pay. However, we welcome the move to open up the tendering process and think it will be a positive move if approached correctly. It improves the opportunities for us in Northern Ireland to build on our success in producing world-class TV productions, not least 'Game of Thrones'.

Finally, my party colleague in Westminster, Margaret Ritchie MP, has already sought assurances from the Secretary of State that the collaboration between the BBC and RTE, which is much valued, will not be undermined. It is important that I take the opportunity to reiterate that point.

Mrs Long: I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of Alliance about the BBC Royal Charter and Framework Agreement announced in Parliament on 16 September. The charter is an essential instrument for an organisation that has become a cornerstone of broadcasting in the UK and throughout the world. It is uniquely well respected as an institution, and, whilst it is not without flaws, it has an important role to fulfil as a public broadcaster.

I want to focus my comments on three aspects of the draft charter and the particular opportunities and challenges they present to the BBC and Northern Ireland. First, I am concerned, unlike some others, that with this charter review we are witnessing the further erosion of the BBC but by means of stealth. The current Government appear to want the BBC to be both a public service broadcaster and a commercially competitive organisation and place challenges in its way on both fronts.

4.15 pm

As has been well documented in the media, the charter will lead to the publication of the salaries of presenters and talent on the BBC. There is a strong argument that that accounts for public money being expended, but it could lead to the release of information that would be considered commercially sensitive by its competitors and could make the poaching of household names from the BBC by other channels much simpler. Whilst that may not seem much of an issue, it disregards the BBC's investment in talent and development and the negative impact that it could have on viewing figures and the popularity of its shows, for which the same people will no doubt also judge its performance very harshly. It seems that the Government live up to the adage of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

The same pattern of commercialisation has led to the outsourcing of much BBC programming to independent production companies. That in itself is not a bad thing, and it results in programmes that only a public service broadcaster could afford to risk making. Once those programmes gain popular appeal, they are sold off to the highest bidder, again diminishing the BBC's schedule, despite its investment in developing those programmes. A recent example of that is 'The Great British Bake Off'. Who would have thought that a show about competitive baking would grip the nation? It has, but it took a public service broadcaster to broadcast it on BBC 2 before it was able to be mainstreamed onto prime-time television on BBC 1. The BBC has now lost out to a commercial operator. While some argue that that will allow new talent and opportunities to break through, it hits BBC viewing figures, against which its performance is judged.

It has also been announced that the BBC will fund free television licences for the over-75s in the charter. I welcome that move and, indeed, believe that it could go much further. However, it will come at the expense of the BBC's running costs, its staff and programme content rather than through additional funding, which further undermines its competitiveness. For both those reasons, I fear that the intentions of the current Government are perhaps not as honourable as they claim.

My second concern is the independence of the BBC, with the inclusion of political appointees on the board. As a public service broadcaster, it must be seen to be independent, and it is hugely important that that is maintained. Political appointments have the potential to diminish that significantly, and, given the questions raised about public appointments in Northern Ireland, I am grateful that there will be a degree of transparency and openness. It should not be politicised.

The appointment of someone from Northern Ireland to the board represents opportunities to increase Northern Irish-created content. Content made in Northern Ireland for Northern Ireland is hugely important, but, if we are to develop our creative industries, it is also important that the BBC commits to making national content in each constituent country. Through television shows such as 'The Fall', 'Game of Thrones' and 'Lily's Driftwood Bay', we have demonstrated that Northern Ireland can create and produce world-class television. I want to see that built on through the BBC's local content commitment.

Finally, an opportunity has been lost to decriminalise the non-payment of a TV licence. My party leader, David Ford, raised the issue with the Home Office during his time as Justice Minister, and it could have been addressed in the charter. Last year, a quarter of criminal prosecutions in Northern Ireland were for failure to pay a TV licence, and fewer than half were found guilty. That puts significant pressure on the legal system. Decriminalisation would allow cost savings, and non-payment could be pursued through non-criminal means.

I note the BBC charter review and hope that the opportunities for improvement in the charter will be fully realised while the risks to an excellent public service broadcaster and its independence are minimised.

Mr Stalford: The BBC is one of the great national institutions. It is extremely powerful. I would suggest that, certainly in Northern Ireland and potentially in the United Kingdom as a whole, it is much more powerful than any political party. With such power comes a responsibility for regulation, so I welcome the fact that Ofcom is to assume regulatory powers with regard to the BBC. It is right that an organisation that millions of people are taxed to pay for should be regulated in that way and scrutinised for the way in which it is run.

I welcome that, as Naomi Long, a Member for East Belfast, said, there will be a Northern Ireland representative appointed to make our voice heard. Given the comments from the former special adviser turned Assembly Member for North Belfast, I am sure she will be able to advise of the public appointment procedures she went through.

I am delighted that progress has been made —

A Member: By royal appointment.

Mr Stalford: By royal appointment.

Progress has been made with openness and transparency. The headlines have obviously been grabbed by the issue of talent pay. I think a more important issue is that the coverage produced for Northern Ireland should reflect Northern Ireland. The BBC recognises that and that it has an obligation to minority languages and cultural expression. One of the areas where I believe there has been a falling away is the representation of the entire Ulster-Scots tradition. I am not an Ulster Scot in the sense of family background, but it is something that interests me and that I have taken an interest in because of the shared heritage and tradition that there is. Northern Ireland and Scotland are divided by about eight miles of water at some points and precious little else. It is part of who we are; it is part of our tradition and our identity. I would like to see more of a reflection of that being produced by the BBC.

I am absolutely not saying that the growth of one should be at the expense of another, such as the Irish language. I recognise that that is important to people as well. I think we should have greater parity between those two traditions and how they are reflected. Some of the programmes produced have been really good. I think particularly of the series that was produced about the Ulster-Scots contribution in Canada. I would like to see more high-quality programming like that being produced as part of the obligations the BBC has in that regard.

The BBC likes to talk about the unique way in which it is funded. That is code for the TV tax we all pay. I agree with the point made, again by the Member for East Belfast, about the need to decriminalise the non-payment of a licence fee. It cannot be right that so much time, effort and resource are spent pursuing people, with criminal charges being brought against them, for the non-payment of a TV licence.

Moving forward, more openness and transparency are needed about how money is spent, and there needs to be a greater preparedness to reflect the society it serves. There also needs to be a genuine commitment to independence and neutrality. The BBC is, as I said, a great national institution. It covers big national events like the Queen's jubilee and the state opening of Parliament. Even its general election coverage is better than that offered by anyone else. It is in all our interests for it to continue to be a success, but it is also in our interests for it to be held accountable for the way in which taxpayer money —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Stalford: — is spent.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I declare an interest at the start: I was one of the Ministers — the other one is over there — who probably started the process of the review of the BBC charter and funding agreement. I am delighted to see that some of the suggestions that were brought forward have been taken on board, but I still think that, notwithstanding that our Committee will meet on Thursday, there are some concerns about some of the issues. The whole issue about the independence of the BBC is, I think, just a given. However, as a result of the Silk and Smith commissions, the funding arrangements, particularly for Scotland, and the memorandum of understanding that was brought forward then, we here and Wales felt there was an inequality. So that seems to have changed. I had a concern about any body regulating itself, so Ofcom has now become the regulating body, and even the concerns

about the arrangements around the advisory committee have been listened to as well. In one year, the BBC had accrued around £4 billion. A lot of us would like to know how that money was spent.

I listened to Jonathan Bell talk about the BBC needing to have a production house here. I tend to disagree with him. I think that one of the successful arguments that we have made is that we have excellent producers and commissioners and the ability to commission programmes here, and, in order for our independent creative industries to thrive, we need to try to support that. The BBC has not exploited the skills and expertise that we have here as much as it should have, in my opinion.

I also believe that, without the broadcasting funds, the BBC has not contributed enough to Ulster Scots and the Irish language. While the broadcast funds are administered through the BBC and even through the work of NI Screen, it still, for me, raises concerns. I am not convinced that the argument around parity of those broadcast funds stands up, to be frank.

I have shared some of the concerns, and that will be reflected somewhat in the charter, about making sure that we are represented in a way that is true, reflective and faithful to the people here, and the Minister touched on that in his opening remarks. That is really important, and I believe that the BBC has lacked in that in the past. One of the best ways that we can change that is to spend more money here commissioning programmes. We have made excellent programmes that can be shown anywhere. I believe that it is a two-way process, and not enough has been done, despite the fact that the creative industries sector here, NI Screen and the BBC here have lobbied and argued for that.

The context for all that argument was particularly around the charter renewal and the funding agreement. I do not think that it is challenging the independence of the BBC to ask where the money is being spent and, more importantly, how it is being spent. I would definitely like to see more of a breakdown of local commissioning here and, particularly, more commissioning in addition to the broadcast funds around the Irish language and Ulster Scots. I shared some concerns around the outworkings of some of those programmes, particularly in relation to Ulster Scots, but that is by the by. That is something that we need to look at.

It is really important that we look at governance and lessons learned from the failure around some of the governance issues with the BBC in the past. One of the biggest issues is the governance around some of the historical sexual abuse allegations. I think that the BBC was quite disgraceful in the way that it governed. It looked after the celebrity rather than the victims. If anything, this presents us with an opportunity to ensure that that never happens again. I am quite looking forward to hearing what some of the big presenters earn. I think that we could take a guess on that.

This is a take-note debate —

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

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes. Beidh mé ag críochnú anois. I am delighted to take part in this and delighted that we have got it this far, but there is still much more work that we need to do.

Mr McCausland: The BBC, as the principal public service broadcaster for the United Kingdom, has a special place in the life of the nation. It has a role in representing Northern Ireland to the wider United Kingdom audience through its programming and, in the other direction, in representing the diversity and unity of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland viewers. It is, of course, the British Broadcasting Corporation. It is important also that it has a role as regards preventing the marginalisation of Northern Ireland and, indeed, the other nations and regions and avoiding what has, in some cases, been identified as a rather London-centric approach, particularly in regard to commissioning, where Northern Ireland has not been adequately represented in commissioning at a United Kingdom level.

4.30 pm

There are also the important issues of the provision of employment in Northern Ireland and supporting the cultural sector, whether that be in-house productions or the work of independent producers. Going forward, we want a greater focus on Northern Ireland, especially through equitable capital investment. Other regions of the United Kingdom got major capital investment, but Northern Ireland was overlooked. There are some excellent locations in the heart of Belfast, close to the University of Ulster and on the north side of the city centre.

Ms Mallon: Hear, hear.

Mr McCausland: I am glad that I have the endorsement of one of the other Members for North Belfast.

Several Members touched on the need to reflect cultural traditions and diversity in Northern Ireland. That has to be a commitment because education and broadcasting — the school system and the broadcasting system — are hugely important in affirming, sustaining and supporting local cultural traditions. That is why the Irish language lobby has put such emphasis on Irish-medium schools and ensuring that there is substantial provision for the Irish language in BBC broadcasting. There is an important role for broadcasting in affirming, sustaining and supporting cultural traditions, but it is important that it is done in a way that is fair and equitable.

Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, in a letter that was circulated, referred particularly to minority languages — in our case, Irish and Ulster Scots — culture and cultural broadcasting. That is not simply a BBC issue; it is an equality issue for Northern Ireland. It is also a human rights issue.

I notice that the former CAL Minister has now left us. Her view was that there was not a strong case for parity between the two broadcasting funds. If you look at the evidence, you see that that simply does not stack up. When I pressed her once on how you would measure need and justify spend, she mentioned viewing figures. Look at the viewing figures for programmes supported by the Irish Language Broadcast Fund; then look at the viewing figures for programmes supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund. In most cases, figures for the programmes supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund are higher. The one exception, I have to confess, is the programme in which Daniel O'Donnell's country music show goes to Newry. That will gain strong support from Mr Kennedy and folks in that area. I suspect —

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Of course, any mention of Newry is worthwhile. It might be interesting to study the viewing figures for 'Stormont Today' among insomniacs and burglars.

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

Mr McCausland: I have not seen those viewing figures.

I suggest to Members that the viewing figures, which are exceptional, for Daniel O'Donnell and his country music show are probably more a reflection of his fan base than a measure of support and interest in the Irish language, but I leave that to others to work on.

In Northern Ireland, the approach by the BBC has been inequitable and unfair, with preferential treatment and provision for Irish culture. The BBC's core budget has funded an in-house Irish language unit, which was never replicated, and there has been a huge disparity between the two broadcast funds, as was mentioned. Sadly, the previous Culture Minister did not fight the corner for equity and parity. Her party has a message that it often puts up as a slogan — "An Ireland of Equals" — but, when it came to the broadcasting funds, some were more equal than others. Certainly, it was her cultural tradition that she was fighting for rather than any other. I emphasise the need for the BBC budget and the two broadcast funds to ensure that there is an opportunity for fairness, equity and equality, and that cultural rights are delivered to us all.

Mr E McCann: I think it is fair to say that there are no two British institutions more widely admired around the world than the BBC and the National Health Service. They also have this in common: both institutions have for some time been and continue to be under relentless assault from people and interests who believe that the free market should be allowed to rip through every aspect of our lives. That aspect of what is happening to the BBC is represented in the charter, and I regret the fact that it has not been mentioned by any Member so far.

If you look at the charter document, you will see that it refers to the necessity of the BBC in the future to be aware of what it calls the wider media market. The key word there is "market". In the rest of the charter, if you read through out and comb out the phrases, you will see what is intended: the direction of travel in which the Government in London and commercial interests — most ferociously the Murdoch empire — want to force the BBC to go. On scheduling, this is what the charter says:

"The BBC must ... have regard to ... any potential adverse impact on fair and effective competition."

What does that mean? It means that, when deciding what to broadcast, when to broadcast it and on which channel to broadcast it, the BBC must take into account the effect that that might have on ITV, Sky or other providers; in other words, it is saying that the BBC must step into the commercial market, otherwise it will not, according to the charter, meet its legal responsibilities. I regard that as a very ominous aspect of the charter.

There is much in the charter that I welcome, but I am drawing attention to the things that concern me and ought to concern the House. There is little in it that would safeguard the BBC's independence in funding or governance. Ms Gildernew has already mentioned the

fact that the Government will appoint the new chair of a unitary board — a very powerful position. That chair — a government appointee — will then appoint not four, as she said, but five other non-executive directors. That means that the Government of the day will be in a powerful position to influence how the BBC is run, which values it expresses and all the rest of it. That is regrettable, and we all should express our regret about it.

The Government have shown no willingness to respect the BBC's independence. Let me give you one example from the recent past. The Government decided that the BBC should fund free licences for the over-75s. What was the rationale for that? Why did they do that? They spelt it out. They were quite open about it: it was part of welfare reform. This is what was said at Westminster: "We will hit the BBC for millions as part of welfare reform". That is an absolutely disgraceful way to treat an institution like the BBC.

We in the North have a lot to thank the BBC for. I come from Derry, where Radio Foyle has phenomenal listenership figures for the size of its area. It is tremendously important for the cultural life of Derry, just as Radio Ulster is for the whole of the North. I have a particular interest in popular culture and popular music. Take the BBC in Derry with Stephen McCauley's 'Electric Mainline' programme and in Belfast with 'Across the Line' with Stuart Bailie and other people. There would not be the wonderful efflorescence of youthful talent in the area of popular culture had the BBC not given an audience to many of the young bands that were coming forward when it made no commercial sense for it do that. It made no commercial sense at all for Stephen McCauley to play the music of local bands, yet some of them have gone on to great things. Even those that have not gone on to great things have provided an uplift and an area of imagination to thousands of people that they otherwise would not have had.

I am no starry-eyed, uncritical admirer of the BBC, not by any means, but I believe that it is a precious asset for our society that should be defended. It should not be left simply to BBC employees, like the journalists organised in the NUJ, to defend its independence. Assemblies like this should step forward and defend the BBC, and I urge us all to do so because it is under threat.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I call the Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan, to wind up the debate on the motion; I emphasise to him that he has 10 minutes.

Mr Givan: I will not need 10 minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker, but thank you for the offer.

We have had an interesting debate. Members raised a number of important issues, which I have no doubt will ultimately be reflected on by Westminster when this is being debated there, because it is a UK-wide issue. We have had an opportunity this time, unlike before, to feed into the process and influence it. When you look at the draft charter, you can see tangible evidence of the value that that input has had, and I commend my officials, who have been engaging on the issue with DCMS and counterparts in Scotland and Wales. We have, I believe, been able to put forward a case for the devolved regions of the United Kingdom that is being reflected in the charter and framework agreement. We will see tangible benefits flowing from that.

A couple of comments that I picked up from some Members were noteworthy. I was impressed with Andy

Allen's effort to indicate that the charter and framework should have more of a focus on ensuring that the Opposition get better representation. Let me say that I would be delighted to have ever more publication and coverage of how the Opposition perform in Stormont to the masses. It would probably do them no good at all, but I would be quite happy to put forward such an argument.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He will note that today's business had to be presented to us not by the leader of the Opposition but by a member of the Government, the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Communities. Yesterday was the first so-called Opposition day that we have had in the House, and the leader of the Opposition, or Mike Nesbitt's deputy, or whatever his official title is, could not be here then either.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for that comment. I will leave it hanging there.

Members raised a number of points. In the round, I do think that we are very well served in Northern Ireland by the BBC. I will point out a couple of areas in which it could do a lot better in representing Northern Ireland more accurately, but, in the round, it is an institution that should be defended. Mr McCann said that, as one of the two finest British institutions, the BBC is up there. Consider coverage of the radio programmes that were highlighted by Eamonn McCann. I prefer Hugo Duncan over other programmes in the morning. I have to say that, since I took up this post, I listen even less to the news output now than ever before, but Hugo Duncan I find provides good value for money. It is worth paying the licence fee just for that slot.

When you think of how local sport is covered, think of the coverage of Ulster Rugby; think of the motorbike coverage of the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix. It is fantastic, not to mention the audience that it gets when it is streamed across the globe. Therefore, with our local sports coverage, we are very well served.

Do I believe, however, that the BBC could do more? Yes, I do. It could do more in reflecting our culture. Take, for example, Scarva and the Royal Black Preceptory parade that take place. Tens of thousands of people take part in a demonstration of our heritage and culture. It is a demonstration of the arts. What coverage does the BBC give to that event? Very little, if any at all. That is something that the BBC needs to address.

Take its news output. Obviously, it is independent in taking its editorial decisions, but the BBC is an incredibly pro-European organisation, and that was reflected in its coverage throughout the referendum campaign. I think of its coverage of social issues across the United Kingdom. Again, it pursues an incredibly left-wing, liberal agenda. *[Interruption.]* When I listen to the commentators, so-called, who dominate the BBC's programmes, I struggle to find ones who are brought on as independent who ever represent the more socially conservative point of view that prevails in Northern Ireland. The BBC could therefore do more to reflect Northern Ireland accurately. There will be an opportunity now, because the Assembly will be able to hold to account the BBC; it will be able to pull people in and ask them how they are representing Northern Ireland. Those are two areas where I think that the BBC can do more.

4.45 pm

The BBC does, of course, have to represent the values of the United Kingdom right across the world. Those values of fairness are fundamentally important, and the BBC does that well. It is to the BBC's credit that it was recognised in a Royal Charter. The organisation is unique in the way in which its incorporation is found. As an aside for Members who want to read the Royal Charter, the language on its opening page is an excellent demonstration of the English language:

"Elizabeth the Second by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith".

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Givan: You can go on and read the language that is used. It highlights the role of the Minister at Westminster and uses a title that I would love to have were it to be incorporated into a body in Northern Ireland. It reads:

"to Us by Our right trusty and well beloved Counsellor Karen Anne Bradley, Our Principal Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport".

That is a fantastic demonstration of how the English language can be presented in such a fabulous way. I encourage Members to read all of that. If time permitted, I would love to read it into the record, but I think that it is a tremendous recognition of the BBC as the British Broadcasting Corporation. In Northern Ireland, the BBC should be very proud of that.

Obviously, this will have a positive impact on the content of the charter. Over the next 11 years, Northern Ireland, I believe, will get a more equitable deal from the BBC. In these documents, the BBC has set down that it accepts that it has a clear obligation to provide services for all its audiences and to represent and reflect its nations, regions and communities. In addition, under the new arrangements, the Assembly will now be able to hold the BBC to account when it falls short on that delivery.

I commend the draft BBC Charter and Framework Agreement and ask the Assembly to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of the content of the draft BBC Royal Charter and Framework Agreement.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone).]

Adjournment

Flags: South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Ms Claire Hanna to raise the matter of the irregular flying of flags in South Belfast. The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes.

Ms Hanna: I thank those Members who have taken the time to participate in the debate. It is disappointing and a little bit unusual that there is no Minister in the Chamber today. I appreciate that this is a complex issue and, indeed, could probably have landed in one of three or four Departments. I understand, however, that it was assigned to the Executive Office and that none of the four Ministers is available, despite the normal publication cycle of the Order Paper.

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

No one is saying that flags are the biggest or most pressing concern for the Assembly to discuss, but, nearly two decades after the establishment of the Assembly, it is an issue that we have to make progress on and remove from the “too difficult” pile, where it is with victims, the past, the 11-plus and a number of other issues. Our party and others, including the Alliance Party, which has a long-standing and honourable position on the issue, have been seeking regulation for several years. If that is not going to come centrally, we need to push for it.

A commission on flags and identity has been created, which, after a year, has released the names of its members, but we have yet to hear any news from it. As it is primarily made up of representatives of political parties in the Assembly, it is fair and interesting to hear from those parties in this debate.

The issue of flags sucks up an enormous amount of traditional media and social media time, but, hopefully, we can discuss it here in a way that gives us time to draw out points and that is less fraught than some other discussions. For clarity, by irregular flag flying, I do not mean flags flown from private residences or public buildings.

I defend the right of anyone to fly a legal flag from their home, provided that it is not in support of an illegal organisation or of violence. There are, of course, separate regulations and guidance for public buildings.

In practice, certainly in South Belfast, the issue is primarily related to flags reflecting a unionist or loyalist identity. In a report from Queen's, the ratio is reported as being 13:1. However, in discussing the issue and potential solutions, we will absolutely include all such manifestations of identity, including the hunger strike banners that are being displayed on parts of the Ormeau Road. Although I consider them to be in a different category, flags of the Northern Ireland football team and GAA clubs, which have been up and down at various times in South Belfast during the summer, are entirely regulatable. A 2010 Queen's study suggested that sporting and other displays made up approximately 5% of the total of things flying from lamp posts, but, if there is support for these displays, there

should be a lawful way for people to apply, setting out the aims and the purpose of the flying. It is not the primary subject of the debate, but, if a set of principles were agreed, they could be applied to, for example, new murals appearing as well.

Most acutely problematic — they should not be regulated but obviously immediately removed — is the display of paramilitary flags. I noted these as recently as this summer at locations in South Belfast. At the root of the wider problem is the perception by very many people, me included, that, in a lot of cases, those flags are being used to mark territory, to intimidate and to divide. This is an issue raised with me by literally dozens of people every summer. I know that many of them contact all their elected representatives, so those of you from South Belfast will have heard from them as well. It frustrates me greatly to be able to do nothing. Those of us who are elected to represent people are literally powerless in this matter until there is some regulation. There are patchy improvements, and I am glad to report that flags came down in the very mixed neighbourhood of Rosetta just this weekend. I commend the people who were involved in local decisions and had the ability to get flags down in certain residential streets in Finaghy. There are slips too, and flags appear each year in places where they had never been before.

South Belfast is probably the most diverse, vibrant and participative constituency in Northern Ireland. Our neighbourhoods are home to people of all faiths and none and all political backgrounds. Of course, they are home to many people from new communities. I know that many people opt to live in South Belfast precisely because it is so open and welcoming. This is not just an issue of community relations and preventing what in some cases is identity being used as a weapon; there is an economic issue. There is evidence that is quantified year on year by the Northern Ireland life and times survey that flags can produce a chill factor that discourages people from shopping in particular areas.

It is an issue of confidence in law and order. How can people have confidence that the Executive are serious about tackling paramilitaries when in many cases their logos fly unmolested from our public property? They are organisations of community control, extortion and drugs, and, if their logos are able to fly, that shows that we are not in any way serious about addressing them. Although I appreciate that it is absolutely not always the case, national flags that do not bear paramilitary logos are often erected by gangs of men, sometimes with their faces obscured, and it is not that cold in South Belfast in May. That is not just a perception of mine: in the life and times survey, 66% of people across all communities stated their perception that flag flying was done by paramilitaries. I am also aware of families who have received intimidation when a flag outside their house was removed, not by them, I might add. The police will confirm, as will many of us who have had conversations about the cat-and-mouse chasing to get the flags down, that the people who they are conducting those conversations with frequently are in paramilitary groups. I know genuinely that no Member of the Assembly is in any way condoning that behaviour, and I know that there are people with much more benign aims who put up flags and other things, but the fact is that there is a disparity. Your poster about your lost cat or charity disco, which is considerably less divisive, will be removed a lot more quickly.

There is a serious lack of clarity, and I think that there is a deliberate political fudge on what is and is not permissible. For that reason, we believe that fresh legislation is overdue. I want to be clear that the SDLP's preference and ambition is for neutral public space that is free from the flying of this sort of symbol. We are not blind to the fact that not all of them are malign. I understand that not everybody is seeking to just mark territory. Also, we know that that aspiration is not shared by all parties in the Chamber.

We think it is time for a fair compromise. Fair compromises are possible. I believe one took place at City Hall on designated day flying. In this case, we think it should be based on the principle that individuals and small groups do not get to decide on the character and atmosphere of an entire neighbourhood and that one event or political viewpoint cannot dominate a whole neighbourhood for months on end. As stated, we support the right of any individual or family to fly a legal flag but do not support someone unilaterally, with no consultation, projecting that view on everybody else for the whole summer and longer.

For the many constituents who contact me on this, it is the duration of flag flying that distresses them most. I grew up a few metres off the Lisburn Road. In fact, in 30 years at five addresses in South Belfast, I have never lived more than 200 metres from a main route that has been flagged and a main parade route, and I will state for the record that I have never in my life objected to an Orange parade along those routes. When I was growing up, flags went up about a week before the Twelfth demonstration and came down about a week after. People probably were not dying about it — we were not dying about it — but we lived and let live because we understood how important that key parade route was to very many people. We understood there was a balance: the flags went up and came down in a fairly timely fashion. That compromise has been lost now in many areas, as flags are left to rot for months on end.

I did a small survey last summer to gauge the level of local support for flags. I did it in one ward, and I think it could be done in others. Malone Ward runs, as South Belfast representatives know, from Balmoral Avenue to Marlborough Park. I walked up one day, and there were 23 flags on lamp posts. I did a consistent survey in every street in the ward, which is home to about 4,000 people in about 200 households. I found that four houses were flying flags, so I do not think it is fair to say that that is representative of the neighbourhood. I am not saying it is a plebiscite in every area — other factors will be taken into consideration — but I do not think the views of four households should have been projected on to every household in that ward and in a very busy shopping area for so many months.

Much reference is made to the 2005 flags protocol, which was devised between the PSNI and various Departments. It has been eroded in almost every aspect. The proliferation of flags on arterial routes was supposed to have been prevented, and flags were definitely not supposed to be flown in integrated areas. Finaghy, the Lisburn Road, the Ormeau and Rosetta fit that bill probably more than any streets.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Ms Hanna: I will, Christopher. Do I get an extra minute if I give way? I have a lot to say. Go ahead.

Mr Stalford: Would the Member care to hazard a guess about the year the number of flags on lamp posts throughout Belfast skyrocketed? Hazard a guess about when people decided to put extra flags up. What do you think might have prompted that decision?

Ms Hanna: I am happy to address that. Would the Member like to state other areas in which it is appropriate to break the law because you do not like a democratic decision? If people put up signs or start street riots because they do not agree, for example, with the UK-wide vote on Brexit, is that acceptable to us? Are we saying you can break the law because you do not agree with a decision that was made by a majority of elected representatives? The fact is that this has been a problem for a very long time, and it is not good enough to say, "Because of a separate democratic decision, we will break the law". Apparently, our elected representatives —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Ms Hanna: No, you can come back in. You will have your own time.

Mr Stalford: Don't worry: I will. Hypocrite.

Ms Hanna: Apparently elected representatives will sanction that. Further, local arrangements in many cases have no clear basis and are made by self-appointed gatekeepers, with no discussion with local residents. People do — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. I remind all Members that even comments made from a sedentary position can be noted by the Speaker. I caution Members about the terms that are used.

Ms Hanna: Thankfully, I did not hear that.

I have sympathy for the public agencies that are called on to devise policy and cover for what is a political problem, although I would like them to be more consistent. An SDLP councillor was asked very promptly to remove anti-burglary posters he erected a few months ago. Transport NI cannot be solely responsible for regulating flags on its property, and I felt for the Housing Executive on Thursday when it was asked to unilaterally adjudicate on the suitability of a new UDA mural on one of its properties. However, it is a pressure that is probably most acutely felt by the PSNI, which is being asked to judge flagging or flag removal in the context of public disorder.

They cannot be expected to police us out of political failure, and action or otherwise on any issue should not be dictated by who is going to make the most trouble. The spectacle of the PSNI apologising for removing flags in Ballyclare because there was a riot afterwards is an affront to any society based on law and order, but it is inevitable when we are asking an organisation that is necessarily impartial to operate in a political context with no framework. We are not being prescriptive at this stage about what form a licensing system would take, but we are asking that people at least acknowledge that there is an unsustainable issue to be dealt with and to engage rationally and constructively in finding a solution.

5.00 pm

Last year, my colleague Mark H Durkan, the then Environment Minister, brought forward rational proposals to regulate the most extreme end of summer bonfires.

There is a direct parallel here. It is fair to say that I would rather that that practice dies out, as we think that there are environmental burdens and community relations burdens. However, the fact is that we accept that it is important to people so we did not seek to ban it. We sought to regulate the more extreme end of it. Like with many SDLP Members, various references to me and my posters have been burnt on numerous bonfires, but I still voted for a bonfire management scheme that incentivises good behaviour. It is not about projecting a view onto everybody.

The devil will be in the detail, of course, but a licensing scheme could regulate the duration of flying and be linked to a specific time or event; a specific parade, the Queen's jubilee, a sporting event or whatever. Crucially, a named individual will be responsible for removal by a specified date and, if not, the authorities can act to remove it. Having a fair and open set of criteria will empower those public bodies. If anybody wants to dismiss this theory as unworkable or unenforceable, just take a wee minute to ask yourself what you are saying about who is calling the shots here and how acceptable that is to you.

Fair regulations for election posters, advertising, fly-postering and graffiti mostly work. The solutions on removal are not 100% perfect, but the problems are largely addressed and the law upheld. If it is good enough for every other aspect of society, it should be good enough for what are, in some cases, divisive symbols in this society.

There is a large body of high-quality academic research and data on this, not least from Dominic Bryan and Paul Nolan who published a very useful snapshot of views earlier this year. They consulted very widely, including all the parties in the Assembly. Their top-line recommendation was a two-week window for flag-flying, but they brought forward a number of recommendations that bear repeating, namely: in residential areas, the views of all people, including minorities, should be given consideration; flags should not be placed outside homes; and flags should not be placed outside places that deliver public services. They also stress the importance of communication, recommending courtesy to people who might feel uncomfortable and that, to reassure people, people should know who is putting the flags up and how long they will be displayed. It is suggested that this information is communicated to the police.

In conclusion —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close.

Ms Hanna: Yes, I will. I have reflected the aims of that flags protocol, which was about improving the environment, a partnership approach to community relations and a legal and enforcement framework if necessary. It is an important issue, and I hope that Members will engage with it rationally.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): All other Members who wish to speak will now have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Stalford: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be familiar with the fact that it is often unionists who are accused of being absolutely obsessed with flags and the display of them. Yet, during the months of July and August, our friend from South Belfast, my constituency colleague and others dine out on nothing else but the issue of flags in the media, or at

least that is how it seems to the people in the constituency. The limit of her ambition in dealing with issues around flags and identity is not to be underestimated, but it was interesting to note that we had one cursory reference to displays of a non-unionist kind. Oddly enough, the lady from South Belfast and others are very prominent any time — it is usually the third week in June; you could set your watch by it — a few flags go up on the Ormeau Road. The hissy fits start. It is not only the SDLP and the Alliance Party, but it is generally the SDLP and the Alliance Party.

Unlike any other representative in the Chamber, I was actually born on the Ormeau Road and come from there. I know that, during July and August, people put flags on lamp posts. I am sure that that is the case in parts of your constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker, and in other constituencies, because those months are a special time in the broad unionist tradition. I have absolutely no objection to Union flags, Northern Ireland flags and Orange standards going up during July and August. For the benefit of the record, I believe that no paramilitary display and no display of any terrorist organisation should occur. They should not be there and are outwith the July and August tradition. They form no part of that tradition. July and August, in the unionist community, are about the celebrations associated with Orangeism and the victory of William at the Boyne, which is an important part of who I am and of the identity of the community that I come from.

The Ormeau Road was always a mixed community, and people there knew that, during July and August, flags went up. My ideal scenario is that, at the end of August or the start of September, they come down. I think that progress is being made in that regard. I deliberately did not say anything about the displays that went up below the Ormeau bridge over the last few months. I deliberately did not say anything because I would have been a hypocrite if I had defended the Union flags going up at one end of the bridge and then condemned republican symbols going up at the other end of the Ormeau Road. To do the reverse is also to be a hypocrite. To cast a blind eye and say nothing when republican symbols go up at the bottom of the Ormeau Road but get oneself into a state of righteous indignation and fury when unionist symbols go up at the top end of the Ormeau Road is to be a hypocrite, and some of those who whip themselves up into a frenzy during July and August over flags in South Belfast are noticeable by their silence when it comes to other displays.

For the record, I have no problem, Claire — through the Deputy Speaker — with Bredagh GAA club putting up its flags. Bredagh GAA club contributes positively to the community in South Belfast —

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: No. You get to make a winding-up speech. I do not have as much time as you.

Ms Hanna: Do I get to wind up?

Mr Stalford: I do not have as much time as you, Claire.

Ms Hanna: I just want to put on record that I did apply the same considerations —

Mr Stalford: I know.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order, please.

Mr Stalford: I have no objection to a GAA club putting up its flags, especially one that contributes to the community

in the way that Bredagh does. I do not and would not object to that because it is reflective of the fact, as has been said, that South Belfast is a diverse community. There are people from a Protestant background, a unionist background, a Catholic background and people who have none of those identities. They all live in South Belfast. You talk about a shared future and shared space, but the image of the shared space that was painted in the opening section of this debate was an absolutely bland one in which people could not in any way express themselves for fear that someone else would be offended by a display —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: No.

Mr Lyttle: Very briefly?

Mr Stalford: No.

Mr Lyttle: I will not get to speak.

Mr Stalford: OK. Very briefly.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Given the Member's support for the display of flags on street furniture, does he support the search to find an open and transparent legal mechanism, which does not exist at the moment, to regulate and make that process open and understandable to the public?

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

Mr Stalford: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

That is what we are trying to work through, and I welcome contributions in that regard. With the greatest of respect, what will not solve the problem is Assembly Members securing an Adjournment debate on this and tut-tutting at working-class loyalist communities that put flags up. *[Interruption.]* You do. The Member does. Every year, we see people who have absolutely no connection with the working-class loyalist community tut-tutting —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: No.

Mr Lyttle: Very briefly?

Mr Stalford: No.

Mr Lyttle: You are not attributing that to me, though. Will you make that clear?

Ms Hanna: Will you make it clear that you are not attributing it to me either?

Mr Stalford: They tut-tut at that community. They have no connection — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. I ask the Member to address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr Stalford: We were told by Claire Hanna that people should not be made to feel uncomfortable. It is evident that, as a member of the SDLP, she was not made to feel uncomfortable by a party that names a play park after a terrorist. She was not made to feel uncomfortable by a party that campaigns for the release of terrorists from prison. I am thinking particularly of Dolours Price and Gerry McGeough — Gerry McGeough, who, incidentally, was responsible for attempting to murder a member of my party. She was not uncomfortable being led by a man who

took part in a funeral where a paramilitary display took place, but apparently a flag on a lamp post makes her feel uncomfortable.

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: When people look at the double standards —

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: I am indicating that I am not giving way. When people look —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. The Member has made it clear that he is not prepared to give way.

Mr Stalford: When people look at the absolute dual standard that is applied by the SDLP in relation to the issue, it is no wonder. They do not want to hear; they will not listen to be execrated and condemned by a party with such a dual standard on issues like this.

As the start of my contribution, I said that I am from the Ormeau Road. That is where I was born. I am from Annadale, and I am very proud to come from there. My vision of the future is a time when it becomes accepted that these displays happen at certain times of the year. That was the case many years ago. We should take the heat out of these issues and agree to live together. Part of agreeing to live together means that people are free to celebrate who they are and what they are. I am a unionist and a loyalist, and I am very proud of the tradition that I come from. Neither I nor the other people who come from that tradition should be made to feel guilty or bad for displaying it during what is a special time of the year for them. I do not complain when others in the part of South Belfast that I come from display their tradition, because to do so would be a dual standard — a double standard.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Stalford: Thank you. I want everyone to work together to build a genuinely shared future, but it will not be achieved by lecturing from ivory towers.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind the House that it is an Adjournment debate and that there is no winding-up speech by any Member.

Mr Stalford: Sorry.

Ms Bradshaw: Thank you, Claire, for bringing the Adjournment debate. Thank you, Christopher, for your comments as well.

The unregulated flying of flags from lamp posts in South Belfast is, without doubt, a significant issue for a number of people living and working in our constituency. As Claire said, it is one of the top five issues that is raised with me. We should not underestimate the scale of the problem. Residents are concerned that flags are displayed as symbols of paramilitary control and to mark territory, which undermines their desire to live in a mixed community and, unfortunately, can have a negative impact on traders' ability to reach out to the whole community. Nevertheless — it is unfortunate that you are leaving, Christopher, because I am coming to the point that you were making. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect that a whole lot of people in South Belfast take pride in the display of flags and emblems. I have included the word "emblems" because it is not just about the flying of flags but the flags

on paramilitary memorials, community gardens and stuff that we need to consider.

There are cases during the year — special occasions — when the flying of flags is entirely legitimate and a positive expression of commemoration and celebration. It is further noted that the displaying of flags is quite normal across the UK and Ireland, both around specific times of the year, at sports finals, local festivals and national commemorations, and in general. Northern Ireland is distinct, however, in that people from different backgrounds can view the same flag in different ways. I would like to once again put on record that, for the Alliance Party, a shared future does not mean a neutral, nondescript future. Indeed, in a positive, progressive society, we need to recognise that the display of emblems and flags is a legitimate democratic right, whether or not we endorse the flag or emblem ourselves.

5.15 pm

We need to be clear about the problem. The problem is what many of us would regard as an unreasonable display of flags and emblems that does not have cross-community support. It is not the display itself. For example, few people had any serious objection to the display of the Union flag to commemorate the royal wedding and the Queen's golden jubilee a few years back. Those were obvious displays of national pride, and even though the feeling may not have been shared by the whole community, in a progressive society, they proceeded without controversy, and rightly so. As has been mentioned this afternoon, Bredagh GAA flags were recently flown on the Ravenhill Road to mark the all-Ireland football championship final, a highlight of the GAA calendar, and it could be seen that they were put up in celebration and not to cause offence. On the other hand, almost everyone objects to a Union flag, a tricolour, or any national flag, being left to turn to rags on a lamp post. Even those who regard the flag as their own can object that the flag is disrespected when it is allowed to fall into a poor state of repair.

Let me be clear about what I have said, because this is a controversial issue, and it is very emotive as we have already seen this afternoon. In one case, there is almost universal support for the display of the flag, regardless of what the flag is; in the other, there is no support at all. The question is this: when does an obviously reasonable display of celebration or commemoration turn into one that is disrespectful, even to the flag itself? In other words, how do we build consensus about what is perceived as a reasonable display and what is not and how do we agree on how to manage the grey area in between? The fact is that much of the work has been done. Many of us may not have found it ideal, but I think that the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC) is to be commended for developing and adopting a protocol and for seeking to ensure that it was enforced. That cannot have been an easy process for the LCC, and in many areas across Northern Ireland local accommodation was found this summer and things were better than in previous years. Of course, in some places, such as South Belfast and the Knockbreda Road, there were more flags than usual. However, the Loyalist Communities Council also issued guidelines for the flying of flags, which indicated where they should and should not appear. We have to recognise that progress has been made.

The last question that I will pose is this: how do we build community confidence across the constituency? How do we build consensus on protocols, guidelines and local dialogue? We would do well to note that interventions absolutely must not do further harm to a process that is going in the right direction in most locations. Out of frustration when I joined the Assembly four months ago — like Claire, I am contacted a lot by desperate constituents, saying, "What are you going to do about it?" — I started work on a private Member's Bill to create a legislative framework that would establish the legal right to display flags and emblems for commemoration and celebration, while seeking to ensure maximum consensus and that flags are on display only where there is local agreement. I do not propose any specific means of doing that nor any particular outcome in the development of the Bill, as I have just begun the consultation process and, as I am today, I am very much in listening mode. Frankly, I think that people have had enough of politicians claiming that they want to build consensus but then putting all sorts of caveats over what the outcome must be. Let us focus on the need for consensus.

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Ms Bradshaw: Yes.

Ms Hanna: I do not get to wind on the debate, but I think that it is appropriate to correct the record, because I have been unfairly tarnished in this debate. I appreciate your giving way. I made a comment in June about the hunger striker banners: I raised them proactively without being asked in a BBC interview. The day after the decision was made on the Raymond McCreesh park, I issued a statement condemning it, and I made efforts in my party to the same end. I have restated that position at least six times, in broadcast interviews, because many people, like Christopher, are keen to throw out the hypocrite line but very few are keen for the record to be corrected. I was not elected at the time of the Gerry McGeough issue, but I wrote to DUP councillor Sammy Brush after his local council passed a motion calling for the release of that person. I am very glad to say that we had a number of very courteous and pleasant phone calls, when I expressed my sympathy at the traumatising that he has been put through. I will not accept that I take a differential view. I have stood at all times, in my elected and unelected life, against all forms of paramilitarism, and it is an outrage to suggest otherwise.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. The Member has an additional minute, although I suspect that much of it has been eaten up. I also remind Members that interventions ought to be concise.

Ms Bradshaw: Thank you. I am finishing off.

I said that we needed to focus on consensus, reflecting that, if we can manage it in South Belfast, we could manage it anywhere in Northern Ireland. I will close by saying that I hope and trust that the South Belfast MLAs and other elected representatives will engage positively and constructively with my work on the private Member's Bill so that we can address the issue for residents and traders once and for all.

Mrs Little Pengelly: Thank you for the opportunity to speak in the debate. In one way, it is a slightly strange one for me. I am standing in the Northern Ireland Assembly talking about flags. If you go out there and speak to people

on the ground, you realise that there is a perception that that is, in fact, all that we do: we talk about flags and the orange and green. I have told people who say that — they are often people who do not take a lot to do with politics — that I do not talk about flags day in, day out. I came here to be an MLA at the end of September last year — almost a year ago, and this is the first time, I believe, either in the Assembly or in Committee, that I am having a discussion on flags. Perhaps, it is a bit ironic that it is an Adjournment topic from Claire Hanna of the SDLP that brings us to talking about flags once again. I would prefer to stand here and talk about issues like affordable childcare, sustainable and good jobs for people etc, but we are standing here under the rather cryptic, I have to say, title “Irregular Flying of Flags in South Belfast”.

I am not particularly annoyed by displays of identity such as flags on either side. That also translates into who I am as a person because I am not particularly annoyed by the celebration of identity right across the diversity of our society, should it be something that I feel part of or not. It is at the very heart of a tolerant and open society that we celebrate and accept cultural difference. I took part in the policy development of the Northern Ireland Executive’s good relations strategy, Together: Building a United Community. At the very heart of that strategy is not the neutrality picture that Claire Hanna has put across but the celebration of our identity and rich diversity. Flag-flying is part and parcel of that.

I echo the words of my colleague Christopher Stalford: I do not agree with the flying of paramilitary flags. The DUP has been very clear, time and time again, that we do not agree with the flying of paramilitary flags. I will also correct what the Member said about the illegality of flag-flying. We have looked at this, and it is not always clear and is not always the case that the public flying of flags, even from lamp posts, falls into illegality. The Member should also be well aware of that. I also share some of the thoughts that were expressed about tattered flags. If people put up the flag of our country or a flag that they feel something about, they leave it there and it gets tattered, that is a shame. I feel shameful when I see that, and I know that communities feel shameful when they see a flag that they feel something about tattered and flying from a lamp post. It is not always the case that local communities can go in and take down that flag themselves. I say to those who put up the flags that mean so much to many people and allow them to get into that state that they should remove them. That is absolutely the case, and, again, the DUP has been clear about that.

What I would say to Claire is that, coming from South Belfast — I know that most people in the Chamber at this stage are South Belfast representatives — we go to events like the Mela and go down to Culture Night. Those are great celebrations of the richness of the diversity of Northern Ireland society in 2016. That is to be celebrated. What must not happen is that we celebrate certain cultural traditions and yet, on the other side of that, say that indigenous displays of culture — other people’s cultural identities — should be packed away and we should be ashamed of them. We have heard about neutral spaces, yet I have seen Claire, who made that comment, at events in South Belfast — I think that I have seen all of us, in fact — where we have had Tibetan prayer flags or emblems and symbols of the Chinese or Indian community. We are all very comfortable about celebrating that. We need to

get into a more mature space where we can step back and say, “Do you know what? This is a cultural identity that means something to a significant number of people in South Belfast and across Northern Ireland”. We should not only tolerate that —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Little Pengelly: I will just finish the point. We should not just tolerate that. We hear a lot about tolerance, but sometimes we do not even get that tolerance. We should celebrate the richness of our cultural diversity. We should not say there should be neutrality for that and then put other cultural traditions and identities right into the public space — into Botanic Gardens and into the town and city centres. We need to celebrate right across the piece.

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Little Pengelly: Sorry, I think Chris wanted to come in.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. I think we have eventually got to a very constructive debate. Would the Member accept, however, that the Northern Ireland life and times survey, a survey used by the Executive on a regular basis to establish an evidence base for policy, shows year-on-year that, regardless of her support for flags on lamp posts or my view of flags on lamp posts, around 80% of people in Northern Ireland do not wish to see flags on lamp posts in their street? There is a significant number of people and traders with a view that this is an issue that needs to be addressed, so is she open to looking at ensuring there is a clear legal framework to deal with it?

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

Mrs Little Pengelly: Just to respond to the Member’s point, I worked closely with the life and times survey in my tenure before I even came into this post. It is a smaller sample survey. There are issues with who participates in it, but it is clear that there are people who do not like flag-flying. That is, again, part and parcel of the tolerance we should show people. If people do not want to display a flag, do not display one. Likewise, just because you do not have an affinity with a particular cultural tradition, that should not mean it should be snuffed out and stamped out in the spirit of neutrality. It is important to emphasise that, if we want to celebrate diversity, we have to celebrate it in all its forms.

Ms Hanna: Will the Member acknowledge that, for a start, this is an attempt to regulate not to ban? I made that very clear through specific examples. Will the Member agree that attempts to regulate should not be dismissed as a “hissy fit”? Will she accept that the independent research puts the ratio of a certain dimension of identity at 13:1? Will the Member further acknowledge that the Mela and Culture Night do not seek to dominate the public space for months — sometimes 12 months at a time? Will the Member further acknowledge that I specifically said it should be allowed, just not year round? — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mrs Little Pengelly: It is a little unfair: you had 15 minutes initially and are eating into a lot of the very limited time I have. I agree with you about cultural dominance, and I think it is a case of diversity, but there are communities that want what they see as their cultural identity to dominate

their space. They want to celebrate that, and generally it happens over July and August. I praise the considerable work that happens at a community level. We have seen not just in South Belfast but across Northern Ireland over the last number of years community leaders working with communities on the management of this: when flags go up, what flags go up and when flags come down. We are still, on a week-by-week basis, reaching local agreements about that, and that is to be welcomed. It is to be welcomed for this reason: we will find a solution to these issues only with local agreement and consensus. It touches on issues of community confidence, the social capital of communities and people feeling respected. When people hear that their traditions like bonfires, flag-flying or parades — people on either side or all sides of the diversity of our culture — are not accepted, are not tolerated and are bigoted or sectarian, they react against that. The reality of it is that we cannot sit up here and push and corral people into a particular position. We need to work with people on this, and we need to find workable solutions.

I think all of you have been involved in the issues down in the Holylands over the last number of years. I was actually involved in it when I was in the student union movement — I know my colleague Christopher was as well — in trying to work with the university about this. One thing is clear: there is no easy solution to these things. You cannot simply go in and say, “Do you know what? Clear the road. Sort out this problem. Do this. Do that”. We need to work with communities to find a workable solution, and this is no different. That is my concern. It raises concern, too — I see Alex Attwood sitting there — many times during negotiations on these issues.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close.

Mrs Little Pengelly: We need to find a workable solution that does not push people into an equal and opposite reaction that may worsen the situation. All of us should work together to find that.

5.30 pm

Ms Bailey: When I saw that this subject was up for debate, I was a little disappointed because I believe that the issue of flying flags in Northern Ireland is not an issue for South Belfast alone, it is an issue for Northern Ireland, and if that debate was going to happen, I would like to see a full Chamber and a raft of opinions. Having said that, I know that Claire Hanna has spoken widely on this matter and, in my opinion, she usually speaks a lot of sense. I understand why this debate is happening.

In trying to support the licensing, regulation or any other initiatives around the flying of flags, these debates need to be had. However, if we want to contain the debate in South Belfast — the most diverse constituency in the whole of Northern Ireland, which is why we see elected representatives from five different parties holding six seats in the Assembly — it is not a nationalist and unionist issue. In the last census — correct me if I am wrong — a third of the population claimed to be neither “Nationalist” nor “Unionist” but claimed to be “Other”. There is a huge Chinese population in South Belfast, and there is a huge Polish population and a huge LGBT community there as well. So, should we put flags up for everybody when they want to celebrate whatever they want to celebrate?

This is also a very timely debate because tomorrow is the day set by the Loyalist Community Council, under its own protocol, to take the flags down. In recent press statements, Jackie McDonald called on the loyalist community to make sure that the flags are down, certainly in South Belfast.

I was a wee bit concerned to hear Christopher Stalford say that a lot of people throw hissy fits when a few wee flags go up on the Ormeau Road in early June. You might have been born there, Christopher, around Annadale, but I have been living there for 20 years. I am not sure when you were last on the Ormeau Road but have a look because there are three flags on every lamp post from the top at Rosetta to the bottom at the city centre. I do not call that a few wee flags and I do not think you should be quite so trite about it.

Mr Stalford: Thank you. I am glad that you gave way. Do you accept that there is a direct correlation with this annual event ending up, in the last week in June, being blown completely out of proportion, usually in the South Belfast News? We have already talked about the fact that, if you push people in one direction, you will get an opposite reaction. Every year, two political parties in particular make a huge issue out of this. I believe that others are committed to a genuine shared future and, in particular, on the Ormeau Road. The SDLP would not even vote for a flower bed to go into the Ormeau park to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Ballynafeigh Orange hall. A flower bed was too much for them.

Ms Bailey: Thanks for that. I think that is just an —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. The Member has an extra minute. I ask all Members of the House to show courtesy when a Member is on their feet. Some of the conversations are a little too audible.

Ms Bailey: It is just another example of where this debate is going and how seriously the issue might be taken. I am recently elected, for the first time, in South Belfast, but, for years, I have been contacted by residents there with their concerns over flag-flying. There is a range of concerns. Some people are concerned that the flags are there in the first place. Some people are concerned that they are there and are left to rot. They feel that it is a sign of disrespect and they want new ones put up. Other people are concerned because they do not know who is putting them up, why they are putting them up or for how long they will be up. Some people are just seriously weary that it is flag season again.

I am not tutting at any community and I resent anybody in the House who thinks that by standing up and engaging in this debate, I am looking down on, or tutting at, the working-class loyalist communities in South Belfast, because I am not. I spent the summer meeting community groups and people in the working-class loyalist areas of South Belfast. What the people are saying is not anything to do with flags. They say, “Seriously, thanks a million for coming. We could not tell you the last time any elected representative has ever paid attention to us.” I have given the commitment that I am here for all people and all concerns.

Mr Stalford: Nonsense.

Ms Bailey: Sorry.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. The Member should continue.

Ms Bailey: Thank you.

The flying of flags in Northern Ireland is not something that I see as a celebration of identity; it is something that I see as a root cause of a crisis of identity. When people are not confident and not feeling secure, that will work its way outwards.

When Christopher Stafford was speaking, he challenged Claire Hanna and asked her when so many flags went up. Well, the flags went up in more numbers when Belfast City Council took its decision, and 40,000 leaflets went to homes telling people to be afraid and that they were under attack. The result was that we now have a bigger culture of flying flags across Northern Ireland. It is not exclusive to South Belfast. It is playing petty politics when you come out with statements like that on an issue that needs to be sorted out.

This is not a South Belfast issue; it is a Northern Ireland issue. The debate needs to be wider. It needs to be taken with a level of seriousness, not as a petty one for cheap political point-scoring. This is not a nationalist and unionist issue. We come to Pride week in Belfast, and I have the LGBT community in South Belfast come and ask me, "Where will we put our flags? There is just no room on the lamp posts". What would happen if our LGBT community went out and put its flags up? I will just leave that there. I cannot imagine that you would have the same reaction to that.

Yes, I believe that regulation is needed, not because I believe that legislation is the answer but because there is a deficit in exactly what Emma Pengelly said about community consensus and working with people and understanding their needs, their fears and their reasons for wanting this. The Loyalist Communities Council, in putting together its protocol, has done an awful lot more than any elected representative over the past few years.

Mr Beattie: I am very conscious that I am not from South Belfast, but it is a microcosm of the whole of Belfast, which is a microcosm of the whole of Northern Ireland, and it is important to talk. I am also part of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition. We have had three meetings so far, and I am one of only two MLAs who sit on that commission; it is not full of MLAs. If you do not mind, I will try to keep my remarks quite general so as not to impinge on what I do in the commission.

I suppose that the flying of flags is nearly an institution in Northern Ireland. It has become part of our psyche in many ways. Certainly, when I was growing up, flags were always flying in some shape or form, normally on a house, and that has transitioned onto lamp posts. As a unionist, I really do not mind if people use the Union flag or the Ulster flag or the Irish tricolour or the provincial Ulster flag as something that identifies them with their identity, culture and tradition. As long as they fly that flag in an appropriate way that does not intimidate, I have no real issue with it.

The one thing that I would say, just to put something in context here, is that there is only one flag that represents the sovereignty of this country, and that is the Union flag. Now, I cannot see how anybody can be intimidated by the one flag that represents the sovereignty of this country, and therein lies the problem: because I cannot see it, does that mean that it does not intimidate? In the same way, there are

people in nationalist areas who fly the Irish tricolour and cannot see how that might intimidate me. So there is a real problem about perception and understanding, and there is a conversation to be had about that.

I do not like flags flying up lamp posts; I really do not. People know that. I have gone up lamp posts and taken those flags down. My flag, my Union flag, in tatters up a lamp post — it is just not acceptable, and I do not like it. It is completely disrespectful.

Many people will know my background in service overseas, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Kosovo or east and west Africa. People know where I have come from.

Not once have I needed a flag flying above my head to tell me how British I am, that I am a member of the United Kingdom or that I am fighting for a particular cause. That is because I am a confident unionist. I am confident in my identity, I am confident in my culture and I am confident in my traditions. However, not everybody is confident, and there is a general perception — it is important to take this on board — in some communities that their identity and culture are being eroded.

I was not in politics when the decision was taken to take the Union flag off City Hall — people will know about that issue far better than I do — but it had a serious, detrimental effect on the Protestant/unionist/loyalist people of the whole of Northern Ireland. It is that perception that we need to deal with.

Ms Bradshaw: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beattie: Absolutely.

Ms Bradshaw: I would like you to expand on the point about it having detrimental effect. How can you quantify that?

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

Mr Beattie: People are at fault — you could point your finger at those who are — but when somebody takes down your national flag, you genuinely feel that somebody is trying to erode something that is incredibly important to you. If you went down to the Republic of Ireland and said, "Take down your tricolour from the Dáil", people would be upset, and that is the problem that we have here — it had a detrimental effect. I understand the reasons why, and I am not attacking that. I do not really want to get into it.

Paramilitary flags are an absolute scourge and should not be flying anywhere. If I could, I would take them down, and I have done so in the past. Only this year, the Loyalist Communities Council came up with a commemorative flag, and what did we do? We attacked them for bringing out something to try to bring about change. Mean-spirited journalists attacked them because the hand was the wrong way round. MLAs attacked them because they did not like the flag. That was a council trying to change things, and, where I come from in Portadown, it worked. This year, I could count the number of paramilitary flags flying in Portadown in single digits. It was far better than last year and certainly better than the year before that.

We have a group called Regenerate that operates in Portadown. It got residents' groups and community groups together to talk, and it came up with a flags protocol, which was instigated last year. It absolutely works: the flags

went up for our celebrations over the Twelfth of July and came down. It was exactly the same this year: they went up and came down. Paramilitary flags did not go up. It has absolutely transformed Portadown and stretched into Banbridge. It is an exportable commodity that could be taken to South Belfast and used there. That is because it is based on dialogue, not on MLAs leading the community by the nose with legislation and saying, "This is what you will do". This is about communities, supported by MLAs, coming up with solutions for themselves. This was an intra-community, not cross-community, initiative, but it had a cross-community effect in Portadown. Suddenly, we saw that flags that were up in the nationalist area were not going up in interface areas. It was not perfect, but it absolutely worked.

I do not like seeing flags on lamp posts, but I would like to see my flag — the Union flag — and all its regalia flying above our government buildings. I would really love to see that all the time. However, I reiterate the importance of bringing the people with us. Where we make improvements, we must applaud success. Where we fail, we must examine failure and do better the next time, but it will take time for us to be able to do that.

Adjourned at 5.44 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 3 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to be seated.

Before commencing business today, I want to return to an issue from last week. Adjournment debates are normally the focus of very constructive and thoughtful exchanges, specifically around constituency issues. However, last Tuesday's Adjournment debate was a very poor example of the standards of debate in this Chamber. There were a number of bad-tempered exchanges and Deputy Speaker Kennedy had to intervene on a number of occasions. I know that there are some subjects on which temperatures will always rise in this Chamber, but that is not an excuse. I was particularly concerned by Mr Stalford's tone and comments from a sedentary position when Ms Hanna refused to give way to him for a second time during her speech. The Deputy Speaker intervened at the time to caution about demonstrating care even with comments made from a sedentary position.

Members will know that this Assembly does not work on the basis of considering specific words to be unparliamentary, but, instead, we examine the context of the words. I have now reviewed the Official Report, and it is clear that Mr Stalford's comments and reaction were uncalled for. They were not in keeping with the standards of debate expected in this Chamber of respect, good temper and moderation. The Member should take this as a warning. He would be wise to ensure that I am not given cause to deal with his behaviour again.

I regret that I have had to deal with this sort of issue so early in the life of the Assembly. I have no doubt that there will be difficult debates to be had in this Chamber during the course of this mandate. As we go forward, it should be perfectly possible for Members to robustly express differing opinions without responding in a disrespectful manner. If not, it will be dealt with from the Chair. I ask new and, indeed, returning Members to bear this in mind.

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to remain seated. I have to deal with another matter.

Matter of the Day

Ardoyne/Twaddell Resolution

Mr Speaker: Mr Gerry Kelly has been given leave to make a statement on the Ardoyne/Twaddell resolution, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24.

If Members wish to be called, they should rise in their places and continue to do so. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I remind Members that I will not take any points of order on this or any other matter until the item of business has been finished.

Mr Kelly: I am glad, Mr Speaker, that you accepted that, over the weekend, something quite significant happened that is worth a few moments of our time to contemplate.

After many years of disputes around the Crumlin/Ardoyne/Twaddell area, an agreement was signed that allowed the Twaddell camp to be dismantled and a moratorium to be put in, and for the Orange Order to complete its return parade from 2013. The agreement was long sought after. The issues surrounding the disputes affected not only everybody in the area but community relations. The big story is the fact that there was agreement, even though people had thought that this was an intractable problem, and there could be no agreement. The agreement also allows a conversation to expand beyond the issue of parades, which had entered into every conversation, whether on regeneration, housing or bringing tourists or jobs into the area. Parades came into the middle of every conversation. Now, with where we are, we have a great platform for moving forward.

We had another parade on Friday night and a protest on Saturday morning, which, I am glad to say, was also peaceful. However, I have to mention some of the scenes that are now in the media around Father Gary Donegan, who is a highly respected priest in the area. He is respected not only as a priest but as someone who has been involved in peace and reconciliation work over a long period. Some of the people who gave him such abuse have a political agenda. Some of the key figures in the Greater Ardoyne Residents Collective (GARC) are also involved in other anti-peace-process political parties, and you cannot fool people on the ground when they know exactly whom they are dealing with in all this.

Father Donegan should not have taken that abuse. I took some abuse myself, but I am a politician and that is what politicians are here for: to take whatever criticisms are thrown at us in whatever way. We should be able to take it. However, to focus attention on Father Gary Donegan is a disgrace. The same man has been up in the area every

night for the past two and a half years, trying to make sure that no more young people got caught up and entered the criminal justice system.

Let me say a little more. Gary Donegan, as far as I am concerned, is the perfect image of a worker priest. I am glad —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Kelly: — that all the parties now support the agreement and Father Donegan; perhaps they should have done so a long time ago.

Mr Beattie: I join Mr Kelly in welcoming the peaceful outcome of the Ardoyne/Twaddell impasse. It is proof, if ever it were needed, that dialogue and accommodation can bring us forward out of the abyss.

I congratulate the people who helped to facilitate the arrangement. They worked tirelessly behind the scenes, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for bringing the dispute to an end. We have also to congratulate those involved in the dispute for going that extra step forward and coming away from it. I particularly pay tribute to the loyal Orange Order, which took that extra step and stretched itself to find a way out of this. I am not a member of the Orange Order, but I can see what it has had to do to get to where we are today. In the same way, I can look at the Crumlin and Ardoyne Residents Association (CARA), which had to deal with considerable hostility in coming to where it now is. We have to be thankful that it showed the courage to get to where it is. It is interesting that the agreement was brought about, despite the Parades Commission. This group came together; the Parades Commission did not facilitate this agreement.

There were some pretty awful scenes, and, again, I agree with Mr Kelly about Father Gary Donegan, who showed incredible courage and leadership when he was receiving verbal abuse, which looked like it nearly bordered on physical abuse.

We must look to people like that who stand up and take very difficult decisions. We have moved forward but we have a way to go. We in the House should now look at how we can make the situation better in Ardoyne, Twaddell and possibly other places. That is for the future, but I have to take this moment to commend the people who brought about the peaceful resolution.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next Member, I remind Members who wish to speak that they should continue to rise from their seat.

Mr McCausland: Like others, I welcome the fact that the Orange brethren and the bands were able to return home to Ligoniel on Saturday and complete their parade. The Crumlin Road is one of the main arterial routes from the Ligoniel/Ballysillan area down into the city centre. It is a tragedy that the community around there and, indeed, in the much wider area around north Belfast has had to endure, over a number of years, the results of what was originally a bizarre, ludicrous, unwarranted decision by the Parades Commission to prevent the brethren from returning on a Twelfth evening. It is a road that has been used by Orange brethren, bands and lodges over many years — in fact, there are records going back well over 100 years — because it is the main road down into the city centre.

The events on Saturday were, indeed, peaceful, and that is to be welcomed. I am glad that the brethren were able to return home. I join others in saying that the behaviour of the GARC people on Saturday — some of them, in particular — was, quite frankly, appalling. You saw their hatred — raw, naked hatred — and it is very hard to comprehend. We saw that hatred directed towards, obviously, those in the parade: the brethren from the three lodges and the bands. We also saw hatred that was not sectarian hatred but the outworking of sectarian hatred, in that they turned on the local priest, Father Gary Donegan. The scenes were really quite shocking. That says something, I think, about the hatred that needs to be addressed in our society. You can have accommodations and work through many things, but, ultimately, we need to get to the bottom of rooting out and addressing that sort of raw sectarian hatred, because it finds its expression not just in opposition to parades but in attacks on Orange halls and in the demonisation of the Orange Order, which has been going on for many years. Let us take the opportunity now to address those issues and tackle the hatred that drives a lot of that. Hopefully, we can then move forward to a shared and better future in which roads such as the Crumlin Road are truly shared.

Ms Mallon: A lot of people entered the weekend with a sense of nervousness and anxiety. Certainly, the SDLP is pleased that, on Friday night and Saturday morning, everything passed off peacefully. The three lodges, from what I could see, adhered fully to the Parades Commission's determination, the illegal camp was very swiftly dismantled thereafter, and the protest was peaceful. However, as many Members pointed out, there was a deeply disturbing moment when Father Gary Donegan was confronted by a number of very angry protesters. What I witnessed was appalling, vile and frightening. I tried to intervene twice because I was truly appalled at what I was seeing. I can assure the House that Father Gary Donegan then, in the heat of that moment, and subsequently, has responded with nothing but dignity, and you would expect nothing less.

The first key milestone of the agreement was tested and passed on Saturday. All efforts must now focus on ensuring that the remainder of it is adhered to by all sides. It is right to acknowledge that there is a sense of nervousness about the level of expectation that perhaps both sides have for the outcome of the process and, in particular, the community forum that is a critical element of it. However, while we in the SDLP acknowledge — it is important to do so — the anxieties that people might have, we are very hopeful that north Belfast is entering a new era and that we can have a clear focus on the issues that are really damaging people's lives, including mental health and training and employment opportunities, to name but a few. It is important that we acknowledge that people with some of those anxieties and that nervousness can be reassured somewhat by the fact that copies of the agreement have been provided to our First Minister and our deputy First Minister, the British and the Irish Governments, the Parades Commission and the PSNI. Hopefully, with them acting as guarantors, that will help to allay some people's fears, and we will have seen the last of worries, anxieties and potential trouble when it comes to contentious parades in my constituency of North Belfast.

12.15 pm

Mr Lunn: Like others, I welcome the agreement and the resolution of this long-running dispute. I pay tribute to the loyal orders and the Crumlin and Ardoyne Residents Association for, dare I say it, finally seeing good sense after two and a half years and, I believe, something over £20 million of expenditure. There were major sensitivities on both sides; we have to acknowledge that. An agreement that took a long time to come to fruition is better than no agreement at all.

I also commend the police operation; I do not think that anybody has mentioned the police yet. The PSNI has held a line up there nightly for all that time. Sometimes it erupted, and sometimes it did not, but the cost of it and the resources that the police had to put into policing the area over that time have been massive. They dealt with it with their normal restraint and dignity and with respect for human rights and the tensions on both sides.

It has been quite a good summer, relatively speaking, for parading. I hope that, as a result of this agreement, as others said, there may be an opportunity now to move forward to discuss these things in an atmosphere of calm and cooperation rather than of stand off. I certainly hope so. Like others, I utterly condemn the treatment of Father Gary Donegan. This is a man who, as others said, has spent night after night and day after day trying to, as I understand it, keep young people in particular away from trouble and from perhaps getting a record that they should not have. He deserves better than to be confronted by a group of people abusing him in those circumstances. I believe that the 'Sunday Life' reporter Chris Woodhouse was roundly abused as well but for what reason I am not aware. As Mr Kelly said in introducing the matter, we are politicians; we have to put up with this. I do not believe that a priest or a reporter should have to suffer that kind of abuse, and I am glad to hear it being condemned by all sides.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am encouraged to hear today that everyone has had an opportunity to give support to the agreement. Indeed, many did last week, and that was greatly appreciated, particularly by CARA and some other residents. It is important that, when we use this opportunity to speak in the Assembly, we speak with one voice, particularly on such an important issue. I think that, for every political representative, or most of them, despite their best efforts to get resources, facilities and services to their constituents in North Belfast over the last few years, this has been an issue that has been crying out for resolution. It is also an issue that has been crying out for leadership. I commend CARA and, indeed, the loyal orders for using that opportunity and leadership to come to a resolution that we all now know about in its public form. Residents in Twaddell Avenue and in Mountainview, Ardoyne and the Dales, as well as businesses, have had their quality of life greatly impacted by nightly and weekly parades. People going about their business and getting on with their lives were greatly impacted.

For me, the message is that we all need to support resolution where that is possible. In order to provide that sort of leadership, even this afternoon, we must use softer words. Nelson spoke about hatred but his language could have been a bit softer when he joined in with the rest of us. I am delighted that he is supporting the agreement but he should support it without conditions and without making points. It is a community that we all represent and we all

have interests in but we all need to show leadership and reach out to one another.

We have political and ideological difficulties, but that is what this place is for. We need to make sure that our communities, our streets and our children and grandchildren — ours, not mine or yours — are left a legacy that is far better than the one we had. How do we do that? We confront what happened on Saturday. Should it be against Father Gary Donegan, or Brian who was with him or anybody else, even some of the people with GARC, who have the right to protest, will back off when they see that behaviour.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am glad that the resolution has received the full support of the House.

Assembly Business

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Third time lucky. As you will be aware, at the end of last week the reclassification of housing associations was announced by the Office for National Statistics and a short press release was issued by the Department of Finance and the Department for Communities.

I am raising this with you because the use of a press statement as opposed to making a statement to the House on a matter of such significance, given the impact it will have, potentially, on new housing and on the cost of borrowing for the Executive, seems to me to be another attempt to avoid scrutiny and normal practice.

I know, certainly, in Westminster there was a statement when a similar thing took place, because the Speaker there would very much frown on Ministers offering government by press. What will you do to ensure that the House has the opportunity to question Ministers urgently on this important issue?

Mr Speaker: First, it is not a point of order. It is, indeed, my intention to encourage all Ministers to bring any statement that they wish to make first of all to the House. Having said that, there is no impediment that I can apply; it is a procedural matter. Ministers have the right to issue statements and you have the right to hold them to account as you are doing today. There are other ways in which you can hold Ministers to account for their statements.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Education

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in education format. The meeting was held in Armagh on 21 September 2016. The statement has been agreed with junior Minister Fearon and is made on behalf of both of us.

The Council had initial discussions on the implications of the UK European referendum result. Ministers in both jurisdictions will continue to engage on this important issue.

The Council noted that Co-operation Ireland has been awarded the contract to progress teacher professional development in the area of educational underachievement in both jurisdictions. Minister Bruton and I agreed that this work should also cover the dissemination of best practice in literacy and numeracy from the work of the two inspectorates. It is envisaged that the work will be completed and the final report submitted by July next year and I look forward to receiving the report.

The Council noted the good progress made by both Departments and the Middletown Centre for Autism to support the promotion of excellence in the development and harmonisation of education and allied services to children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders. Alongside increasing the number of users who have benefited from the centre's services, an important aim of the expansion of services was to further embed the centre as an essential delivery body for the range of services that are available to support children with autism in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

A follow-on joint inspection of the centre was undertaken by DE and Department of Education and Skills (DES) inspectorates in April 2016, the results of which were published on 30 August 2016. The overall findings of the evaluation reported that the quality of leadership and management was outstanding, that there was high quality leadership from senior management and that the services of the centre were impacting significantly on the education and experiences of the pupils, teachers and parents. The Council also noted that new appointments have been made to the board of Middletown Centre for Autism for a term of three years from 16 March 2016. The centre has been considering any potential implications following the outcome of the EU referendum.

The Council noted the ongoing activities of the North/South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work in the professional endorsement of higher education programmes in youth work. The Council also noted the commitment of the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland to the optimisation of ICT for effective youth work in a rapidly changing environment and their determination to implement the recommendations of the Screenagers international research report, which explored the use of ICT, digital and social media in youth work and provides evidence-based recommendations to promote the development of ICT in youth work.

The Council welcomed the joint update from the two teaching councils and continued cooperation between the teaching councils on measures to reduce obstacles to the mobility of teachers. In particular, the Council noted that the Teaching Council of Ireland is in the process of introducing mechanisms to address qualification shortfalls that arise as a result of the introduction of the two-year professional master of education qualification and that the North/South teacher qualifications working group, in conjunction with the two teaching councils, will be considering the impact of the outcome of the referendum on EU membership on teacher mobility at its next meeting, which is scheduled to be held on 19 October 2016.

The Council welcomed progress with the proposal from St Mary's University College, Belfast and Marino College to collaborate to support access to the Irish language requirement by applicants accredited by the General Teaching Council. The proposal is now with the steering committee at Marino College for consideration. The Council welcomed the continued commitment to a cross-border professional learning collaboration between the professional development service for teachers and the school development service. I note the successful completion of the first years of the history and digital storytelling project, which culminated in a showcase of films made by the 12 schools involved, in the Irish Film Centre, Dublin, in May this year.

The Council was pleased to receive a report on the continued collaboration between the two inspectorates. Inspectors from the Department of Education's Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) participated in a training session organised by the Department of Education and Skills' Inspectorate for inspectors working in Irish-medium settings during August 2016. A further round of inspector exchanges has been organised to take place in the 2016-17 school year. The themes of the exchanges will be modern languages and mathematics in the primary curriculum. The selected inspectors met in a joint session on 30 September 2016 in Dublin. Inspectors from the Department of Education and Skills' Inspectorate will join an inspection team from my Department's ETI in an Irish-medium school in autumn 2016. A joint meeting of the management teams of both inspectorates is scheduled for November 2016. An assistant chief inspector attended the DES staff conference in Athlone in March 2016. This was highly beneficial, giving the opportunity to engage in discussions around the theory of evaluation, the impact of inspection on school improvement and the quality framework for schools. Similarly, a DES inspector attended the ETI staff development conference in September 2016.

As I hope Members will have gathered from my statement, the meeting in Armagh on 21 September 2016 illustrates in positive terms how the Education Ministers can work effectively together to progress matters for the mutual benefit of citizens in both jurisdictions.

Mrs Overend: I notice that the Minister did not share any knowledge on the ownership of the entire schools estate between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In any future meetings, will the Education Minister initiate such a discussion along similar lines to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Republic of Ireland and possibly learn from that?

12.30 pm

Mr Weir: We can always have exchange of information. I would have thought that the ownership of the schools estate in Northern Ireland was really an internal matter for Northern Ireland, but, if there is a particular suggestion that the Member wants to make, I am sure it can be looked at. I am not quite sure of the relevance of a cross-border basis on that subject.

Mr McElduff (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I thank the Minister for his statement — *ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabhail leis* — and welcome its content. I want to zone in on two issues. The first concerns the Middletown Centre for Autism. Is there a contradiction in the statement, in that the Minister said that there was great praise and recognition in a very positive review for the centre, but at the same time there appear to be plans to convert to online provision up to 70% of parental training? It appears that residential support services have been abandoned.

The second issue is the portability of qualifications on a North/South basis. I think particularly about a situation, if there was to be a withdrawal from EU membership, in respect of accommodation costs or university fees for students from the North who are, perhaps, studying in Dublin.

Mr Weir: I will deal with the two issues in reverse order. Obviously, when the precise shape of EU withdrawal takes shape, that can be looked at. University fees and accommodation fall within the remit of higher education. That is where there is a slight degree of mismatch between the remit of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the remits of some of the Departments in neighbouring jurisdictions. In the Republic of Ireland, higher and further education fall within the remit of the Department of Education and Skills. Obviously, those things do not fall within my departmental remit. When there is discussion around the broad issues of the EU, that is probably something that is better addressed between the Education and Skills Minister in the Republic of Ireland and the Economy Minister here. I am sure they will be happy to pick up that issue.

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

There is a glowing report on Middletown in terms of the model that has been used. The new appointments to the board of Middletown will want to give a bit of thought to the best way forward. The current process has worked very well. I had the opportunity to visit Middletown a couple of months ago, and the shift from the original plan of a number of years ago for a purely residential centre to one that focuses much more on outreach facilities has proved to be the better route. If you talk to the professionals there, the parents, the children and the schools, that seems to be the better route. Obviously, there will need to be some thought given to future direction by the new board.

The Member mentioned the online facilities, which were not directly part of the statement. Technology is moving very quickly, and there has been considerable success in bringing parents and teachers to Middletown for training. With regard to how that is thought through, there is a desire to ensure that the learning experiences are spread as much as possible. Given the geography — I stand to be corrected on this — the online training is of particular relevance to the Republic of Ireland, more than

Northern Ireland. If you are dealing with much greater distances, particularly from the southern parts of the Republic of Ireland to Middletown, you also have to look at what is convenient for parents and teachers. There has probably been greater emphasis on the online side in that jurisdiction than in Northern Ireland, which, despite our preconceptions, is geographically a relatively small place, so getting to Middletown is a lot easier than, for example, for someone who is travelling up from Cork or Kerry.

Lord Morrow: My question is also about the Middletown centre. Is the Minister entirely satisfied that the delivery model that is being used at Middletown is fit for purpose?

Mr Weir: Obviously, there will need to be a degree of refreshment of that. The last time there were questions in the House on Middletown, the Northern Ireland representatives on the board at Middletown had been appointed and we were waiting for the nominees from the Republic of Ireland. I was glad to see that, by the North/South ministerial meeting, those appointments had been made by the Republic of Ireland, which enables them to move forward.

Broadly speaking, Middletown took a different path from what was originally intended. The original intention, with a greater level of resources, particularly from the Republic of Ireland, was to have something based on a residential centre. The focus for Middletown shifted to a range of things, including research and training sessions for teachers and parents. The emphasis of all that focus is on outreach and what is called a “whole-school” approach, taking the trained professionals from Middletown and embedding them for a period in the schools where the children who have autism are. There are positive spin-offs from that. It means that there is training for the school itself, which puts it in a much better position to deal with future autism needs. That might have started off as plan B effectively, but I think that plan B has actually worked out to be much more effective. Talking to board members, staff, some of whom have been there from the very start, and the parents was a very moving experience but also a very informative one. It showed that plan B had almost certainly worked out a lot better than the original plans. Sometimes that is the route that life takes us. Broadly speaking, I am satisfied, although I remain open. If there are other suggestions of any adjustments to that model, I am happy to take those on board.

Mr McGrath: I welcome the statement. It highlights the areas of North/South cooperation that there can be in education and the benefits of that for students. I welcome the inclusion of a substantial paragraph about youth work and the development of IT. Having worked in the sector and seen at first hand the benefit that IT can have on youth work, I look forward to seeing continued development to help young people on the ground. However, I was a little disappointed to see such a short —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Could the Member ask a question, please?

Mr McGrath: Oh, I will get there. There was only a short mention of EU matters. I spent 10 years undertaking youth exchanges and saw the cultural and educational benefits of that. Do you see any future for continued North/South exchanges?

Mr Weir: My answer may be shorter than the question.

I always see benefit in exchanges between jurisdictions. Youth work can almost be seen as having a Cinderella-type quality in education, and it is important that it is embraced. On the brevity of that part of the statement, while there are significant impacts from a DES point of view in terms of the referendum and the challenges and opportunities that are there, most of those do not interact directly with the Department of Education. Most of the EU implications, particularly from the Republic of Ireland, as highlighted by the Chair, tend to look more at student exchange and mobility at higher and further education level. There was limited amount of nexus on that issue, which explains why a relatively short part of the statement related to that aspect.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I remind Members to come quickly to their question. We are not here to make speeches in this session.

Mr Lyttle: The Minister’s statement references excellent cooperation between all-Ireland education and health services to the benefit of children and young people with autism at the Middletown centre. What is the Minister’s assessment of the level of cooperation in Northern Ireland between the Education Authority and the health trusts for children with special educational needs and their families?

Mr Weir: That is a matter that falls outside the North/South Ministerial Council meeting statement. As a result of the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 and other actions that are being taken, there is now liaison between education and health. We start from a base that clearly needs to be improved. At a high level, there is departmental cooperation. We have to try to ensure that that happens on the ground for special educational needs. However, as I said, that has limited direct relevance to the statement itself.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I was coming to that point, Minister: it is entirely at your discretion whether you answer the question or not. I ask Members to keep their questions relevant to the statement in front of them.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister’s statement. What advantage does the Minister see in cooperation in the area of educational underachievement?

Mr Weir: I was able to attend and address the opening session of the conference in Newry on Thursday on educational underachievement. It is the second such conference that has been organised by Co-operation Ireland. A range of actions will arise out of that, particularly dissemination of best practice. When it comes to educational achievement, particularly in an environment of tight educational budgets and, indeed, tight budgets across government as a whole, it is about trying to ensure that we have gained the knowledge of best practice and then disseminated it.

In that context, the opportunity for professionals to exchange views is helpful. Part of the Co-operation Ireland project is to try to disseminate that best practice, which is also helpful. As I highlighted at the conference, that can sometimes involve what happens internally in Northern Ireland because a range of useful things are happening on the ground on educational underachievement in parts of Northern Ireland. Trying to spread that message within Northern Ireland is useful. We should not be so arrogant in Northern Ireland to believe that we have all the answers to every question. Consequently, when there is an exchange

of information, whether it is on a North/South basis, with other parts of the United Kingdom or, indeed, about international best practice, particularly on educational underachievement, we should be prepared to listen, find that best practice and try to ensure that it is disseminated. That should be the focus. There will be a substantive report on that next year, and I look forward to receiving it.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his previous answer, and I will continue in that vein. Will he ensure that he and his Department will make tackling underachievement a priority and bring forward the policies and interventions that are needed to deliver quality outcomes for all our children and young people, particularly those from a socially or economically disadvantaged background?

Mr Weir: Before the Deputy Speaker raises any issue, I will say that, yes, I will try to see what learning is done from that. There are a number of interventions, as the Member is aware, particularly in communities and, indeed, in wider contexts that are helpful in tackling educational underachievement. In the last fortnight, for example, a report was produced on nurture units. There has been a level of success with that. There is a separately funded early interventions strategy that is, in part, supported by Delivering Social Change and the Atlantic Philanthropies. It is things like Learning to Learn. There are a range of measures. Sometimes, arguments go off on tangents, but, in my view, when tackling underachievement, the biggest single intervention is early intervention, which is where the focus ultimately has to be. In times of tough budgets, it is one of the areas that I am keenest to protect as much as possible; indeed, if possible, I want to see it grow.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his statement. Can he outline any ongoing cooperation between the North/South education and training standards committee and other jurisdictions?

Mr Weir: I mentioned that it is useful that there is wider learning and cooperation. That is helpful whether it is on a North/South basis or across the United Kingdom and involving a range of organisations. That is particularly true for the North/South education and training standards committee for youth work. It is working closely not just on a North/South basis but with its counterpart organisations and the training standards committees in England, Scotland and Wales through the joint education and training standards committee. That means that the individual committees are able to operate things like mutual recognition of protocols and to work together. There is, for instance, close work involving Northern Ireland by the Dundalk Institute of Technology and the Open University, with particular endorsements from colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales. A very open attitude has been taken by the education and training standards committees across a range of jurisdictions, which will, hopefully, be beneficial to all aspects of education.

Mrs Barton: I note, Minister, that Co-operation Ireland has been awarded the contract to progress teacher professional development in the area of educational underachievement, including numeracy and literacy. Will you provide some additional information on how that professional development will be progressed, given the two very different curriculums in the jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?

12.45 pm

Mr Weir: As part of that, Co-operation Ireland has been looking at the overall issue and taken a number of actions. Decisions were taken some time ago to provide support from both jurisdictions. On the details, there will be a range of outputs from the project: for instance, we are looking at the conferences that have taken place, a programme of teacher professional development and the management of educational underachievement. What arises from the conferences will provide an informing tool for how we take that forward.

The Member is quite right to say that there are different curriculums — that must be realised. However, a range of the activities pertinent to educational underachievement may not be particularly or massively curriculum driven. This is a lesson that may need to be learned in Northern Ireland. The absenteeism policy, for example, and working out how to ensure that the attendance, particularly of those who are underachieving, is better, has an important impact on educational underachievement. Different schemes operate at grass-roots level in Northern Ireland, and it is about learning those things. That is pertinent not only to Northern Ireland; it arises in the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales and, indeed, throughout the world. It is about trying to disseminate best practice. Obviously, there will be a range of choices to be made at individual school level, but, if schools can make those choices against a better background of what is potentially best practice, it will enable them to take informed decisions.

Ms Armstrong: I thank the Minister very much for his statement. I noted with gratitude his discussions on special educational needs and especially the Middletown Centre for Autism. In that vein, the statement refers to:

“commitment to a cross-border professional learning collaboration”.

Does that collaboration include discussions about the qualification shortfalls, particularly for teachers of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools?

Mr Weir: We should remember that the collaboration in Middletown is specifically focused on autism. The college is probably not in a position to widen it beyond that at this stage, although the new governing committee may want to take it in a slightly different direction. Principally, that is about trying to teach and explain best practice to teachers and parents.

So far, there has been a total of 58,000 separate contacts on the issue of training in Middletown. The contacts have focused not just on the teachers who are responsible for a child for only part of the day. It is important to get not simply a whole-school approach but a whole-life approach, and critical to Middletown's work has been the training of parents. That is one of its major advantages. Indeed, when I visited, that was one of the examples of good practice that was indicated to me, not simply by professional staff but by the parents of children whom Middletown is directly helping.

Mr Allister: I note in the statement references to a plethora of joint ventures on inspectorates, history projects, teacher mobility, youth and teacher exchanges, professional development etc. What parallel cooperation and deepening involvement in education is there with other parts of the nation of which we are a part?

Mr Weir: A range of exchanges takes place on different levels. I mentioned, for instance, that the youth councils cooperate on a British Isles-wide basis.

An exchange could involve a representative of the ETI going to a conference, and characterising that as “a plethora” may be questionable. There are, however, experiences that we can learn from.

For example, there is much greater use of Irish language schools in the Republic of Ireland. That means that there is a background of expertise there. For instance, the inspectorate probably has much more experience of dealing with such schools. It is important, I suppose, that we learn to cover those situations. I am keen to see cross-jurisdictional exchanges of information and exchanges in a general sense across all the borders, and I think that a considerable amount of that is ongoing.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That concludes questions on the statement.

Private Members’ Business

Scrambler and Quad Bikes

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): 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 others will have five minutes.

Before we begin, I advise Members of the need to take care in their contributions today. I am sure that you are all aware of the ongoing criminal proceedings in relation to an accident involving a scrambler bike during the summer. The subject matter of those proceedings is sub judice. I do not wish to inhibit discussion of the motion, which clearly relates to a matter of public interest, but Members should take particular care not to say anything in their contribution that might in any way prejudice the current criminal proceedings.

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to review the current legislation governing scrambler and quad bikes; and further calls on the PSNI and other responsible agencies to ensure that the current legislation governing these machines is enforced in a robust way.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to propose the motion. I propose it in the hope that all Members will support it and send a clear message that we are committed to highlighting the dangers of scramblers and quads, when driven recklessly or in public places, and are united in doing what we can to ensure that legislation governing those vehicles is enforced in a robust way.

A number of adults and children have lost their life or been seriously injured in recent years by these vehicles. The tragic death of Valerie Armstrong and the devastation caused to her family brought that into the public arena again. I am very mindful of the caution that you gave about speaking on that case, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have no need to explain to Members the way in which scramblers and quads plague communities, as I have no doubt that many of you will have seen it at first hand or heard from your constituents and people coming to your offices.

I want to focus on a number of issues during the debate. First, I will discuss what needs to be done to ensure that the current legislation governing these machines is enforced. Then I will look at some of the gaps in the legislation, including those around registration. It is also important to look at how we can have an effective public awareness campaign, especially at this time of year in the run-up to Christmas. Often, this is when the machines are bought for children and young people. All of us need to ensure that parents, in particular, are aware of the law on scramblers and quads and of where they can and cannot be used before buying them for their children.

My first point, put simply, is that the current law is very clear. For a scrambler or quad to be legally used on the road, it has to comply with the following: the driver has to have a driving licence; the vehicle has to be taxed; it has to be registered with the DVA; it has to have insurance; it has to have lights and reflectors; and it has to have a number plate. The fact is — it is important to emphasise this point — that the scramblers and quads that we see being driven

about in our communities are intended for off-road use only. It is illegal to drive them on public roads, on public footpaths or in any public places, such as parks. They are only allowed to be driven on private property with the permission of the property owner. The legal status of those vehicles is very clear. They also have to be insured and the proper safety equipment worn by users. If they are driven in a reckless way or cause distress or annoyance in any place, the PSNI has the power to seize them.

As I said, I have no doubt that many Members in the House have either personally witnessed the dangerous manner in which scramblers and quads are driven or have had constituents make complaints about them. Certainly, in my office, I get complaints about them regularly. At best, they can destroy green areas and pitches used by children and young people for sporting activities; at worst, they can destroy lives and have destroyed lives. By using them in public places, people put pedestrians, including young children, and other road users at risk, but they also put themselves in danger.

People need to have the confidence that, when they report the use of the machines in public places to the police, particularly when they are being used in a reckless fashion that puts members of the public in danger, the law will be enforced and the vehicle seized and taken off the streets. Parents, too, need to be aware, when they buy scramblers and quads for their children, that they can only be driven on private land where the landowner has given permission and that the scrambler or quad needs to be transported to and from that designated area and cannot be driven on the road to or from it.

Along with party colleagues and community representatives, I have recently had meetings with the PSNI, the Minister of Justice and the Minister for Infrastructure. I am delighted to see the Minister for Infrastructure here to respond to this important motion, and I look forward to his response. We went to those meetings to see what more could be done to enforce the current legislation or, if there were gaps, what could be done to amend it. I want to say that there was willingness on the part of everybody in those organisations — Ministers and Departments included — to work together. They expressed their willingness to work together to solve the issue. For example, on the issue of registration, it was suggested that we look at a scheme that would make it easy to identify who owns a vehicle and at the possibility of marking the machine, so that, if it were being used in a reckless or nuisance way, it would be easy for the PSNI to identify the owner and deal with it.

I know that other initiatives have been brought forward to raise public awareness about this, such as signage and setting out more information for people in communities and the constituents who come into our offices on how they can report and how the vehicles can and cannot be used. There were also suggestions that Belfast City Council look at possible designated sites and areas for the vehicles where young people particularly and their parents could ensure that they were used in a responsible and safe manner. I know that that has happened in other council areas. There have been partnerships between the police, motor sport and community representatives. They have come together to look at this. I hope that Belfast City Council, in particular, will take this forward because I know that this is a particular issue in certain parts of Belfast.

I look forward to hearing what all Members say during the debate. I particularly look forward to the Minister's response. I have to say that I really want to see Members supporting the motion because the truth is that we really need to do something before another tragedy occurs. We need to remove these vehicles from our streets, roads, parks and other public places. We need people to be safe when they walk on footpaths and in parks. I urge all Members to support the motion. We should all work together with all the agencies, Departments and other organisations.

Mr Humphrey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Infrastructure): I rise as Chair of the Committee for Infrastructure, but the Committee has not met to discuss the issue and has not taken a position on it. These views are entirely my own. I should make the House aware of that.

I agree with much of what the Member who moved the motion to the House said. I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue. For me, it is not about preventing people from enjoying scramblers or quads but about using those vehicles in a safe and responsible way and striking that balance.

1.00 pm

Like the proposer of the motion, I receive quite a number of phone calls to my office on this issue, in particular from the expanse of Glencairn Park. The issue there is that some people, particularly elderly people, are frightened when they hear scramblers and the noise pollution that comes from them.

There is a clear danger on the road to the person using the scrambler, to the person walking on the footpath and, of course, there is a danger for other people in the traffic. There is considerable damage caused in the churning up of parks and pitches. Belfast City Council has spent a considerable number of millions of pounds over the last number of years under its strategy of putting new pitches in place. Unfortunately, some of those pitches have been damaged by scramblers.

It is vital that we strike a balanced and reasonable approach between protection and responsible usage. The focus of the House has to be on the protection of life and reducing injuries, particularly serious injuries, reducing road traffic accidents, protecting public amenities and preventing the destruction of our parks. It is not about making scramblers illegal but making those who use them more responsible. In most cases, it is for the parents of those who use scramblers to be responsible and adhere to the law because it is about protecting everyone.

There is, absolutely, a need for a joined-up approach on this issue. From my perspective, as the DUP spokesperson on this issue, I welcome the motion, and the Democratic Unionist Party will support a review of the legislation. The Assembly working with councils would be a vital move forward because so much of this illegal activity happens on council facilities, not just in this city but across Northern Ireland.

If I may speak as a Belfast representative, it is important that Belfast City Council looks at the possibility of establishing a facility for scramblers and quads. I remember a number of years ago, when I was a member of Belfast City Council, working with young people who were using skateboards. A skateboard park, built under the flyover at Lagan Bridge, took them away from using other

public spaces and stopped them from being a nuisance and allowed them to take part in legitimate activity in a designated area. That is the approach that should be taken. Therefore, there needs to be a joined-up approach.

The other issue, of course, is the police. The police are not allowed to chase someone on a scrambler or quad in a built-up space because of the potential for an accident. Only last year, a similar scenario unfolded across the way from my office, when someone came out of Woodvale Park. I mention Woodvale Park because my office overlooks it, and I worked hard with the local community to secure over £2 million for Woodvale Park. Two new pitches that were put there — that are, thankfully, now being used by local football clubs — have been damaged by the use of scramblers.

There is an absolute need for a joined-up approach and a round-table discussion. I would very much welcome and support such a call. Since being elected as a public representative, I have attended the funerals of two young people, one as young as four years old, who were killed on scramblers. One was in the mid-Shankill, and the other young fellow came from Glenbryn in Ballysillan. He was only 14 years old.

Of course, the incident and the accident — and I am mindful of what you said —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Humphrey: — is Valerie Armstrong. I appeal to the House to support the motion. Let us get a joined-up approach and make sure we get legislation that is practical and will make a difference and protect lives.

Mr Beattie: I support the motion. In doing so, I stand with our Executive as they attempt to curb this menace, which is neither new nor unique to Northern Ireland. At the same time, I challenge our Executive to produce more than the words of this motion and to look at the problem with a strategic eye.

The issue of quad bikes or scramblers being driven on our streets or on private land, in a dangerous manner without proper personal protective equipment (PPE), has been highlighted for over a decade. Legislation is in place to deal with it; the issue is whether or not that legislation is enough. The Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was amended in 2016, and the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 give the PSNI the powers they need to ensure that mechanically powered vehicles are not driven anywhere other than on roads — there is an issue with private land. It gives the police the power to seize vehicles used in a manner that causes alarm, distress or annoyance and the power to enforce the wearing of PPE, in the form of protective headgear. Last month — and this is interesting — the Justice Minister made it clear that the PSNI was content with the present legislation and the powers available to deal with the issue. In my contribution, I want to raise a number of other issues that might fall out of that.

First, the issue of enforcement. If the legislation is in place and the PSNI is content with the powers available to it, then why do we see such terrible incidents as the tragic death of Valerie Armstrong in Colin Glen forest park or, if we go back to 2011, the tragic death of Daniel Mooney, who was only 12 years old when he fell off the back of a scrambler? Many of these incidents could have been prevented if the

PSNI had reacted to reports from concerned residents — because residents are ringing in and reporting these incidents — or if the PSNI had more of a footprint in these and other areas in the form of robust neighbourhood policing. Of course, this is not a criticism of the PSNI, because we all know the strain on our police force with budget cuts, indecisive strategic leadership and a series of manpower deficiencies. Again, I call on the Executive to look at the minimum manning level of the PSNI and take action to increase its numbers to 7,500 officers, as envisaged in the Patten report, giving the force the ability to return to fully resourced neighbourhood policing.

With that, I call on the Justice Minister —

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. I have sympathy for the point that the Member makes. However, does the Member agree that, ultimately, the responsibility lies with the parents to ensure that those young people are using scramblers in a responsible way? Obviously, police are in the equation but, as you well know, police are always under huge pressure in terms of their time and resource. As with all crime, they have to respond with the resource that they have available to them.

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

Mr Beattie: I thank the Member for his intervention; you are absolutely right. Later in my contribution, I am going to raise that very issue.

I call on the Justice Minister to drive forward, at pace, a review of sentencing to enable our judges and magistrates to deliver punishments that act as a deterrent. It is not enough for people to use scramblers and quads in an illegal manner and then say that they did not mean to harm someone. By using these vehicles in an illegal way, they are going out knowing that they could end up harming or killing somebody.

I move on to parental control. Without a doubt, there is a trend that those riding quads and scramblers illegally are either young adults or children. Therefore, there is a huge onus on parents to show responsibility. Parents should not buy their children quads or scramblers unless they know that they have access and permission to use private land. Even then, I ask that they supervise those individuals and ensure that they know how to operate the vehicle efficiently and wear the correct PPE. I can see how new legislation making all those who operate such vehicles on private land have to obtain some kind of mandatory, formal familiarisation training and a wider understanding of the issue surrounding the use of quads and scramblers is something that could help. It is also a reasonable assumption that those parents living in heavily built-up areas who allow their children or teenagers to go out with such vehicles must know that they are operating them illegally, on the streets or the nearest piece of waste ground. Those parents are complicit if somebody is injured, and they need to be told this.

We need to have proactive measures because, all too often, we debate these issues after the fact. We are debating this today because of a death, so we are debating after the fact.

I do not lay blame purely at the door of the Department of Justice, past or present; I do not blame the Justice Committee; I do not blame law enforcement; I do not blame

the Assembly. But we must find a mechanism to keep the citizens of Northern Ireland safe. On this particular issue, there is no easy solution. It is difficult to catch those involved in using scramblers and quads outside the legal guidelines.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Beattie: Whatever route we decide to go down — legislation, technology, public awareness or education — the bottom line is that we must resource our Police Service and must educate parents.

Mr Attwood: I thank Jennifer McCann and others for bringing this motion to the House today, and whilst it is clearly important and welcome, everybody is mindful of the particular circumstances that have brought about this debate at this time: the tragic, sad and painful circumstances of the death of Valerie Armstrong and the impact on her immediate and extended family.

As other Members have indicated, there have been a number of other deaths arising from the use of these sorts of bikes, and many, many serious injuries. If you do any review of source material on these matters, you will find that there are regular incidents leading to serious injury or death on this island, in Britain and further afield. It should be within the grasp of all of us, including government, to scale up multiple interventions to mitigate the risk of death and serious injury from the use of quad and other off-road mechanisms. That means trying to identify solutions to the problem that is clearly before us.

I will refer to some matters, some of which have been touched on already. I acknowledge the work of Belfast City Council and people involved in community safety, over the last number of weeks, in working up some — for want of a better term — management tools to deal with the use of these vehicles. As referred to by Ms McCann, there are proposals forthcoming in respect of signage on council property, on lamp posts and on private land, with the consent of the landowner. Interventions of that sort to issue warnings about what is or is not allowed and about the penalties for misuse will be important.

I agree with some of the comments made by Mr Beattie. Given the very heavy risk that exists and the consequences for too many families in this city and beyond, there should be exhortations to parents for them not to buy these sorts of vehicles for their children, not least over the next two or three months in the run-up to the Christmas season, and if they do buy them, they should put on constraints for responsible use.

If there is a need for a new law on the registration and marking of these sorts of vehicles when sold, the SDLP will endorse it. Our experience of people and vehicles generally suggests that there will be a need for legislative intervention. We have discovered that in respect of all other sorts of vehicles and all other issues to do with road and land safety. It is my view that a new law will be required in order to try to manage the issue and mitigate the risk.

I concur with the views made on enforcement. There is a wide family of legislation already in existence, and — I note the comments made about police resources — there are a number of mechanisms available to the PSNI and other authorities enabling them to deal with the use of these vehicles. There is legislation for use without lawful

authority; alarm, distress and nuisance; criminal damage; and supplying petrol to persons under the age of 16. There is also an obligation on those who sell petrol to behave more responsibly when people come to their premises. There is a wide range of enforcement mechanisms and legislation, and I urge the police to deal with that.

1.15 pm

I have one example, after which I will bring my remarks to a close —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Attwood: Recently in Kent, there was an effort to deploy legislation against wrong use: 94 vehicles were seized, and calls were reduced by three quarters.

Mr Lunn: I thank Ms McCann and her colleagues for tabling this timely motion. The law on the use of scramblers and quads is, indeed, confused. Questions could be asked about the current legislation, in particular, the extent to which it is being enforced by the PSNI.

There does not appear to be any restriction on the size of a machine or the age of the person operating it if they are off-road. In theory, it would be possible for a 13-year-old to drive around on a 650 cc machine as long as he or she is off-road.

Mr Mullan: I thank the Member for giving way. He will be well aware, due to the high-profile media attention, of the tragic death of 13-year-old Daniel Sheridan in August at Magilligan in east Derry. The incident really shook the whole community. Does the Member agree that, although motocross tracks may encourage more responsible use of these vehicles — I encourage that — it is of the utmost importance that health and safety be paramount for all riders, especially young people, and any controlled or purpose-built tracks should be included in a review of the use of these vehicles?

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

Mr Lunn: I think that I deserve an extra two minutes, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]* I agree with the Member's comments on health and safety. My understanding of the current law is that there is no requirement on the driver of a quad bike to wear a crash helmet, as there is a requirement for motorbikers.

The police have a difficulty because, if the equipment is being used off-road, they have to be certain that the landowner does not want it to be happening and has not given permission. That is not easily obtained. The police have to try to implement the law of trespass. Trespass, according to my basic knowledge, does not mean just a presence on the land; it means that there must be damage. The purpose of the motion is to tidy up this type of thing. Theoretically, a noise nuisance complaint could be made, but that would involve the local council. Try getting a council to enforce a noise abatement order and see how far you get. Quad biking happens in the open air, probably in the countryside, and it is not feasible.

Currently, there is no requirement for liability insurance if a vehicle is being used off-road, but there is for on-road use. The law for on-road use is reasonably clear. These things are regarded as motorised vehicles and have to have type

approval, be registered, have an MOT if necessary, display number plates, reflectors, indicators and have third-party motor insurance. This is where I can contribute something. Trying to get third-party motor insurance on these contraptions is very difficult and is a specialised market. Companies that will insure them are not keen to insure a quad that is purely for recreational use.

Farmers do not have any great difficulty in getting cover because they have a clear need because of their occupation: perhaps somebody wants to draw a boat out of the water or something like that. There are situations in which it is possible to prove to an insurance company that there is a need for the cover and the vehicle.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Sure.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member agree with me that insurance can be very problematic for anyone to take on because, first, many of those using the bikes do so illegally in public areas, and, secondly, they frequently allow many of their friends, who, of course, are not insured, to use them, which defeats the purpose?

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for that. If you are 17 years of age and try to insure a 500 cc motorbike, you will not get cover — it is not available. The same applies to quads. Not only is there a problem because insurance is required but cover is impossible to get. Other Members made the point that, most of the time, we are talking about youngsters. If you see a quad — I am talking really only about quads — being driven on a public road by somebody who is 16, 17 or 18 years of age, it is absolutely certain that it does not have proper third-party motor insurance.

The police seem to be reluctant; they have seizure powers, but they do not seem very keen to use them. It is a mess that needs to be tidied up quickly.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Lunn: I have seen the police on Twitter proclaiming that they have seized a very expensive motor vehicle because it did not have any insurance. I have yet to see the same situation arise —

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

Mr Lunn: — with a quad.

Mrs Cameron: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important matter today. I thank those who tabled the motion for bringing it to the House.

Mr Lunn referred to helmet wearing by quad bike users. As far as I am aware, that is covered under the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, which we dealt with last term in the old Environment Committee. I am not sure whether that has Royal Assent yet, but, if it has not already come in, it is on its way.

I suspect that the catalyst for bringing this to the House today was, as Members across the Chamber have said, the tragic death in July of mother-of-three Valerie Armstrong, which brought into sharp focus the need to look at the legislation and enforcement currently in place. I would like to take the opportunity to send my condolences to Mrs Armstrong's family. Whilst her death was the most

recent and harrowing such event, it was not an isolated incident. Each year, our hospitals deal with dozens of cases of, on the whole, younger people making poor choices, ignoring the law and putting their life, and the lives of others, at risk.

I fully appreciate that the use of scramblers and quad bikes in an appropriate manner, with the correct safety equipment, can be a very enjoyable activity for those involved. I am aware of a number of purpose-built facilities across Northern Ireland where scramblers and quads can be used in a controlled environment. For many, it is an exciting pastime. However, as with any activity involving powerful and fast vehicles, there are inherent risks, which are often heightened, especially when they are used in an inappropriate manner and safety is disregarded. Quads and scramblers are not toys; they are restricted to off-road use and only on private property where permission has been granted. The PSNI has powers to confiscate any vehicles causing a public nuisance that are being driven on the road without insurance or a driving licence. The root of the problems is the lack of enforcement of the current powers.

The unlawful, aggravating and, at times, intimidating use of those vehicles is quite often viewed in the context of antisocial behaviour, and quite rightly so. However, there may be an attitude amongst individuals using quad bikes and scramblers illegally that they can deliberately flout the law as nothing will be done. Robust and swift enforcement is key to getting the message across that that behaviour is simply not acceptable.

There is also room for improvement in awareness of what the law states. While some are mindful that they are acting illegally in the use of these vehicles, I suspect that a greater number are not aware of the consequences. Work in conjunction with local schools may assist the PSNI in getting the message across and educating young people not only about the law surrounding quads and scramblers but about the dangers that they hold and what can happen if they are used irresponsibly.

Finally, we cannot overlook the role of parental responsibility in ensuring that these vehicles are used legally. Again, I feel that there may be a lack of awareness amongst parents of the full intricacies of the law surrounding quads and scramblers, where they can be used and who can use them. I believe that there may be an opportunity, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to include quad bikes and scramblers in its programme of road safety awareness schemes.

In closing, there is no doubt that this problem needs to be addressed. By vigorously enforcing legislation, we have an opportunity to raise awareness of the law, and I think that we could quickly see a change in the illegal use of these vehicles. I support the motion.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas le Jennifer McCann as an rún a chur os comhair an Tionóil inniu. I thank Jennifer McCann for bringing the motion to the Assembly. Members have referred to the death of Valerie Armstrong, and Jennifer McCann played a significant role in highlighting the issues that flowed from that. I am mindful of your guidance on sub judice, Mr Deputy Speaker. Jennifer McCann has raised it at the Policing Board and has had meetings with senior members of the PSNI about the legislation.

The motion is in two parts, and it sets out very clearly that there should be a review of the current legislation, and then it calls on the PSNI and other agencies to effect the current legislation in a robust way. That is what we have to do.

There is no doubt that that recent death being raised at the Policing Board brought to the fore many issues that, sometimes, even the public do not understand, particularly in relation to quad bikes and scramblers. They have to be taxed, registered and insured. More could be done in those three areas to ensure that young people who have vehicles illegally understand that they have to have the vehicle registered, taxed and insured. We need public awareness on this issue to ensure that that is brought to the fore, even at the point of sale. When you register a motor vehicle, the garage has a responsibility to ensure that it informs the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) that someone has purchased a vehicle. Responsibilities are put on owners of vehicles to ensure that when they sell a vehicle on they have a responsibility to inform the DVA as to who the next owner is. We need to look at those issues, and, when we look at the legislation and seek from the PSNI how it enforces it, the review of the legislation will be better informed. Sometimes, there is enough legislation in place; it is about enforcement, awareness and a relationship between the PSNI and the community.

In recent times, there was a spate of car crime, and a combination of stolen vehicles or runarounds caused great nuisance in some estates in Derry. I was involved in a meeting with the local PSNI and the community safety partnership, and many of these issues came out. The PSNI did a presentation and talked about how it had seized a number of scramblers and quad bikes, and people at the meeting asked on what basis it was able to do that because people were working from the perception that, first, it had to be reported and then the PSNI would have to catch the person on the scrambler for it to be seized. The officers involved in the meeting said that they went to the house and the person could not prove that they owned it, they could not produce insurance or tax, and the vehicle was seized. That is the type of thing that we need to see happening. That is a relationship between the community and the PSNI. It can be seasonal. Sometimes, it can be in the summer when younger people are off school. I do not want to say that it is all younger people because I have seen people in my area and they are certainly not children.

It can be around Christmas time, when parents may think that it is not a bad thing to buy a child a small quad or scrambler, but if it is not taxed and registered and if the child is not given the proper equipment in the proper circumstances, parents are leading them into danger or into a situation in which they could get a criminal conviction or worse.

1.30 pm

We have to see the current legislation brought to the fore. We must see an awareness campaign. Belfast City Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council have given great publicity to quads and off-road vehicles. In my opinion, the review will assist the process. Alex Attwood said that, in his opinion, there may be a need for some legislation. He talked about the experience of Kent. Those instances need to be brought to the attention of the Department and the Minister so that, when we act, we do so to assist the process. However, we also have

to concede that there is enough legislation in place, so long as there is good cooperation and enforcement of it to protect us.

Mr Girvan: I also support the motion. I do not think there is anyone in the Chamber who has not been contacted by people with problems associated with scrambling, including the noise and nuisance. It is wrong to say there is no legislation. There is some legislation that covers many areas, and that is something that we have to be aware of. We must ensure that that legislation is properly enforced and knowledge of it imparted.

We live in a society in which, unless you legislate for something, people want to blame somebody. There is personal responsibility and parental responsibility and those two areas have a vital role to play in the problem. We must ensure that parents who decide to purchase a scrambler for their child, without considering where they are going to use it or without instruction about how to use it safely, are held to account. Mention has been made of the personal protection equipment that should be carried or worn. Yet some people believe that, if you have a helmet on, you are invincible and can do whatever you want.

There must also be consideration of the landowner whose land is being used, sometimes without permission. I am thinking primarily of a site in my constituency that is owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. It is quite a large area and it has been used by scramblers and those involved in scrambling.

As a young boy, I thoroughly enjoyed anything associated with an engine and a bit of fun. I do not want to legislate so that the Health and Safety Executive gets the name, "Department of no Fun". There needs to be a little give and take on the matter. However, the Housing Executive has a responsibility to ensure that its land is not accessible and is not used for this purpose. That can be very difficult to police. Each of us has a responsibility for it. The individuals who live around the site that I am talking about phone the PSNI on many occasions about scrambling, but they hear the usual story: "Unfortunately, we cannot respond to this matter", or "We will be out at some stage, but we will not make it a priority unless they are causing a major problem." As a consequence, the police usually come out at 10.00 pm, when nobody is there, so it is not an issue for them. We must ensure that this does not happen.

There is also an issue about those who fall off scramblers and quads. If they are on private land, and even though the landowner has not necessarily given permission, he could end up becoming liable for a minor who gets injured on his land. That is very worrying from the landowner's perspective, and it is something we should look at. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. If someone breaks into your property and cuts himself, he might take a claim against you because your property is insured but he is not. That is where I think the law can sometimes be an ass, because it errs on the side of those perpetrating a crime or creating a problem.

I understand that a number of high-profile cases brought about the debate today. I think of the case mentioned here this afternoon involving the tragic death of Valerie Armstrong. I think that there is another area that people are maybe not aware of. Pedestrians are told to get out and take exercise. Likewise, young people are told that they need to get outside instead of playing on their Xbox

and doing all those other things, and I think that that is vital. The problem is that those on mountain bikes are in the same predicament when they interact with pedestrians.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Girvan: It is about ensuring that we have a separation between those using equipment and pedestrians on public pathways. We should look at that as well. I support the motion, and I think that a review would be very helpful.

Mr Beggs: I also thank the Member for West Belfast for bringing forward the motion. The issue continues to give rise to concern. I agree with her that this is very timely, because some parents in their, I would say, lack of knowledge may be thinking of making a purchase before Christmas, and it is important that people are fully aware of the law and of the dangers to their child and the public if their child rides such a vehicle. As long as they do so in that knowledge and have somewhere safe for their child to ride it, it will be fine. There are similar concerns in my constituency of East Antrim about the illegal use of motorised vehicles. Indeed, sadly, there has also been a fatality in Carrickfergus. As I say, there is a need for the public to be better informed about the use of quads and scramblers.

I do not think that anybody else has outed himself as a former scrambler — I am. I rode a trail bike from the age of 16 on my father's farm and then had an RM 125. Not everybody fully understands the power that is there. I had a look online and saw that it is listed as being 38 horsepower. The Yamaha YZ was only 33 horsepower. Would you dream of putting a child behind a team of 38 horses? That is the amount of power that we are talking about. A scrambler can frequently out-chase or outride a car, such is the acceleration. Parents need to understand the degree of power that they are handing to their child. There needs to be education and training, and until a child has that, it is unwise to hand such a vehicle to them.

I fully understand the thrill, and I am lucky to have survived the spills involved. I think that it is important that people understand the danger to the rider and to those in the vicinity. I noticed that, just this summer, the police in my constituency highlighted concerns raised with them about scramblers in Selby Road, Marshallstown Road and the College Walk area of Carrickfergus. Indeed, I have come across scramblers before at Woodburn reservoir and the council-owned public park at Broadlands. Frequently, they are used illegally either on the road or in public areas. In both cases, parents really should be aware — I suspect that there is a lack of knowledge — that their perhaps £1,000 or £2,000 investment, or perhaps even more for a modern bike, could be seized from them. So, apart from endangering their child and the public, they may lose their precious asset.

There needs to be greater knowledge of that law. The law says that a vehicle with an engine of more than 22.5 cc, and that is very little, will be classed as a motorised vehicle. Therefore, if someone with such a vehicle wants to be on the road, the vehicle should be insured and taxed and should have lights, and a helmet should be worn. Failure in any of those areas means that it could easily be lifted. If it is ridden in a public area without permission, straight away, an illegal act is occurring, and the police, having given a warning, can seize that vehicle. I think

that we may need to look at the law in that regard to see whether there are areas that need to be improved.

This is a very difficult area to police. Are the police to give chase to a young person on a scrambler?

Will that involve a high-speed chase and perhaps an accident? That does not work either. We need to see what is practical and what would work.

There was mention of creating a bespoke track somewhere. That is a good idea. I like that idea. In my youth I went to a track in Carrntall in Newtownabbey. It was fantastic — you could jump in mid-air, and you thought you were wonderful — but facilitating such a track involves huge risks. Will everyone entering it accept their risk and not turn round and sue either the landowner or the council? That needs to be ironed out. Also, how are such bikes to get to the track? I would not wish parents to think this is coming shortly or without considerable expense. To get to the track, a parent will probably need a trailer costing, I do not know, £300 or £400, and a tow bar for their car costing £200 or £300. So, on top of the bike, if they want to get that bike to the track, they have to be prepared to purchase those things. On top of that, are they going to deliver —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Beggs: — their child and collect them later? It is not just as easy as building a track. I encourage people to contact local motorcycle clubs, where those who already use motorcycles safely and with some knowledge can give some advice and perhaps some training.

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

Mr Frew: I support the motion and thank the Member for West Belfast for moving it. Like West Belfast, my constituency, North Antrim, has been plagued by this activity, more so in Ballymena in built-up areas of the town. Before I move on to that, let us talk about the actual motor sport. The motor sport is a very good one. It fascinates young and old, and it gives people a buzz and an interest. That should be encouraged, as young people having interests and hobbies is a good thing — anything that gets them out and about and off their Xbox is a good thing and should be encouraged — but with that comes responsibility. It is a motor sport, and motor sports are dangerous. They come with risks. There is high speed involved, and people can get hurt and people can be killed. We had evidence of that only in the last few weeks with young Daniel Sheridan unfortunately losing his life in an accident that was in some way controlled.

It is dangerous. That should be a red light flashing and a siren going off for all parents who purchase scramblers and quad bikes. That is the first thing we have to say. Even in a controlled setting and there are marshals, regulations and laws for a course, a track or a race, there are still dangers and risks involved. How much more so, then, when young people go out and about on bikes that are strung together? They go out on footways and highways where there are people, including young people riding their tricycles on footpaths or elderly folk going to do their shopping in the local shop. That is what happens.

In Ballymena, Harryville and Ballykeel, which are two distinct built-up areas, are divided by Larne Road

Link, which is basically a dual carriageway. There are underpasses, and these young people — maybe not even so young, on some occasions — ride from one area to the other. They use the underpass, which is connected with a network of paths. They get so far, and they are all heading to the one place: either to the south of the town or to Education Authority land in Ballykeel. They have to use the network of paths, cross over roads and then drive down built-up areas. They drive recklessly on footpaths and on roads with 90-degree bends to get to their desired environment. They have no permission on either site to ride scramblers, but they do it thinking they are doing no harm. They do tremendous harm to the communities they sail through. Elderly folk are frightened. Young people are frightened to go out on their tricycles and bikes, and parents are scared to allow their children out. These people ride their scramblers, do wheelies down main avenues and bounce on and off footpaths. That is absolutely no way to treat their community.

1.45 pm

Some of the bikes are strung together, and some riders do not even wear safety gear. Do they not realise the danger to themselves, let alone to the community in which they live and to pedestrians? They also use a public park at the Ecos centre, where many walkers, runners and other people enjoy the environment. They swing round those paths, which are only a metre wide, with little regard for what is around the corner.

I believe that the issue can be resolved with better enforcement. I believe that there are times when the police look sympathetically on the actions of young people on scramblers — if they are scrambling about on waste ground, they are not out and about doing other things. That is totally and utterly the wrong message to send out. The bikes can be seized, and that would send a warning to others that their behaviour cannot be tolerated. Why do we set laws? We do so to protect people and to change the mindset of society.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Frew: That is what needs to happen. The police need to enforce the law better and seize the bikes.

Ms Mallon: On Tuesday 19 July this year, as has been referred to by many Members, Valerie Armstrong, a devoted mother of three described by her parish priest as

“a generous, kind and loving person who was filled with life and the natural expectations of a young mum”

lost her life after she was struck by a scrambler. As other Members have pointed out, we have lost people across different constituencies as a result of the dangerous and irresponsible use of these vehicles. It is important to take a moment to extend our sympathies to those who have, sadly, lost a loved one in that way.

In recent years, we have seen a rise in the dangerous and irresponsible use of quads, scramblers, go-peds, buzz boards and mini-motors, not least around Cave Hill Country Park and Marrowbone park in my constituency, North Belfast. Accordingly, there has been an escalation in the number of injuries inflicted by these vehicles.

I thank the Members to my right for bringing the motion before us today. I share Ms McCann's view that it is important that the House sends a strong and united message of responsibility to parents, who often buy the vehicles, and to the vehicle users. It is also important that we send a strong message to the PSNI and other responsible agencies that they need to robustly enforce current legislation. Equally, there is a responsibility on the Executive, working with those agencies, to ensure that the legislation is as effective as it can be. Ms McCann has helpfully taken time to outline the conditions and legal requirements that must be met in respect of the ownership and use of the vehicles. The critical point that we must get across, which nearly every Member has touched on, is that these vehicles are not toys. They are motor vehicles that can travel at up to 60 mph and can kill, and they should be treated as such. That is the unequivocal message that we must get across, particularly as Christmas approaches. Yes, when used in a controlled, safe and responsible environment with the necessary training, they can be fun. In agricultural settings, as Mr Beggs pointed out, the vehicles are, for example, often critical in carrying out farming duties. Outside that structure, however, they can be devastating, and much more work is required to educate parents in particular about the legal requirements and the dangers of the vehicles and to encourage their safe and responsible use.

There is a role to be considered for other more robust measures when parental culpability is evidenced. I say that in no way lightly but to reflect the seriousness of the matter. The seriousness of it comes home when people are injured or, tragically, killed. It also comes home when you speak to the many residents — their numbers are increasing — whose lives are blighted by the noise, the disturbance and the risk of injury and death from vehicles that are being driven on our roads — I have witnessed that with my own eyes in North Belfast — and in our public parks, which are there for us all to enjoy and use safely.

As many Members articulated, the solution to this escalating problem lies not in one source. We certainly need more robust enforcement of current legislation, not least in PSNI seizures. The House needs to be able to satisfy itself that the legislation and other tools at the disposal of the PSNI, councils, courts and others is as effective as it can be.

I am not suggesting that this would be the case, but the review of current legislation must not be a paper exercise and no more than that. If the review finds that more is required in legislative interventions, the Executive should not be found wanting. The game changer, I believe, is in raising awareness of the dangers and in promoting the legislative requirements that parents and others who purchase these vehicles must follow. Addressing the issue of parental responsibility is never an easy thing, but we should certainly not shy away from it, not least on this matter.

Mr Robinson: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. In my constituency in recent years, there have been incidents of death and noise pollution from scramblers and quad bikes. It is a problem that householders and others find disruptive and intrusive, and I realise that a balance has to be struck between illegal scrambler activity and legitimate users. Incidents have occurred on private land and public roads, so there is a difficulty in tracing offenders. The police play a vital role

in combating the problem, so, where the problem exists, the police need to be more proactive, as they were in Limavady recently. It is forbidden by law to ride scrambler or quad bikes in public spaces such as playing fields or public parks, so it is essential that any problem with them is tackled immediately by the police.

In July this year, the danger of the misuse of scramblers or quads was brought into sharp focus by the tragic death of Valerie Armstrong. This family are living with the reality of scrambler and quad bike misuse, and I realise that this is a very sensitive legal issue at present. At this stage of my contribution, I wish to express my sincere condolences to the bereaved families of Valerie Armstrong and, indeed, of Daniel Sheridan, who died recently on a quad bike in the Magilligan area of my constituency. Sadly, these are not the only families in Northern Ireland who have had to deal with accidents on these bikes, and it would be ideal if the number of incidents could be further reduced. For this, there is a need for robust enforcement, as the motion states.

To ensure that the legal framework is fit for purpose, a review into the current legislation would be helpful, possibly to identify areas where the law needs to be changed. I would support such a review because the law needs to be fit for purpose. The law also has to be enforceable. It is worth noting that, if the law is to be enforced, there must be enough police officers or other agency officials to be able to enforce the law equitably.

I support the motion as it could be beneficial in reducing accidents involving these machines.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The next item of business in the Order Paper is Question Time. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.53 pm.

2.00 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that questions 1, 7 and 11 have been withdrawn.

Social Investment Fund: Northern Zone

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund projects in the northern zone. (AQO 353/16-21)

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): All £9 million of the funding allocated to the northern zone has been committed to the six projects prioritised by the local steering group. Delivery is progressing at pace, with three of the projects, worth almost £4.5 million, now operational and providing vital support and opportunities in local communities. The community capacity hubs project, worth almost £1.7 million and funding improvements to seven community premises, has commenced. The two remaining projects, focused on mental health support and fuel poverty and worth almost £2.8 million, are committed. Work is ongoing to finalise the implementation plan and to commence the projects as quickly as possible.

Mr Beggs: It is now some six years since the First Minister and the deputy First Minister first raised the idea of the social investment fund (SIF). Does the Minister agree with me that it is an indictment that, at this date in time, none of the £1.8 million allocated to tackle fuel poverty has reached any of my constituents who are in urgent need and that, if she were a business, she would be out of business?

Mrs Foster: The first thing that I would advise the Member to do is to calm down. *[Laughter.]* The second thing that I would advise the Member of is that the strategic investment fund is making a huge impact on areas across Northern Ireland. I am really disappointed to hear that the Ulster Unionists have still not got what is happening in their own constituencies. What is actually happening is that we are making a real impact on constituents. We are helping them through employment programmes. Indeed, Mr Speaker, I was delighted to be in your constituency just last week making a very good announcement about employability and allowing people to be employed where otherwise they would not have had the opportunity to be so. Some £80 million will be spent in relation to SIF. Hopefully, by the time it is implemented, the Members in the official Opposition — that is the Ulster Unionist Party, because it has deemed itself the official Opposition — will get with the programme.

Mr Mullan: Will the First Minister provide an update on the community premises support project, which is designed to update the infrastructure of community buildings in the north-west, especially with regard to Limavady?

Mrs Foster: If it is the northern zone project that he is talking about, I understand that seven community capacity hubs will be dealt with. Five are ready to go ahead; two,

however, have difficulties with health and safety. The business case has been split off so that five can go ahead while the other two have their issues dealt with. I am very pleased that the project is moving ahead.

Mr McMullan: Minister, you mentioned that there are five cases ready to go in the northern zone. Can you give us an example of one of those?

Mrs Foster: Yes. Under the community capacity hubs, Moneymore, Broughdearg, Ballymaguigan, Castledawson and Coagh halls are ready to proceed, but I understand that there are health and safety issues with the other two halls. Those are being dealt with proactively by officials, and I have no doubt that those issues will be dealt with very quickly.

Mr Hilditch: The First Minister has already touched on some of this, but can she share any good examples of the positive impact that the SIF projects are having in these areas?

Mrs Foster: SIF is investing £18.5 million in employment-focused projects. Given my background, I am particularly pleased that it is supporting over 800 people through training and paid work placements. I had the opportunity to speak to a young man who was not employed but who had a real desire to get involved with the technology industry. No one would employ him because he lacked experience and had not had the opportunity to gain qualifications in the sector. After securing a placement through one of our SIF-funded employment projects, he not only gained experience and training but increased his confidence and self-belief.

As a consequence of that, he has secured a full-time position with a major software company. That is exactly what it is all about. Others can say, "Oh, this hasn't happened. That hasn't happened": we are interested in real people and the outcome that can be achieved for real people, and that is what we have been able to do with individuals such as the young man whom I spoke to. I think that we will look back at SIF and say, "We are very proud of that project".

Mr Lyttle: I am sure that even the First Minister will accept that there have been serious problems with the administration of the social investment fund. There have been a number of Executive gateway reviews of that. Is she satisfied and can she assure the House that all government protocols, particularly in relation to ending paramilitary activity, have been followed in the awarding of contracts under the fund?

Mrs Foster: Yes. I wish that the Member would be more explicit about which one he is speaking about. Is he speaking about the one that I was at last week? I will sit down if he wants to mention the project he is referring to.

All the SIF programmes have been assessed by civil servants and have all passed what they need to pass to be allowed to draw down the money. I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that any of the SIF money that has been awarded will be put to the use for which it has been intended.

Mr Allister: The panel on paramilitarism commented adversely on officialdom pandering to paramilitary groups. It said that those that Government do business with:

"should be consistent positive examples to their communities."

Why has the management of a social investment project in east Belfast been handed over to a UDA front organisation? How many Provo front organisations are set to run SIF projects? Is that what the social investment fund is all about?

Mrs Foster: The Member reads from the paramilitary panel report but does not reference the part of the report that says:

"Those who have been or are members of paramilitary groups but who wish to transition should be encouraged to do so. This includes the need to make sure that as many ex-offenders as possible are able to reintegrate and live peacefully and productively in society."

That is what the panel report says, and I am standing by that.

Brexit: NI's Interests

3. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have in place to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are represented in negotiations on an exit from the European Union. (AQO 354/16-21)

Brexit: UK Government Engagement

6. **Mr Easton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on any engagement with the United Kingdom Government on leaving the European Union. (AQO 357/16-21)

Mrs Foster: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I would like to group questions 3 and 6.

As I recently stated in the Chamber, while it is for the United Kingdom Government to negotiate directly on the terms of our exit from the European Union, we intend to have a full and active voice in shaping the terms of those negotiations to get what is best for the people of Northern Ireland. We welcome and are determined to see fulfilled the Prime Minister's commitment to full engagement with the Executive in preparing for the negotiations and to an inclusive UK-wide approach to and objectives for those negotiations.

Members will be aware that meetings have taken place with the Prime Minister and with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union. We have also written to the Prime Minister to set out our initial assessment of the particular challenges that Northern Ireland will face. Work continues in and between Departments to scope and refine the nature of those challenges so that our position will be informed and supported by the best information and analysis available. Discussions have also been taking place in bilateral and multilateral format between the Governments on sectoral issues and on the establishment of a formal intergovernmental forum under the auspices of the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) to consider all issues regarding the exit negotiations.

Mr McGlone: I thank the First Minister for her comments. Will she consider the use of an Ad Hoc Assembly Committee to oversee and scrutinise the Brexit process as it evolves and develops? What is her opinion on that?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. That is a matter that the Committees must take up, if they decide to set up some Committee structure. There have been

occasions in the past when the Committees have come together for a particular reason. They may well believe that they want to do that on this occasion. It is a matter entirely for the Committees and for the House.

Mr Aiken: I thank the First Minister for her remarks. Has she a view on the Prime Minister's recent comments about initiating article 50 by 31 March 2017 and about a Great Repeal Bill? Has she received any written response to the co-First Ministers' letter dated 10 August, which raises several issues that would directly bear on triggering article 50 and the Great Repeal Bill? Would she ensure that, in the spirit of openness and transparency that her Government are well known for —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to come to his question.

Mr Aiken: — that response is published?

Mrs Foster: We have not received any response to our letter of 10 August, but that does not mean that we have not been communicating with Whitehall or, indeed, with our ministerial colleagues there. Here is some news for the Member: not everything is put in a letter. We sometimes speak to each other on the telephone and, indeed, by other mechanisms.

Mr Easton: I thank the First Minister for her answers so far. Is she satisfied with the level of engagement with the UK Government? Does she support the triggering of article 10 by the end of March next year?

Mrs Foster: I think that the Member means article 50. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure what article 10 is *[Interruption.]* I am sure that some of my Europhile colleagues will be able to tell me what article 10 of the Lisbon treaty is all about.

Engagement with Her Majesty's Government will be multilayered. We will, of course, have multilateral discussions with the Irish and UK Governments and some bilateral discussions. The formal ministerial discussions will take place through a JMC format, and the deputy First Minister and I have been clear that we want to be directly involved in any negotiations so that we can put forward what is right for all the people of Northern Ireland, regardless of whether they voted to remain or to leave. We are focused on what is best for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Lynch: What discussions have taken place with the Irish, Scottish and Welsh Governments?

Mrs Foster: We had a very useful meeting during the specially convened British-Irish Council (BIC) in July. As I said, negotiations and discussions will continue bilaterally and multilaterally. I have no doubt that, when the date for the Joint Ministerial Council is set — we believe that that will be set relatively soon — we will continue to discuss matters with our Scottish, Welsh and, indeed, Republic of Ireland colleagues.

Mrs Long: The Prime Minister's announcement at the weekend not only accelerated the Brexit process but made it clear that access to the single market and its retention would not be a priority. How does the First Minister feel that that will impact on business in Northern Ireland, given the degree to which we trade with the Republic of Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. It is a core question and one that I have no doubt will continue to be at the core of the negotiations over the next period. Whilst access to the single market is important, we should also remember — people sometimes try to wipe the slate

on the issue — that, if we were continuing as members of the European Union, we would have to deal with domestic water charges, the ever-greater inflexibility in relation to attracting foreign direct investment —

Mrs Long: That was not the question.

Mrs Foster: If the Member will allow me, I will answer the question. I know that she is always in a rush, but give me a minute. We would also have to deal with state aid rules.

The negotiations will be long; they will be protracted. As a country, we should not be lacking in our ambitions. I have listened to some of the disparate members of the Opposition making the case that we should set out in solid stone what our negotiation position should be. I never heard such nonsense in all my life.

Mr Storey: They are not very good at negotiating.

Mrs Foster: Indeed, it just shows what good negotiators they are. You do not set out your hand before entering into negotiations. I will not undercut the negotiating hand of the Northern Ireland Executive in these matters before we start —

Dr Farry: You do not have one.

Mrs Long: You do not have one.

Mrs Foster: I am sorry; there is a bit of noise coming from the naughty corner.

It is in everyone's interest to make the transition as smooth as possible. In doing so, we will work with the Republic of Ireland's Government, with colleagues in Scotland and Wales and with the UK Government.

That is where we are. We will continue to push ahead with what is right for the people of Northern Ireland.

2.15 pm

Mr Agnew: Given that the people of Northern Ireland voted to "Remain", will the First Minister give a commitment that there will be no Northern Ireland Great Repeal Bill? Can she outline what work is being done by the Executive to ensure that existing EU laws are enshrined locally?

Mrs Foster: We will not be passing a Great Repeal Bill; that is a matter for the Westminster Parliament, which is sovereign in all these matters, as, indeed, colleagues in Scotland and Wales have had to face up to. Some Members in this Chamber have still not faced up to the fact that the vote on 23 June was taken right across the United Kingdom. I still hear that Northern Ireland voted to remain. Northern Ireland is a constituent part of the United Kingdom. We were all asked whether we wanted the United Kingdom to remain or to leave, and we all voted. The vote has been taken. Now let us get on with it and deal with the consequences.

Mr Speaker: Members, before I call Mr George Robinson, I extend a welcome to the Rt Hon Ekwee Ethuro, Speaker of the Senate of Kenya, and an accompanying delegation who are visiting the Northern Ireland Assembly. You are all very welcome indeed. *[Applause.]*

NI Bureaux: Washington and China

4. **Mr Robinson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Northern Ireland bureaux in Washington DC and China. (AQO 355/16-21)

Mrs Foster: Having just returned from the United States, I can testify to the ability of the Northern Ireland bureau in Washington to represent our interests at the highest level, in partnership with Invest Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland. That strong working bond between the three offices ensures maximum impact, not just in the United States but in Canada. In the two years that it is has been operational, the Executive bureau in Beijing has established excellent working relationships with key national and provincial government bodies. I am looking forward to developing these relationships when the deputy First Minister and I visit China in December.

Mr Robinson: I thank the First Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the bureaux will play an increasingly important role in attracting investment and jobs to all areas of Northern Ireland, including the north-west of the Province?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, the bureaux perform a critical role for all the people of Northern Ireland. It hosts Executive Ministers and Assembly delegations when they go to the United States — I am speaking about the Washington bureau — and it has hosted many other delegations from Northern Ireland schools, universities and business. That bureau provides a very clear view of what is happening in the United States and tries to exert influence by bringing forward what is happening in Northern Ireland — in modern-day Northern Ireland, because it is very important that people have an understanding of what is going on here now.

The deputy First Minister and I will go to China at the beginning of December to open our office in Beijing. We will use it to make further contacts in, and inroads into, the Chinese market. We are very much looking forward to doing that. We had a good opportunity to speak with our consul general, Madam Wang, last week. The Chinese are looking forward to hosting us, and we hope that it will be a very successful visit.

Mrs Barton: How will these offices be affected by the departure of Stephen Grimason?

Mrs Foster: They will not be. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McGuigan: Going beyond the two bureaux, can the First Minister comment on the importance of international relations to our economic development?

Mrs Foster: It is critical that we continue to go across the world to sell Northern Ireland as a good place not only to invest in but to visit. I am pleased to say that the Economy Minister is in the Middle East to continue to build on the links that have been developing over a period of time. Of course, Invest Northern Ireland has a range of offices right across the globe, as well as Tourism Ireland, which, as you know, sells Northern Ireland across the world as a tourist destination. What a story they have to tell now; a very positive story about Northern Ireland. The fact is that Titanic Belfast is now Europe's leading visitor attraction. How wonderful is it to be able to say that? The fact is that the multi-award-winning 'Game of Thrones' happens here in Northern Ireland. It has won more Emmys than any other programme in history. As well as that is the fact that Northern Ireland is number one globally when it comes to financial technology investment. It is number one in the world. Now, that is not something that you will see in an Opposition press statement, but it is something that I will talk about all day long.

Dr Farry: In her last answer, the Minister referred to the Executive's having a negotiating hand in relation to Brexit. That belies what she has just said in the Chamber and is in contrast to what the deputy First Minister actually said today outside this room. How can we make best use of our diplomats in Brussels, Washington and Beijing if we do not give them a strong, coherent position on Brexit, particularly when people internationally are very keen to help Northern Ireland in light of our experience with the peace process?

Mrs Foster: As someone who has just come back from the United States, I want to tell the Member that it is not actually all about Brexit. It is not actually all about Brexit. It is about the fact that we continue to have — he should know this being the former skills Minister — the raw talent here that people are looking for. We have the value and the fact that our attrition rates are very low. Come April 2018, we will have corporation tax devolved to Northern Ireland. So we will have the talent, the value and the tax. None of that — none of that — is dependent on our position on the European Union.

Brexit:

Migrant and Minority Ethnic Communities

5. **Mr McElduff** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how their Department is making migrant workers and minority ethnic communities feel welcome following the result of the referendum on membership of the European Union. (AQO 356/16-21)

Mrs Foster: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Ross to answer this question.

Mr Ross (Junior Minister, The Executive Office): Thank you. A number of actions were taken immediately after the referendum. As the Member will be aware, the First Minister and deputy First Minister provided assurances to our valued migrant and minority ethnic communities in a joint statement. We continue to work towards a society of welcome and belonging. In September, junior Minister Fearon and me launched the community relations and cultural awareness week, supported by the Executive Office, which brought together communities through the arts, open days and discussion. Our officials are in contact with representatives from the EU migrant communities to help them assert their rights and continue our long-standing relationship of appreciation and respect. We can assure people from European countries and other migrants living here that they are very much welcome and valued in Northern Ireland.

Mr McElduff: I take this opportunity to commend the work of organisations in my constituency; ethnic community support groups in Omagh and Strabane. They do tremendous work. What plans do the Executive have in place to make life easier and more fulfilled for child refugees?

Mr Ross: As the Member will be aware, 200 refugees have come to Northern Ireland; to Belfast, Londonderry and Craigavon. I had the opportunity to meet one of those individuals, who relocated to Northern Ireland quite recently, at an event in Dungannon. I must say that I was incredibly encouraged by the fact that he has found Northern Ireland to be a very welcoming place. Although it is difficult to come to a new country, he has found it a very welcoming place.

For child refugees specifically, we are aware of Home Office plans to establish a resettlement scheme for refugee children at risk. There is a range of complex issues to consider regarding the resettlement of children. The UN and other humanitarian charities are clear that efforts to reunite children with relatives of extended family should be given priority. In most cases, this means that they should remain in the region to improve their chances of being reunited with their families. We have demonstrated our commitment to assisting with the humanitarian crisis through the Executive's participation in the resettlement of refugees, including families with children, through the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme. That scheme is the first formal refugee resettlement programme in which the Executive have participated. We will consider what role we may play in any plans to resettle child refugees once more detailed proposals emerge. This would include an assessment of our capacity to meet the specific needs of child refugees.

Ms Hanna: If, as indicated by Theresa May's conference speech yesterday — albeit that she is less squeamish than this Government about revealing her plan, to the extent that she has one — it does look as though we are going towards a hard Brexit, will the Executive advocate on behalf of those citizens from other EU countries who are currently working here to protect their freedom of movement and the interests of the Northern Irish businesses that rely so heavily on migrant labour?

Mr Ross: We have already moved to reassure those EU migrants living in Northern Ireland that they are very much welcome and are helping them to understand their rights. As Members will know, immigration is a reserved matter, so it is not a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, the immigration policy will have a practical impact on many companies in Northern Ireland. That is exactly why the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in the joint letter to the Prime Minister, indicated the priorities from a Northern Ireland perspective and the importance of migrant workers for many key industries, including the agri-sector. That will be a continuing part of the discussions that we have with Her Majesty's Government.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Minister for his answers. Will he outline how many attacks have been recorded targeting members of the black and minority communities since the EU referendum?

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for raising the issue. I am pleased to say that, unlike in England and Wales, Northern Ireland has not seen a spike in racially motivated attacks against our ethnic communities. Indeed, the general trajectory is of a decreasing number of attacks. That said, we cannot be complacent. Too many attacks are still happening. We want to make sure that we continue to work with the Justice Minister and the PSNI to ensure that those sorts of attacks are not tolerated. We have a racial equality strategy, and the racial equality group met last month for the first time. It will meet again on 8 November.

What we are doing collaboratively with those ethnic minority groups is recognising and identifying their key needs and how we can ensure that we continue to work towards creating not just a tolerant Northern Ireland but one that celebrates diversity and the cultural richness that we now have in the modern Northern Ireland.

Mr Stalford: Is the Minister aware of the ComRes research that found that 77% of "Leave" voters wanted to ensure that the status of EU migrants was protected post-referendum? Does he also agree that it is essential that we move forward from the referendum united as a community in condemnation of all those who would engage in such attacks?

Mr Ross: Of course — I absolutely do. Some of the work that I have been doing in this Department has allowed me to go out and see the activities that are going on with ethnic minorities across Northern Ireland. I had the privilege of helping to launch, along with junior Minister Fearon, the community relations and cultural awareness week. That was a fabulous week of activities. Over 160 events across Northern Ireland allowed ethnic minorities to come together, explain more about their cultures and allow those conversations to take place.

I am also assured by listening to comments directly from some ethnic minority groups, and some of the refugees who have come and created a new life in Northern Ireland, of how welcoming they have found Northern Ireland. We should all be immensely proud of that.

Ms Bradshaw: Did the Minister hear his party colleague Gregory Campbell on 'The Nolan Show' this morning talking about allies in Hungary? If so, does he think it credible for the DUP to talk about these allies, given the track record of Orbán and Jobbik on refugees? If he has not heard it, I am happy to read it out to him.

Mr Ross: No, I did not. I do not make a habit of listening to 'The Nolan Show'. *[Laughter.]* It is better for my health that way, but I will be sure to have a look at the transcript.

NI: Promotion Abroad

8. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to promote Northern Ireland abroad over the next six months. (AQO 359/16-21)

Mrs Foster: We plan to visit China in December to meet senior national and provincial government leaders. Those strategic meetings will help us to realise our objective for China of developing trade and investment connections, encouraging tourism, attracting students and developing research partnerships.

I have just returned from a visit to the United States, where I met potential investors, international lawyers and tourism industry representatives to promote Northern Ireland. The deputy First Minister is scheduled to visit the United States in early November.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the First Minister for her answer. Given the First Minister's meeting last week with the Chinese consul to Northern Ireland, has the Brexit vote and the determination of the British people across this United Kingdom had any negative effect on her discussions?

Mrs Foster: No, and certainly not with China. As the Member will know, we have long been working with China to develop a relationship there. If anyone knows anything about doing business in China, they will know that you have to build up a relationship with the Government at central and local level. I am pleased to see that Belfast City Council now has full sister city status with Shenyang, one of the cities that the deputy First Minister and I will

visit in December, and we look forward to doing very good business out there.

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

2.30 pm

Brexit: Hidden OFMDFM Paper

T1. **Ms Mallon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the First Minister kept the Brexit research paper, which was produced before the referendum, hidden from the people of Northern Ireland. (AQT 256/16-21)

Mrs Foster: I am very pleased that the Member has asked that question today, because I want to put a few things on the record.

First, the paper was not commissioned by me, and it was not commissioned by my predecessor. It came to my attention only when a freedom of information request came in earlier this year. The document was not seen by me. Just today, I spoke to the head of the Civil Service. He had been on leave for a time, and it was my first opportunity to speak to him in order to get the bottom of the issue. When I asked him why it had not been brought to my attention, he said, "Well, I wouldn't have brought it to your attention, as it was not completed". Yet, somehow, the document has become something that I stopped going out, for some reason. It never came to me; nor did it come to my predecessor. It was initiated by the head of the Civil Service. I would have thought that Members opposite, despite the fact that they are in the Opposition, would know full well that civil servants, from time to time, commission and pass around papers between them, but it is not something that came to my desk.

Ms Mallon: Will the First Minister confirm whether the deputy First Minister suggested publishing the report, or at least sharing it with other Executive colleagues, as outlined in an interview with the BBC?

Mrs Foster: I did not hear the interview and what the deputy First Minister had to say, but the document certainly did not come to me. I will let the deputy First Minister answer on whether the document came to him. I am not aware of it having gone to him, but it certainly did not come to me. It was written, as I understand it, by two civil servants in the Department's European policy branch. It was not initiated by a Minister; it was initiated inside the Civil Service. Everybody needs to calm down about this so-called Brexit paper.

Brexit: Hard Border

T2. **Mr Kennedy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister can outline the view that she has expressed to the Prime Minister and the Minister with responsibility for Brexit on the issue of what has been described as a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic once the UK leaves the EU. (AQT 257/16-21)

Mrs Foster: There are times when I wished, over this past 40 years, that we had a hard border between us and the Republic of Ireland: times when people were being murdered at will along the border, but there was no hard border. I find it very difficult to understand why those who voted "Remain" still do not get that we, as a United

Kingdom, voted to leave the European Union. Some are calling them "Remoaners" — of course, I would not use that sort of terminology — and they cannot get that the only people who are talking about a hard border are people who voted to remain. Nobody on this side of the House is talking about a hard border — nobody. I do not know whether some people have become fascinated with Donald Trump's wall, but we do not want a wall built. Some people might, but I do not want a wall built along the border with the Republic of Ireland. We want maximum movement between us and the Republic of Ireland. We want a sensible way forward. I am working for a sensible way forward, but there are plenty in the Assembly who keep talking up issues that are not even on the agenda.

Mr Kennedy: I am slightly disappointed at the tone the First Minister seems to be adopting. When she is swilling champagne at the Conservative Party conference later this week — [Laughter.] — will she at least try to ensure that any future arrangements for border controls are not simply created at Great Britain's ports and airports?

Mrs Foster: It took only until 2.35 pm to get that one in. I assure the Member that non-alcoholic drinks will also be available at the reception — [Laughter.] — in case he wants to come along.

Mr Storey: He was not invited.

Mrs Foster: That is true, and that is part of the problem: we are listening to jilted lovers and their reaction to the way in which they deal with the Conservative Party now. We all remember the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists - New Force (UCUNF) — sorry, those who were in the Ulster Unionist Party at the time remember UCUNF. There are many on the UUP Benches, of course, who were not in the party then.

Of course, I will be representing the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland when I go to Birmingham. I will be give a very good account of what is happening in Northern Ireland, including the fact that we are an open, regional economy and want to remain an open, regional economy in the United Kingdom to take all the benefits of our membership of the United Kingdom while benefiting from our good relationship with the Republic of Ireland's Government, which will continue post-Brexit.

Peace Funding: Logjam

T3. **Ms Dillon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans there are to engage with the Irish and British Governments and the EU Commission to overcome the funding logjam that is holding up Peace funding. (AQT 258/16-21)

Mrs Foster: Yes, I understand that the Finance Minister mentioned this in his questions last week; the fact that, whilst we have letters of offer worth over €120 million for cross-border transformative job, environmental and health projects, some of those have become logjammed in the system. Let me be very clear: the Executive, the Finance Department, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and INTERREG panels have all stepped up to expedite those funding applications. In fact, they have put in an awful lot of work to ensure that the money is released to all those involved with peace work and creating jobs. Respectfully, however, I suggest that their efforts need to be matched by the Irish Government, by our own

Government and by the European Union Commission as well. We will, of course, support the Finance Minister as he tries to push those organisations in the correct direction.

Ms Dillon: In the absence of resolution, what plans do the Executive have in place to sustain projects that rely on Peace funding?

Mrs Foster: Of course, we are not there yet. As you know, the Chancellor has indicated that anything signed off before the autumn statement will be honoured. That is a very good indicator, which has given some time, so that groups and, indeed, the SEUPB can have offers in place. For offers that are not in place after that date, I understand that the Finance Minister is continuing his negotiations with the Treasury, and we will, of course, support him in those efforts.

Mr Speaker: I must inform Members that question 4 has been withdrawn.

Hart Inquiry: Recommendations

T5. **Mr Kelly** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have in place to deal with the recommendations from the Hart inquiry. (AQT 260/16-21)

Mrs Foster: Indeed. As I understand it, Mr Justice Hart is writing his long-awaited judgement on the hearings that he listened to very empathetically in Banbridge courthouse. We look forward to receiving that judgement, we believe, early next year. We will, of course, give it due consideration.

Mr Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas as na freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the First Minister believe that a panel of redress should be established to meet the needs of the victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse?

Mrs Foster: There have been many calls for a panel of redress, and I can understand why that is the case; not least the fact that the victims are not getting any younger, but we do not want to pre-judge what Mr Justice Hart will say in his judgement. He may well have decided — I do not know whether he has or not — which particular form the redress should take or what the process should be around it. He may, on the other hand, leave it up to us to decide what redress should happen. I do not want to pre-judge what Mr Justice Hart might say. I know that there are many victims who might want us to move ahead on this, but it is now October, and we expect the report in January or February of next year. I can assure people that, when we get the report, we will not sit on it; we will deal with the consequences of it as quickly as we can.

Legacy Talks

T6. **Mr Douglas** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what engagement the First Minister has had with groups on the legacy issue, given that she will be aware of recent talks on that subject. (AQT 261/16-21)

Mrs Foster: This is an issue that is still very much to the fore. I continue to have very useful engagement with victims groups across Northern Ireland. I recently met Decorum NI in Bangor. I met the Mid Ulster group, along with Keith Buchanan, just last week and, yesterday, I was with a group from the Ulster Special Constabulary Association. I will continue to engage with victims groups

as we move towards trying to deal with the legacy of the past.

Mr Douglas: I thank the First Minister for her answers thus far. How important is it that resolution of the matter is reached before autumn?

Mrs Foster: I hope we are moving to a resolution of the matter. The Secretary of State indicated he would like to consult with the wider community on the way forward, probably in the autumn time. We look forward to him doing that so we can have an open and transparent look at what he is suggesting. It is very important that, whatever comes out of this, there can be no rewriting of what happened in the past. The past stands on its own facts and people should not try to spin what happened in the past in a particular direction. Therefore, I hope we get to a situation where we have a holistic way of dealing with the past because, until we do, there will be various attempts to rewrite the past, and that is something I certainly will not stand for.

Brexit: Single Market

T7. **Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister would appreciate another opportunity to address the question of how important it is for businesses in Northern Ireland to have access to the single market. (AQT 262/16-21)

Mrs Foster: Alliance Party Members are very exercised today, and we can hear the noise from them up here, even at the opposite end of the Chamber. I have answered the question about the single market. I have said —

Mr Long: No you did not.

Mrs Foster: You see. I have said that we will continue to work with businesses and, unlike the Alliance Party, the deputy First Minister and I are speaking directly to members of the business community. Last week, we had a very good engagement with the Chamber of Commerce, when there were disparate voices from all around the Province and from all sorts of different sectors. It was a very good engagement. We will continue to listen to their concerns.

It is wrong for the Alliance Party to say that we have not raised this issue. It is one of the very key issues that we raised in our letter of 10 August to the Prime Minister. It is wrong to say that we are not representing the business community in Northern Ireland; very wrong indeed.

Mr Lyttle: To be honest, if anyone is getting exercised in here today, it appears to be the First Minister. *[Laughter.]* It is clear that many businesses in Northern Ireland are asking what Brexit will mean for them. They are concerned about access to the single market and they believe that it is vital to our economy. What reassurances can she give to those businesses that she does have an alternative plan, if she does not believe that this is as important as they do?

Mrs Foster: I did not say I did not think it was important. Of course it is important that businesses have access to their markets. That is why we raised it in the letter of 10 August. If the Member wants, I will do him up a specially gilded copy of the letter of 10 August, and send it to his office.

'The Sun': Londonderry/Strabane Ban

T8. **Mr Middleton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the First Minister's views are on the recent motion passed by the council in Londonderry and Strabane, which called on newsagents not to sell 'The Sun' newspaper. (AQT 263/16-21)

Mrs Foster: It is a very retrograde step when you try to boycott one paper or another. Many of us have been the subject of investigations and scrutiny by the press; that is what they do and that is their job. I condemn the threatening behaviour directed towards not only Father Gary Donegan but a journalist on Saturday morning when he was only doing his job in north Belfast. It is absolutely scandalous that anyone should be faced with that sort of threatening and intimidating behaviour, and I want to send out a very strong message that it is simply not acceptable.

Mr Middleton: I welcome the response from the First Minister and she has, in part, answered my supplementary question. Will she give some assurance that she will do all that she can in her Department to ensure that Londonderry and Strabane are well represented even if the council is focused on other areas?

Mrs Foster: I was alarmed to see the motion in relation to Israel that was put forward in that council as well, particularly at a time when Jews in Belfast — we are told this by the rabbi — are feeling very intimidated and under attack. The council should reflect on that. We have heard a lot from other parties in the Assembly about equality and non-discrimination and about making sure that everybody feels at home in Northern Ireland. What about the Jewish people? Do they not have a right to feel at home in Northern Ireland as well? They are very welcome and they are a very key part of the community here in Northern Ireland.

2.45 pm

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Agri-food Marketing Organisation

1. **Mr Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the agri-food marketing organisation recommended in the Going for Growth strategy. (AQO 366/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): In 'Going for Growth', the Agri-Food Strategy Board recommended the creation of an agri-food marketing organisation with a clear food-promotion strategy. Following that, my colleague the First Minister, in her former role as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, commissioned a review of agri-food marketing arrangements in Northern Ireland and endorsed the review's conclusion that an agri-food marketing body be established to coordinate the marketing of our food and drink produce based on the model of Scotland Food and Drink.

Work on the project is being led by the Department for the Economy. I share my colleague Economy Minister Simon Hamilton's view that the marketing body should be established as soon as is practicably possible. Local

farmers and fishermen need to be confident that there are sustainable markets in which to sell their produce. Any strategic growth in the agri-food sector will be exported, and a strategic, coordinated approach to marketing through a single organisation is key to delivering that growth. My officials are supporting their DFE counterparts and industry representatives in developing an agreed model that will allow the Executive to provide suitable government support to the new body and will satisfy the requirements of the industry and government.

Mr Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister. Does she agree that the result of the EU referendum will make the job of any marketing organisation much more difficult?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The need for a marketing organisation was established long before Brexit. Brexit reinforces the need for the body. We need a marketing body for Northern Ireland produce. We need to ensure that our product goes to appropriate markets and that our markets are open right across the United Kingdom. We need to retain existing markets and have the opportunities to go to new markets. A marketing organisation allows us to do that. It needs to be set up as quickly as possible, and I am working along with colleagues in Economy to do so.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for the commitment to work as quickly as possible. Will she give us some indication of when it will happen? At the moment, without that body in place, we are missing opportunities.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I appreciate that. I met the Agri-Food Strategy Board in relation to that. Obviously, there are some issues in relation to what the model looks like and how it will be presented. There is an opportunity to bring all the groups that we currently have together under an umbrella organisation quite quickly. The Agri-Food Strategy Board has been working on it for some time, so it perhaps sees a different model. There is an urgency in relation to setting it up.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. I also thank her for visiting my constituency at the weekend in relation to the agri-food industry by attending the Northern Ireland Potato Festival at the Giant's Causeway: a world-class venue to celebrate the humble spud.

Will the Minister give the House an update in relation to the agri-food processing investment grant scheme and how it will be processed in the future?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I had a very good day in the north-west; I was also in Limavady for the International Ploughing Championships. The agri-food processing investment grant scheme has a proposed budget of £27.5 million. Its purpose is to improve the economic performance and competitiveness of the agri-food sector. This will be through capital investment in processing, marketing and/or development of agricultural products. Again, we are working with the Economy Department and Invest NI to explore the scope and feasibility of a single streamlined offering to support the food sector. I want to make sure that we deliver a scheme that best fits the needs of the local agri-food processing sector. Let me be clear that we will take these decisions as quickly as possible, and we will start to implement the scheme as soon as possible.

Ms Hanna: As the Minister indicated, the need for the joint body has been established for some time, and I believe that it has been green-lit for some time. Can you outline the reasons why it has not happened to date? Is there anything that we should know?

Miss McIlveen: I have only been in post since May, so I am unclear as to what the processes were before that and what engagement there was with the previous Minister and DETI colleagues. All I can say is that I have given a commitment to this, there is a purpose to it and we should get behind it in order to deliver on it as quickly as possible.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn within the time limits.

Coastal Erosion

3. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the actions her Department has taken to address coastal erosion. (AQO 368/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I am acutely aware of the devastating effects that coastal erosion can have on people's lives. It is one of the reasons why I established a coastal forum when I was the Minister for Regional Development. I could see that we needed to deal with coastal management in a more strategic way, particularly in relation to coastal erosion. Now that I am the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, my responsibilities have, of course, changed. My Department is responsible for marine licensing and nature conservation protection, but I am still very keen to be involved. I have met Chris Hazzard, Minister for Infrastructure, and we have agreed to co-chair meetings of the forum. The forum has already identified the key issues that need to be tackled. These include the completion of a robust scientific evidence base on coastal processes in Northern Ireland and allocation of the coastal erosion risk management function. I am confident that the forum will help to deliver on those issues.

I should say that coastal erosion is a natural process, so it is going to continue. The challenge that we face is to find the best way of managing coastal change, both erosion and flooding. It is about having a clear vision of how we want Northern Ireland's coastline to be shaped, now and into the future. I assure Members that I will continue to play my part wherever possible.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Minister for her response. I acknowledge the good work that the forum carried out in the past and welcome the fact that the Minister intends to continue the forum going into the future. My supplementary question was going to be about whether the forum would go into the future, and the Minister has already answered it, so thank you.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his comments. I plan to have a good working relationship with DFI with regard to that. In the past, when I was in the Department for Regional Development, I had a good working relationship with the former Minister of the Environment and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. She allowed a representative from her Department — David Porter — to come forward, and he worked very well in that group. Establishing that was useful, and I hope to see it moving forward to have a meaningful outcome.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Minister for her work in this area. Has an assessment been undertaken to determine how many properties and how much land is affected by coastal erosion?

Miss McIlveen: One of the issues that we have is lack of data. That is one of the things that we need to look at when we do our scoping exercise, particularly around the terms of reference and how we move forward in order to achieve that. Various groups are collating their own information, and we have a lot of science work and research being carried out by universities. Individual councils are also carrying out work. DFI is doing work, particularly around the structural infrastructure side of things. It is about bringing that together so that we have a full view of the impact, and potential impact, that this will have as we go forward.

Mr Dunne: The Minister will be aware of coastal erosion around parts of the north Down coast, particularly the Cultra, Craigavad and Kinnegar areas of Holywood.

Recognising that, does she see the need for coordination between the various agencies and clear definitions of responsibility, particularly between the Department for Infrastructure, DAERA — her Department — and the local council?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Absolutely. In my previous role, I met the Member with regard to the issues at Kinnegar. He will also be aware that coastal flooding is the responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure. Kinnegar has been identified as at risk of flooding during extreme tidal events and is included in the coastal flood response plan. It is important that various agencies work together and are at a place where they can react quickly to flooding, particularly in areas such as Kinnegar.

Mr Nesbitt: I invite the Minister to join me in applauding the work of the Ards Peninsula Coastal Erosion Group. Can she update us on whether it is likely to secure two of its key objectives, namely a fit-for-purpose policy to replace the discredited Bateman formula and securing a lead Department for coastal management issues?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As a fellow member of that group who attended a number of meetings, I absolutely want to acknowledge the work of Eric Rainey, Sandra Henderson and others involved. They really have brought this to the attention of the House. On the back of that, I was delighted that I could move that forward. That group was represented in the initial meeting that I had of the coastal forum. I want to use the template that they established with regard to community action. I have spoken to Members from other constituencies, and I think that it is very important that we get that from a grass-roots perspective. The community is our eyes and ears along the coastline.

With regards to Bateman and having a lead Department, you will understand that part of the terms of reference that we are establishing for the forum will address those concerns. I am not clear whether we need a lead Department at this stage. My Department working in partnership with DFI may in itself be adequate. Again, that is something that we can explore as we go. Obviously, by doing that, we have reduced the number of Departments that will naturally be involved anyway. It is something that we can explore. We are on a positive pathway to that.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you very much, Minister, for your information to date about coastal erosion. When the scoping exercise is being carried out, obviously there will be consideration of a budget going forward. Will rural proofing be brought in, so that the small number of businesses that suffered £1 million worth of damage along the coast can finally be included in some of the payments?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question — again, a fellow member of that group and a constituency colleague. Scoping is something that we will have to look at as we move forward. I am the Minister who is responsible for the Rural Needs Act, and rural proofing will be part of that. It is early days as regards what that will look like, particularly what funding will be required for coastal erosion. Some of that may fall under the Department for Infrastructure, particularly the coastal flooding aspect of things. Again, it is something that we will need to look at.

Farmers: Poor Weather

4. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the implications for farmers of the poor weather conditions in large areas of rural Northern Ireland over recent months. (AQO 369/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I am fully aware of the impact that the recent poor weather has had on farms across Northern Ireland, particularly in the north and west of the Province. Unsettled weather during the summer months has resulted in difficult conditions for silage making, slurry spreading and the harvesting of arable crops. In localised areas, cattle have been housed earlier than usual, which means that feed and forage are already being used, at an additional cost to the farmer, and the harvesting of spring cereal crops has not yet been completed. Also, much straw has still to be baled, and progress with the potato harvest and the sowing of winter cereals has been slow. All those issues combined to have an adverse impact on cash flows on farms.

In June, as the Member will be aware, I announced my commitment to pay at least 95% of eligible basic payment scheme applicants in December, and I confirmed that I would introduce advance payments this year from 16 October. That will undoubtedly help farmers to meet the financial challenges that arise as a result of the recent poor weather. In addition to that, CAFRE advisers are available at business development group meetings to discuss with farmers and growers how their business might respond to the impact of poor weather conditions. CAFRE will also deliver feed efficiency and business management workshops in the areas worst affected by poor weather conditions during the autumn and winter. Further guidance is available on the DAERA website that will help farmers to plan for a good supply of fodder for the winter months ahead and to make the best decisions for their farm businesses.

3.00 pm

Mr McKee: Thank you, Minister, for your answers thus far. The problem has been exacerbated by further bad weather over the last fortnight. In addition to a likely shortage of second-cut fodder becoming a serious problem, there is the increasing pressure of slurry tanks not being emptied. Will the Minister now agree to extend the slurry-spreading

period to allow farmers to have their tanks emptied in an environmentally safe way?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware that calls have been made for farmers to be granted a dispensation to spread slurry during the closed period, which comes into force at midnight on Saturday 15 October. There is no legal provision in the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 to grant a complete waiver. I want to be clear that, in exceptional circumstances beyond the control of and not foreseeable by an individual farmer, a defence may be made for non-compliance with some of the requirements of the NAP regulations, including spreading organic manures during the closed period.

The challenges faced by some farmers over recent months as a result of high rainfall and the severe weather conditions in 2015 have been exceptional; therefore, where a farmer has reasonable cause to spread after the end of the season, the farmer will be able to spread. Such cases would be considered by the NIEA on a case-by-case basis and must be evidence-based, showing that the farmer had taken all reasonable steps to manage the situation and was left with no alternative. I encourage farmers who are experiencing particular difficulties to speak either to their DAERA adviser or to the local farming organisation.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members wishing to ask a question that they need to rise continually in their seat.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I come from Fermanagh, where we get our fair share of wet weather, and some farmers in my constituency still have to harvest their grass. Will she outline what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the farming sector on measures to minimise the impact of the poor weather conditions on farmers?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, as I said in answer to the previous question, I have had conversations about how we can assist farmers moving forward. I have met the Ulster Farmers' Union — I meet it regularly — and I plan to go to Fermanagh later this week to speak to local groups from the Ulster Farmers' Union. Those discussions will be ongoing. While the weather is starting to improve, that does not necessarily mitigate all their concerns. I will be in a better place after Thursday.

Mr K Buchanan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far; indeed, I commend her for giving some help to farmers. Unfortunately, it rains not only in Fermanagh but in Tyrone. I have just one additional point: is it possible for landowners who have surplus grass to allow other farmers to graze that land over the coming weeks?

Miss McIlveen: For direct payments and areas of natural constraint (ANC) payments, farmers need to demonstrate that they actively farm all the land that they have claimed. That can be done by demonstrating that they have the decision-making power, the benefits and the financial risks for the majority of the agricultural activity carried out on the land. Where the farmer has carried out substantial amounts of agricultural activity on the land during 2016, permitting someone else to graze the land for six to eight weeks is unlikely to undermine their ability to meet the requirement. That may not be the case if a farmer with surplus grass has carried out little or no agricultural activity on his land in 2016. I recommend that any agreements

are documented so that farmers can then provide the necessary evidence to ensure that they demonstrate the agricultural activity they have carried out on the land during the year.

Snares Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

5. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline her plans to implement the Snares Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. (AQO 370/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Member may recall from his role on the Environment Committee that there was a commitment to place further restrictions on the use of snares. That commitment was to be achieved through the snares order, which was subject to affirmative resolution. The order was laid in October 2015, however the Assembly's approval was not sought during the previous mandate to bring the legislation into force.

I intend to complete the legislative process, which will require a revised order due to the timescale involved since the previous order was laid and the subsequent new Assembly structure. That approach will ensure complete transparency in the process.

I am conscious that many organisations and individuals see the use of snares as inhumane treatment of wild animals. Indeed, some would like them banned altogether. However, there is a need to protect farm animals, game birds and other species from predators, such as foxes, at certain times of the year. The use of snares provides an effective and practical means of providing that protection. I feel that the additional safeguards in the snares order should help to negate the concerns of those opposed to the use of snares, as the additional restrictions are intended to reduce suffering.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her answer. I detected from it that the matter lay dormant with previous Ministers, who seemed to refuse to do anything about it. That is regrettable, and it would be good to hear why they did that. Minister, will you outline to the Assembly what the position will be if you do not complete the legislation?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, if the order is not actioned, we will have the status quo. The current levels of protection, which are beneficial, will remain, but they are limited, including, for example, the requirement to inspect set snares once every 24 hours. The additional restrictions that the order would bring, such as snares having to be fitted with permanent safety stops, are, I feel, required. The purpose of a stop is to prevent the noose closing too far and inflicting damage to the caught animal, particularly through strangulation. I imagine that this and other restrictions would be welcomed by responsible landowners and those who see snaring as an indiscriminate means of pest control. I do not find the status quo acceptable.

Mr Lyttle: A snare is a loop of wire that tightens around the leg, body or neck of any animal caught by it. That can include foxes, hares, badgers, deer and, at times, pets such as cats and dogs. Polls have found that around three of four people in Northern Ireland support a total ban on snares. Why is the Minister not minded, therefore, to introduce a total ban?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Personally, I have sympathy for the calls to ban the use of snares outright. However, as mentioned, a practical approach to land management is needed. Young lambs are susceptible to fox predation, as are game birds and other species, and farmers and gamekeepers require a practical and effective means of vermin control. The alternatives are not viable: the use of poison is potentially prohibited, less targeted and more inhumane. It is not reasonable to ask landowners to patrol their fields with shotguns at night, when foxes are most active, and it would also be costly and potentially dangerous to allow others to do that work on a large scale on their behalf.

As you will be aware, a complete ban was discussed during the debate on the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, which went through the Assembly in 2011. It was debated at length and rejected. The new legal requirements will help to promote best possible practice in the use of snares, but I have sympathy for the Member's comments.

Brexit: Agri-food Sector

6. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the impact on the agri-food sector of the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. (AQO 371/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A full assessment will depend on new arrangements that will be put in place and on how well we can exploit the opportunities that leaving the European Union will present. Since the referendum in June, we have seen a positive impact on the Northern Ireland agri-food sector. There has been a significant depreciation in the value of sterling, compared with the euro and the dollar, and that continues to be beneficial to exporting companies, and that devaluation has had a positive impact on the value of basic farm payments to farmers. As I announced last Friday, the total value of 2016 basic payment scheme and greening payments is 16.5% greater than in 2015, resulting in a boost to the total net value of 2016 direct payments to local farmers of £39 million compared with 2015.

As I said during questions two weeks ago, most farm-gate prices have also improved, partly as a result of exchange rate movements. That is encouraging, and we can say that the early impact of the vote to leave has been positive for agriculture. The longer-term impacts remain to be seen, but I intend to do all that I can to protect and promote the interests of the Northern Ireland agri-food sector in the forthcoming negotiations. I intend to be closely and directly involved in the domestic agricultural, environmental, fisheries and trade policy agendas as they unfold in order to maximise the opportunities that we will have from leaving the European Union.

Ms S Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answer. I applaud her optimism, although I do not fully share all of it. Is it now time for us to have a more balanced debate? Should we be forced to leave the EU against the will of the people of Northern Ireland, is it not realistic that we should start to look at the risks and threats that exist, particularly for those who work in the agri-food sector?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. If she missed it, the UK voted to leave. I do not want to refer to her in the same way that the First Minister referred to "Remoaners", and I hope that she is not falling into

that category. However, there is no doubt that there are conversations that need to be held, which is why my Department is working hard on them. I have established a consultative group, and I now regularly meet colleagues in the various jurisdictions, and that work will continue. We are not going to redo the referendum. The referendum result was very clear: we will be leaving the European Union.

Ms Gildernew: Has the Minister raised the concerns of the agri-food industry with the British and Irish Governments around the issues of exports and the workforce?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. I have; I held the first meeting with the agri-food sector just a couple of days after the result was known. Those were the issues that were highlighted to me, and they were the basis for most of the conversations that I have had with Minister Creed in the Irish Republic and with George Eustice, Andrea Leadsom and David Davis, the Secretary of State. While it is accepted that there are issues with those matters, those conversations will need to continue. They have been highlighted by me and by other colleagues, who are very aware of them.

Mrs Dobson: Following yesterday's announcement by the Prime Minister that we now have a time frame for triggering article 50, will the Minister update us on a proposed time frame for negotiations on key agri-food support, such as a new basic payment scheme and rural development programme?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. As she indicated, that announcement was made yesterday, and, obviously, we are at today. My Department has been working over the last number of months on the issues pertaining to it, and that work will continue. Over the next number of months, we will have other conversations with George Eustice, Andrea Leadsom, David Davis and so on. I have invited George Eustice to Northern Ireland, and he is planning to visit in the next number of weeks. We are still at a very early stage with regard to a timescale for what the basic payment will look like, but I assure the Member that we will be looking for the best outcome for Northern Ireland.

Dr Farry: In light of the very particular characteristics of the Northern Ireland market, such as the number of businesses that conduct their activities on a North/South basis and the scale in our economy relative to other places, what is the Minister's assessment of the best model for Northern Ireland agri-food's future trading arrangements?

Is it the single market? Is it the Norwegian model? Is it WTO rules? Is it something else? What is her view on the best way forward for a trading regime for the local sector?

3.15 pm

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Again, those are scenarios that we are looking at when considering what is particular to Northern Ireland, especially given the issues around our land border, which, in itself, is peculiar to this part of the United Kingdom. I do not want to get into a position where I tie myself to a particular scenario at this stage. It is still early days, but I am happy to share it with the House once it has been scoped out.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions. The Member listed to ask question 1 has withdrawn his name.

Carrier Bag Levy: Review

T2. Mr Stalford asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the term of reference for, and cost of, the review into the carrier bag levy. (AQT 267/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As he will be aware, we have committed to delivering a statutory review of the carrier bag levy by April 2017. It will be conducted on behalf of my Department by business consultancy service, which is a division of the Department of Finance. The terms of reference of that review will be to look at three options: maintain the existing arrangements; discontinue the existing levy and remove the 5p charge; and, finally, increase the levy to 10 pence for all bags with a threshold extended to 40 pence. The Member also asked the cost of the review. It is costing £29,948, which in itself is not insignificant.

Mr Stalford: What has the impact been from the funding that has been raised by the levy in the most important constituency in Northern Ireland, South Belfast?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, it has had an impact across Northern Ireland. In previous years, a challenge fund was run by the former Department of the Environment, and this was really to look at enabling schools and community groups to support and deliver small-scale projects to improve the local environment and to provide environmental education. A number of groups have benefited from the fund in the past. The Mornington Community Project received £8,000 spend. The Greater Village Regeneration Trust received £7,454, and Windsor Women's Centre received £7,998. That was a total of £23,452.83. I am considering our options around launching a challenge fund for this year. I am looking at that alongside the priorities for expenditure. I found that that was a useful project, and I know that communities and schools felt that it was of value.

Brexit Consultative Committee

T3. Mr Murphy asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to state the relevant stakeholders from her side on the Brexit consultative committee that has been set up between her Department and the Department for the Economy. (AQT 268/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. They were all relevant from my side. They are: the Agri-Food Strategy Board, the Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association, Dairy UK Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association, Environment Link, the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association and the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association. I also had David Dobbin represented, who is an EU agricultural task force member. Moy Park was also represented on that committee.

Mr Murphy: I thank the Minister for her answer. Undoubtedly, there are a lot of people with a lot of experience on that, but there seems to be one gap in relation to rural groups, who, obviously, are very important

in delivering economic and social outcomes on the ground and will be heavily dependent on EU funding for their existence and to assist in the good work that they provide on the ground. Will the Minister look to that gap in provision on this group and see whether there is an opportunity to fill it with some of the people who have that experience?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I recognise that there is that gap, but this particular group is the agri-food and environment consultative group. I was very much aware that rural groups were not included, but I did not feel that this group was appropriate for them. I have met with the rural groups and have given them my assurance that they will be involved in the conversation, but there is probably a more appropriate forum for them to have a conversation with me and my officials. It was the same with the environment side. The Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the representative, as an umbrella group, for the environment sector, but the group is weighted to the agri-food side. I have given the environment groups a commitment that their voices will not be lost either and that there will be appropriate engagement with myself and my officials on the environmental side. So, I have considered that, but I did not feel that this particular group was the best place for their voice to be adequately heard.

Paris Agreement: NI Role

T4. **Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with Whitehall about Northern Ireland's role in meeting the objectives of the Paris agreement that will come into force in 2020, given the recent conclusion of Northern Ireland Environment Week. (AQT 269/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. At this stage I have not had any discussions directly, but I am more than content to do so.

Ms Bradshaw: Thank you for your answer. You will be aware that all regional and subregional authorities are required, under the agreement, to scale up efforts to build resilience to the effects of climate change. Will you give me any indication of how you plan to meet those objectives?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. Obviously, Northern Ireland is making good progress with regard to reducing its emissions. The latest greenhouse gas inventory, which was published in June 2016, shows a reduction of 17.4% from 1990 levels. We are also on target to meet the targets set by the previous Programme for Government, including a reduction of 35% on 1990 levels by 2025.

The Member will also be aware that I launched the implementation plan to reduce emissions in the agri-food industry last week, so we are working towards the implementation of that. There is also considerable work being done, particularly in the farming sector. She might be aware of the sustainable land use strategy, which is being developed by John Gilliland and an independent group, and I am looking forward to receiving that within the next month to six weeks.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Brexit: Loss of Income for Farmers

T6. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has any detail on the potential loss of income to farmers as a result of Brexit, given that, in answer to a number of questions, she has mentioned the work that her Department has been doing around Brexit. (AQT 271/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The current situation is positive, as he would have noted in my response to the question from Ms Sinéad Bradley. Exports are much more competitive as a result of the euro/sterling exchange rate. Sheep prices and cattle prices have increased, as have pig prices, over the last year. You will also be aware of the basic payment increase of 16.5% on last year, which accounts for an extra £39 million to the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Lynch: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she guarantee farmers that they will be better off financially as a result of Brexit?

Miss McIlveen: In the short term, they are better off. In the long term, there would be absolutely no guarantee that they were going to be better off even if we remained in the European Union. It is very early days, and I cannot forecast that.

NIEA: Farmers' Concerns

T7. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she is aware of any concerns that have been raised by farmers' groups or the Ulster Farmers' Union about the current practice and procedures of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. (AQT 272/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, there are ongoing discussions with regard to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and farmers. You will be aware that the Ulster Farmers' Union and NIEA are looking to reach a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

Hopefully, we will work towards that and there will be a positive outcome for everyone. I am not sure whether the Member has a particular issue or example in relation to that, but I am happy to discuss it with him.

Mr Aiken: Thank you very much, Minister. I am delighted that an MOU will be signed. However, I am having some difficulties in South Antrim and wish to facilitate a meeting with the CEO of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. I understand that there are some issues with the visit being cleared through your office. I would appreciate it if that meeting could be facilitated as quickly as possible.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am content to facilitate any meeting, but he and the House need to recognise that much of what NIEA does and what it implements is on the basis of European directives. We need to be clear on that and the flexibility around it.

Mr Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

EU Milk Production Reduction Aid Scheme

T9. **Mr Lyons** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on Northern Ireland uptake of the EU milk production reduction aid scheme. (AQT 274/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The Rural Payments Agency has confirmed that there have been 611 applications from Northern Ireland. Production reduction will take place in the period from October to December of this year. That equates to 22% of dairy farms in Northern Ireland. The total volume reduction will equate to 21.37 million litres, which is a 4.17% reduction compared with last year.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Minister for her answer. How does that reduction compare with the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland?

Miss McIlveen: It equates to 33% of the total UK applications and 20% of the UK volume of reduction. There were 892 applications in England, 194 in Wales and 154 in Scotland. The UK submitted the eighth highest number of applications to the EU and the third highest quantity of proposed reduction. The comparison with the Republic of Ireland is that they had the third highest number of applications and the fifth highest quantity. I inform Members that the closing date for the second tranche will be 12 October, so this is a scheme that is ongoing.

Mr Speaker: Mr Gerry Kelly is not in his place. Time is therefore up. That concludes Question Time. I invite the House to take its ease while we make a change at the top Table.

(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

Scrambler and Quad Bikes

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to review the current legislation governing scrambler and quad bikes; and further calls on the PSNI and other responsible agencies to ensure that the current legislation governing these machines is enforced in a robust way. — [Ms J McCann.]

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I thank Ms McCann and her colleagues for bringing this important motion to the Floor. The fact that we do not have a divided House, that voices from all corners of the Chamber spoke in unison and that there is an acknowledgement that there is no silver bullet on the issue and, from all sides and all corners and in all forums, we need to work together is a positive development. At the outset, I also wish to add my sincere condolences to the family of Valerie Armstrong, who sadly lost her life after being struck by a scrambler. Her needless death leaves three young children without their mother. All of us in the House must consider how best to take action to ensure that that type of tragedy never happens again.

Under current arrangements, my Department's remit extends to the regulation of on-road vehicles only. However, as Minister for road safety, I welcome the opportunity to take a lead role in the debate and share the concerns of the MLAs who have brought the issue to the Floor of the Assembly. We need to do all in our power to tackle what appears to be a growing problem. I am prepared to play my part, and I believe that an overwhelming number of Members feel the same.

3.30 pm

The law, as it stands, is relatively simple. If you wish to use a scrambler or quad on the public road, you must have an appropriate driving licence and insurance and the vehicle must be type-approved and meet the necessary safety standards. It must be registered and display a number plate, and you must have paid your vehicle excise duty. If you cannot fulfil those conditions, you may use the vehicle on private land if and only if you have the clear permission of the landowner. You may not ride the scrambler or quad in parks, on footpaths or on land belonging to any public body. I understand that the PSNI considers that current legislation provides sufficient powers to take action against those who illegally use scramblers or quads off-road but the difficulty lies with detecting and catching offenders.

I recently met Ms McCann to discuss the issue, and I am aware that she has also met the Justice Minister to voice her concerns. It is clear that, whatever the legislation might say, we have a growing problem with the illegal and antisocial use of the vehicles. They are being imported in increasingly large numbers and can be bought cheaply. Many are being bought by parents for young children. The problem is not limited to the North of Ireland, and I have looked across these islands to see how other jurisdictions are dealing with it. The legislative framework is broadly

similar in the South and in Britain, in that on-road use is regulated and off-road use is only with the permission of landowners. Media and newspaper reports make it clear that effective enforcement is an issue for all of us in all jurisdictions.

During my meeting with Ms McCann, we discussed the introduction of a registration scheme for these off-road vehicles; in effect, that would extend the current scheme for on-road motorcycles. The potential advantage of registration at the point of sale would be to make it clear, particularly to parents, that such vehicles are not toys. It would enable us to monitor the number of vehicles in circulation and easily identify owners. However, it is unlikely to resolve the practical problems around enforcement. The introduction of such a scheme would require powers that have not been devolved to the Assembly. I am aware that, in Britain, several attempts have been made to legislate to require all off-road motorcycles to be registered. As this is an excepted matter, the proposed schemes would have to be extended here. All of those attempts have faltered, mainly, it seems, due to the failure to address the enforcement issue. The Association of Chief Police Officers does not believe that a registration scheme would be viable. That is because there is not an established, reputable dealer network to ensure registration at the point of sale and because identifying marks can be easily removed from the vehicles. The Motorcycle Action Group and the Motorcycle Industry Association also believe that a registration scheme would be unworkable and that the real issue is the lack of enforcement of the current law.

Against that background, I am unconvinced that the answer lies solely in legislative change. Nevertheless, I would not rule it out at this stage and will keep the legislation available to us under review. I am happy to work with Members and communities to strengthen the legislation that we have at our disposal. It is also important to bear it in mind that the success of any legislative change would depend on our ability to use it to change behaviours. Traditionally, that is achieved at least partly through enforcement, and I note that the motion calls on responsible agencies to ensure that the current legislation governing these regimes is enforced in a robust way. Under current legislation, the PSNI has the power to seize and dispose of vehicles and to prosecute riders for a range of road safety offences. In certain circumstances, parents and guardians can also be reported for prosecution or issued with a fixed penalty notice.

I have already held a brief discussion with the Justice Minister, who shares my concerns and determination to take some positive steps to address the matter. We discussed potential options and are keen to explore those further in the months ahead. One area that could be addressed immediately is education. Realistically, we cannot have a police officer on every corner. Enforcement is important, but the PSNI cannot do this alone.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I agree entirely with the Minister on that very point. A number of Members referred to the police: the police cannot tackle and address this on their own, because there is an issue of resource and enforcement and so on. I welcome the Minister saying that he had a joint meeting with the Minister of Justice on the issue.

I think that the only way that we can tackle this is if there is a round-table approach and a joined-upness across government and with the councils and police. Would the Minister welcome such an initiative?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his remarks. Indeed, this will have to be done in partnership, not just between MLAs and government but, of course, with our councils, which are very often the landowners and control the land that a lot of this is taking place on. I am more than happy to work in conjunction with the Justice Minister and councils as we go forward.

At my meetings with Ms McCann and the Justice Minister, we also discussed the development of an awareness campaign. I note that the policing and community safety partnerships have already taken a step in this direction with the publication of an advice and information leaflet that sets out the law. It also contains a section aimed at parents, and that is vital. All too often, parents buy these vehicles for their children without giving any thought to where and how they will be used. The vehicles are not toys and, as we have seen, can be lethal weapons if not used considerately and in line with the law.

I want to widen the awareness effort and will work with the Justice Minister to explore what we can do jointly on the development of a campaign targeted at parents who have purchased or may be thinking of purchasing a scrambler or quad for their children, particularly in the run-up to Christmas. I am also keen to raise awareness that it is a community issue and that we can all help to make a difference. If you see someone riding one of these vehicles illegally, please call 101 with a description of the bike and the rider. Those who are breaking the law in that manner need to realise that their neighbours will not tolerate that sort of antisocial behaviour.

In conclusion, the use of scramblers and quads as a leisure activity can be exciting and fun, and a number of clubs and societies across the North can give out information about where to pursue the hobby lawfully and safely. People need to stop taking risks with their own lives and those of the community around them. We must not lose sight of the pain and suffering caused by those who use these vehicles illegally without any thought of the consequences or concern for others. We must take action to address the matter now, and my Department and I will do our part.

Mr F McCann: I am glad that my colleague Jennifer brought the motion to the Floor of the House. It has been on the minds of many people in many areas of the North for a long time.

Just before I speak about the motion and relay what people said, we are coming into the run-up to Christmas — it was mentioned earlier — when parents will be coming under pressure from their children to purchase these machines and will be actively looking for them. About three or four years ago, I remember going onto the front of the Falls Road in my community on Christmas morning and hearing the bikes and quads coming along the road. There were a number of young people — about 11 or 12 of them — and it was like a youth chapter of Hell's Angels coming down the road at high speed. They are a novelty in many communities on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and afterwards. While some of them end up disappearing into sheds or cupboards, many more cause serious accidents,

and their riders will be brought to hospital with broken arms, legs and whatever else. Pedestrians may also suffer from being run over by these machines going at speed.

One thing that was not mentioned — it is not a new phenomenon — is death driving. Last Saturday, a young man in my constituency was attacked by three people and had his bike taken from him. The bike was then used to drive at high speed around the area, putting people's lives at risk. That is an ever-increasing problem. People have said that there is legislation for theft, but a fact of life is that this can happen day and daily within communities.

The Minister spoke about education, and that is a crucial thing. If parents realised that there has to be a licence and insurance and realised all the additional costs attached, many would have second thoughts about buying these machines for their children.

Jennifer spoke about the number of adults and children who have lost their life. She said that parents need to be more aware of the laws and talked about the impact that well-run designated sites could have.

William Humphrey spoke personally about some of the stuff that has happened in his constituency. He emphasised that this is not about stopping people enjoying scramblers; it is about reducing danger to pedestrians on the road. The focus of the House should be on the protection of life. Councils need to look at providing facilities.

Doug Beattie supports the motion. There is legislation in place, but he does not know whether it is being implemented to the full. The police say that there are enough powers; yet deaths still occur. Judges need to take stronger action, and the legislation needs to be stronger.

Alex Attwood said that everyone understands the circumstances that brought the motion to the Chamber. He said that we need to mitigate the risk of future deaths and injuries. He commended Belfast City Council for some of the stuff that it is doing and supported legislative intervention and, if required, new laws.

Trevor Lunn said that the motion is timely and that the law needs to be revised. Questions, he said, need to be asked of the PSNI, and there is no requirement to wear a helmet when driving a quad.

Pam Cameron said that quads and scramblers, when used properly, can be enjoyable. She said that the root of the problem is that legislation is not being used properly, and the robust implementation of existing powers would help.

Raymond McCartney stated that Jennifer has been fairly robust in raising the issue at the Policing Board time and again over the past couple of months. He said the legislation needs to be used in a robust manner and that we need to speak to the PSNI to find out how it would enforce any new legislation. He went on to describe how the police had seized scramblers and quads in his constituency. Paul Girvan said that many of us have been contacted about the misuse of these bikes. The responsibility is on parents when buying scramblers. We need to understand the difficulty for landowners, who may not know that people are using their land illegally and yet could find themselves with serious problems if someone is seriously injured or worse.

Roy Beggs said that some parents might already be contemplating buying a quad or a scrambler at this time of year. They need to understand the serious consequences. Paul Frew said that his constituency of North Antrim has been plagued with the same problem. Even in a controlled setting, these machines are dangerous. People drive recklessly on footpaths in built-up areas. Nichola Mallon said that a number of people have lost their life, some after being run down by these machines outside controlled settings. These machines can cause death and devastating injury. Enforcement needs to be robust. George Robinson said that the police need to be more proactive. The activity has been brought into focus by the death of Valerie Armstrong.

The Minister laid out the legislation. The PSNI has said that there is enough legislation already to deal with the problem. Detection and enforcement are the problems. He does not rule out legislative change, but he feels that education is crucial. That has run through the contributions: the protection of life and the education of parents. As William Humphrey and others said, maybe together we can find something that allows us to deal effectively with this growing problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to review the current legislation governing scrambler and quad bikes; and further calls on the PSNI and other responsible agencies to ensure that the current legislation governing these machines is enforced in a robust way.

Epilepsy Service Provision

Madam 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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

3.45 pm

Mr Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly commends the work of the Assembly all-party group on epilepsy and the Northern Ireland advisory council of Epilepsy Action; and calls on the Minister of Health to establish a patient-led approach to epilepsy service provision, with particular emphasis on the protection and extension of epilepsy nurse specialists, and the creation of a database that will enable service provision to be directed towards the most used service areas for the benefit of the 20,000 people in Northern Ireland who live with epilepsy and their families, and to ensure the best use of resources.

I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group. I welcome the opportunity to bring the debate to the House and to highlight issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure a positive future for people living with epilepsy and value-for-money, targeted health services. I must begin by paying tribute to all those in the medical profession who are grossly overworked but still care without complaint for people who have epilepsy. Neurologists, specialist nurses and the Epilepsy Action advisory council for Northern Ireland all work diligently to improve lives, health services, and public awareness of the condition.

The motion calls for the creation of a database especially for people with epilepsy, as that would be the cornerstone of future service development. Most debates are littered with impressive facts and figures about service provision, patient numbers and even mortality rates. However, those facts cannot be used today because they do not exist: no definitive information is gathered on a Northern Ireland-wide basis about the number of people who live with epilepsy, misdiagnosis, or the incidence of sudden, unexpected death from epilepsy. We need a database; we need facts in order to accurately deliver services to people with epilepsy.

In June, the new Minister told me in answer to a written question that there are no plans to develop a database specifically for epilepsy. There are databases for renal cancer and for MS patients, and I welcome those because they accurately inform the Department how to plan future services. Minister, in 2014, 35 people died in Northern Ireland as a result of epilepsy. That is unacceptable. With any other condition, there would be a public outcry. This debate is partly about preventing those deaths. It is up to you to spearhead the solution. I ask you to do that.

A major step is making a database the central core of service planning for the future. The all-party group report points out that exact figures were not provided by any trust on many issues. I ask the Minister to plan a database as a matter of urgency to address the situation. That single action will lead to service development that benefits patients and saves money.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for his contribution.

Mr Milne: I am grateful to the Member across the way for bringing the motion before the Assembly. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important issue and also to acknowledge the work and commitment of the all-party working group, Epilepsy Action, and all those who treat and support people living with epilepsy. The role and value of those who provide care, both medical and in the home, cannot be overestimated.

When we think about epilepsy, we think about seizures, but that, to some extent, simplifies the condition. It masks the fact that there are over 40 different types of epilepsy and therefore at least 40 different types of seizure. It masks the difficulty in finding the right diagnosis, and therefore the right treatment, for individuals, and the frightening and confusing experience that it is for those who are affected and those around them. Epilepsy is a serious condition that affects people of all ages. Many are born with it and others will develop it in later life, usually as a result of a stroke, brain surgery or injury. Depending on the severity of the condition, it can impact on a person's career choice, independence and ability to drive, to mention just a few.

Sufferers have a right to expect the best possible care available. Self-care, a healthy lifestyle and timely reporting are important elements of managing epilepsy, but so too is having the right support at the right time.

The motion calls for:

"a patient-led approach to epilepsy service provision, with particular emphasis on the protection and extension of epilepsy nurse specialists".

Epilepsy Action, in a recent paper, highlighted the value of those nurses in providing patient advice and support in managing their condition. It also pointed to the potential cost savings as a result of fewer hospital admissions and follow-up appointments with GPs and consultants.

Understanding your condition and treatment, face-to-face support, and appointments at intervals appropriate to your care needs are important elements of a patient-centred approach. From the information given, I can certainly see the advantages of that focused and well-informed service, and I commend the nurses who are fulfilling those roles.

The motion also calls for the creation of a database, or epilepsy register, that would assist in targeting provision and cover all health trusts in the North. While I have no doubt that patient records are maintained and kept to a high standard, a database that records additional information, or, indeed, similar information in a different format, allowing it to be compared and utilised for service planning, research and to support individual clinical care is certainly not without merit.

The motion is effective in highlighting these issues and in raising awareness of the complexity of the condition. I thank the Member across the way for proposing the motion, and I support it.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate as a member of the Health Committee and the all-party group on epilepsy.

As has been highlighted, epilepsy affects an estimated 20,000 people in Northern Ireland. In my family, my nephew Matthew lives with it every day. A smaller number of those people receive monthly treatment. However, services continue to struggle to cope with current

numbers, so it is clear that there needs to be improvement. As was articulated by Members during the previous debate on epilepsy, in May 2013, there are shortages in the number of medical staff needed to deal with this specialty.

For so many affected by epilepsy, self-care is an integral part of daily life. This often involves family members, friends and work colleagues who know the condition, the triggers and how best to look after their loved one during an epileptic episode. This can lead to constant worry and concern, and really makes the need for increased research and family support for people once diagnosed.

The effect of epilepsy on self-esteem, especially for young children, must never be overlooked. We know that epileptic episodes can often be triggered by work, especially long hours, or when people are under stress. However, that is for those who are able to continue their career.

Looking into the issue ahead of this debate, I was disappointed to learn that, despite the question being asked in the House, there are no plans to develop a database for epilepsy patients. It is also concerning that, historically, the Department does not collect data for expenditure on epilepsy services as that cannot be broken down within neurology. Add the fact that the Department could not provide information on the number of patients who have presented at emergency care departments, and that makes a firm case for change.

We cannot hope to manage what is not being effectively measured. That is why it is important, as the motion suggests, to bring forward a database that will enable service provision to be measured, and, therefore, targeted.

I agree with the motion in endorsing the important work of the all-party group on epilepsy and the expert support of Epilepsy Action NI. Its report, produced in autumn 2014, into epilepsy service provision across the five local trusts brings out a number of interesting findings. However, the most noticeable issue is that information on epilepsy varies from trust to trust, especially regarding the frequency of epilepsy and neurology clinics.

The report also argued for the need to expand the use of, and investment in, specialist nurses. This could alleviate some of the pressures experienced by consultant neurologists. However, the conclusion, which focuses on the modernisation of neurology, is the most helpful. One trust suggested that this would require ground structures, people and information to allow management of chronic epilepsy in the community, with timely and relevant support from specialist staff in hospitals. It also focuses on the need for a clear pathway of referral from primary to secondary care and, crucially, a Northern Ireland-wide database to maintain records for people with epilepsy. However, a database cannot stand alone; it should be the start of measuring what is currently not being managed as efficiently and effectively as it could be.

In conclusion, we had a debate in the Chamber in 2013 and an important report by the all-party group in 2014. Action must therefore follow. We have had the debate, the conclusions and the working groups, so I look forward to the Minister's contribution and, I hope, assurances that action will follow. I once again commend those who tabled the motion for raising the issue in the House, and I truly hope that a patient-led approach will follow.

Mr Durkan: I also support the motion and would like to congratulate the proposer and members of the all-party group on Epilepsy, who have worked hard and worked together to bring the motion here today. It is something that I expect everyone to be singing from the same hymn sheet on. For that reason, I am not going to speak for too long today. I know that my colleague Gerry Mullan, who is a member of the all-party group, will speak later in the debate and make some more substantive points.

Regarding the condition itself, and the impact that epilepsy has on individuals — a few Members have referred to that — it is fairly evident that this condition can be extremely debilitating. However, on reading through the information pack, I was surprised at just how common epilepsy is and how many people we see every day and possibly talk to every day who are living with the condition and doing their best to keep it invisible. However, it needs to be treated; they need to be treated. They need to have the security of knowing that they will be taken care of, that their condition will be managed and that they will be helped to manage their condition. That is why I think that a database is not a particularly big ask, and I do not think there should be much, or any, resistance to it. It could be a cost-effective means of establishing who needs what care. It will make it easier for people to get the care that they need, and, importantly, it will make it easier for people to give the care that is needed.

The shortage of specialist staff is an issue that, I am sure, causes great concern to all MLAs. Sadly, it is not a problem that is exclusive to the condition of epilepsy.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Member for giving way. Would he agree with me that this is not just a case for the Department of Health but also a case for our Education Authority? When we send our kids to school, it is the teachers who identify the triggers, see the signs before a seizure and have to deal with the seizure and the after-effects of the seizure. If I can name-drop today, Mrs Leeman of Carrick Primary School in Lurgan, has just received her training for the treatment of my grandson, who has epilepsy.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

4.00 pm

Mr Durkan: Thank you. I can assure the House that I will not need the extra minute, but I certainly concur with what Mr Beattie says, and I am sure that the Minister will too. She has previously made public the importance of cross-departmental collaboration on a whole range of issues, and this is certainly one of those, given the massively important and early role that educators play in people's lives.

I will go back to the issue of the shortage of staff and a situation that materialised or developed in my own constituency a few years ago. We had a brand spanking new piece of ECG machinery to carry out tests and give treatment to people suffering from epilepsy, however there were no nurse or staff there to use it. Day and daily, children and families had to drive past Altnagelvin on their way to Belfast to get work done and treatment given that they could and should have been getting closer to home. It would have made life a lot easier for everyone.

The report from Epilepsy Action NI is a very useful document. It highlights many issues, many — if not all — of which will be touched on today by other Members. It is very sad that a lot of these issues are not exclusive to epilepsy and you see very similar things, particularly with other neurological conditions.

To conclude, I echo Ms Dobson's call for action. It is well and good that we have these debates and raise the issues and air our concerns, however what people really want to see is action coming out of them. That is how we will be judged at the end of the day.

Ms Bradshaw: I support the motion. This is, of course, a very significant issue. No one here today could have any difficulty with the text of the motion, and nor would anybody deny that it is important to put it on record for the 20,000 people and their families living here in Northern Ireland. Epilepsy is a condition that does not discriminate; it can strike any one of us at any time, and it is a condition that can have a devastating impact on the quality of life and well-being of the sufferer.

Like other Members, I have no hesitation in supporting the work of the Northern Ireland advisory council of Epilepsy Action and other epilepsy support groups, and emphasising the huge importance of their work. One thing I would say, however, is that over the summer months, like many people on the Health Committee, I met different condition-specific lobby groups and charities, and with all due respect to epilepsy sufferers, this motion could be brought forward for any one of those conditions.

There is no doubt that the answers are within the motion here, in terms of wider health reform. We need expert-led multidisciplinary teams; we need more nurse specialists; we need better workforce planning and data management; and we need better use of resources. The motion is 100% correct in all of that, but to do it all, we need reform of the entire Health and Social Care service for epilepsy, and indeed, all of the other conditions. Such reform would probably deliver a type of shift left, to ensure that conditions such as epilepsy are properly diagnosed in the first instance; to ensure that information is available to people concerned about them at the outset; and to plan support services and treatments more effectively, especially among primary care providers.

It would be interesting to know if this is the type of reform proposed in the expert panel report, as chaired by Professor Bengoa, but of course, as we know in this Chamber, we are being denied access to the report. I am grateful that the Minister is here today, and I challenge her to publish the report as soon as possible. It is important that we, as Health Committee members with an elected mandate, and many people within the sector with the expertise, should have view of it, so that we can all contribute and have a consensus on its delivery. The Health Committee Chair, who is in the Chamber as well, said at the outset of the Assembly term that she wanted the Committee to work together, but this is impossible while we are denied access to the report. I trust that, in the spirit of cooperation that she rightfully proposed, she will join me today in calling for the immediate publication of the report. It is only once we seize the need to implement a proper reform programme for Health and Social Care services, with better data and workforce planning, and more specialised and primary care cooperation, that the outcomes proposed in this motion will become a reality.

Mr Middleton: Like others, I begin by thanking my colleagues for bringing this important motion to the House. I want to recognise and congratulate the APG on epilepsy on the work that it has carried out to date to support and advocate on behalf of people with epilepsy. I also recognise the work of Foyle epilepsy support group and, in particular, Keith Cradden for his tireless efforts in raising awareness of the condition.

Whilst a lot of work has been done, there is still much more to do to ensure that epilepsy has its rightful place in our health system and that it is seen as a chronic condition that needs greater attention, greater support and much less stigmatisation. Many people who have epilepsy do not say that they do. When we discuss epilepsy, we always hear people saying, "My friend has epilepsy" or "I know someone who has epilepsy". With the numbers being so large, it is inevitable that we all know somebody who has the condition.

The motion calls for actions to be taken to go some way in addressing the many concerns around provision for people with epilepsy. First, there is establishing a patient-led approach. This is important when dealing with issues directly affecting the life of an individual. Whether it is having an impact on their health, their education or their employment, the patient should have an input to the services they require. Obviously, that approach must be evidence-based.

Secondly, there is the epilepsy service provision itself. I have spoken to people with epilepsy and colleagues on the APG, and it is clear to me that they not only want to protect the services already there but want an extension of those services. That will not only help patients with the condition; it will have an impact on the wider health system through the reduction of their dependence on other specialists. More importantly, it will have an impact on the number of people who die with the condition. We need to ensure that we have the right support at every level.

There is no doubt — there should be no doubt — about the value of epilepsy specialist nurses. They provide a crucial source of support and advice and enable many patients to manage their epilepsy effectively and remain independent in the community. The APG report identified trusts in Northern Ireland that did not have those specialist nurses and looked to other trust areas for support. Without that cover locally, epilepsy patients have to travel to other areas, increasing the time for assessment and treatment. More epilepsy specialist nurses will not only result in a better service for patients but could bring about savings for the health service.

Finally, there is the creation of a database. As we all know, up-to-date, accurate information is something that our health service needs and relies on to ensure that the best possible and most effective care is available. Epilepsy should be no different. The database would provide information and evidence for the targeting of services to areas of need and ultimately reduce misdiagnoses and waiting times. Another use for the database would be to provide a basis for gathering information on the relationships between conditions. That is important in terms of links with autism, for example, as 46% of children with autism also have seizures. It is important that we share that information across the board. We must understand the interrelationship between epilepsy and other conditions but also that between epilepsy and life

restrictions in terms of employment, social services or people having to give up their education due to a lack of support.

I fully support the motion and the calls within it. We all recognise the pressures that our health system is under; however, the steps proposed will not only benefit the 20,000 people in Northern Ireland with epilepsy but, I believe, will have an impact on the health service.

Mr Sheehan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion as a member of the Health Committee. I thank George Robinson for tabling the motion. I commend the all-party group on epilepsy and the work it does in shining a light on the needs of epilepsy patients and the difficulties they face. Epilepsy Action also plays an important role, and its contribution to helping those who suffer from epilepsy should also be commended.

There is no doubt that a diagnosis of epilepsy can have a devastating impact on an individual and his or her family. Epilepsy, as we know, is most often diagnosed in childhood, but it can occur at any time and can have severe consequences on the ability to work, drive a car and, basically, lead a normal life.

Concerns have been raised about long waiting times for neurology appointments, which, of course, leads to delays in diagnosis and treatment. Waiting times are a concern for all of us in the Assembly. I acknowledge that the Minister has spoken on a number of occasions about her determination to reduce waiting times right across the health service. I hope that there will be an improvement, at least in the medium-term future.

As with any medical diagnosis, looking after oneself is vital. Staying healthy is key. Along with that, patients should have access to the highest quality of care, from their GP through to the specialist nurses and neurologists. It is clear, however, that access to the highest quality of care is not always available. I acknowledge that the Department has established a regional group to consider the modernisation of neurological services, including epilepsy. As part of that work, the Public Health Agency has recently established a regional neurology nursing group, and planning for epilepsy services will be included in the group. However, given the wide discrepancy between Epilepsy Action's figures and the trusts' estimates of the number of epilepsy sufferers, I ask the Minister to look again at the possible creation of an accurate database. Planning services and resourcing them require an accurate database. I support the motion.

Mr Butler: I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate.

I commend the motion on epilepsy service provision. I do not think that anyone could fail to be moved by the story that I listened to this morning on local radio about the young man who suffers from epilepsy and his mother's heartfelt plea for greater help with her son's plight as they live with the dangers of epilepsy every day. It was alarming to hear that their route to health will entail a transatlantic journey; sadly, it will not be met here in Northern Ireland.

As stated in the motion, 20,000 local people live with epilepsy. Epilepsy is defined as a tendency to have recurrent seizures caused by a sudden burst of excess electrical activity in the brain, causing a temporary disruption to the normal messages passing between brain

cells. By its very description, it is a condition that greatly impacts on the people who suffer from it. A diagnosis can come as a worrying blow, and, as we all know, it can greatly impact on areas of daily life as basic and fundamental as driving, as Member Sheehan mentioned.

Epilepsy has a worrying misdiagnosis rate, however: up to 20% or 30%. As a result, it is a real possibility that people with the condition in Northern Ireland are being left in the system, where their needs are never identified. That, in turn, contributes to a rate of unscheduled care that is far higher than normal. We would not for one moment tolerate such a rate of misdiagnosis for cancer. However, it is the sad reality for epilepsy. Of course, we do not have that rate of misdiagnosis of conditions such as cancer, principally because suspected cases of cancer are referred to a specialist — rightly so. Epilepsy sufferers are most regularly seen by a general physician with no specialist knowledge of the condition. That is a criticism not of those doctors but of a system that does not best signpost patients to the timeliest and most effective path of support.

In addition, in some areas of Northern Ireland, the limited specialist services are next to non-existent. As a result, health outcomes for people with epilepsy not only in Northern Ireland but in the UK more generally are very poor.

In particular, I would like to raise the plight of children and young people with epilepsy. A wealth of research reveals that they have a lower quality of life than peers who have other long-term conditions, such as asthma and diabetes.

4.15 pm

Timely access to appropriate services is essential in the diagnosis and treatment of suspected epilepsy. MRI scans are particularly important, yet, as my party previously revealed, waiting times for a scan sharply increase in areas such as the Southern Trust, with some jumping from nine weeks to as many as 16.

The provision of specialist nurses across Northern Ireland is a poor. This should be easily addressed with better NHS workforce planning that takes account of the need to train epilepsy specialists with consultants and nurses.

I hope that the debate will act as a timely prompt for the Minister that the sporadic level of service provision is no longer tolerable. I call on her to extend nurse specialists; to carry out a wider epilepsy needs assessment; and to assist in the development of a database that will ensure that the appropriate support mechanisms are in place to ensure that people are receiving the appropriate and timely care.

Mr Mullan: I speak today as a relatively new member of the all-party group on epilepsy. However, what I am not new to is the impact that epilepsy has on the many people in my constituency who suffer from the condition. In this regard, I thank Mr Robinson for bringing the motion to the House today.

One of the biggest barriers for sufferers of epilepsy is, in my view, the stigma that is associated with it. I am glad that the debate allows us to address a lot of those stigmas. Epilepsy is a large-scale, chronic condition that directly impacts on the lives of 20,000 people in the North, as Members have said, and around 40 people lose their life to the condition every year.

Although we have witnessed many advances in treatment and managing the condition, living with epilepsy has a wide-ranging impact on all stages of life, and I want to address that here today.

Across the North, children with epilepsy are being severely disadvantaged in school, which is leading to underachievement and impaired social development. It is important that the Assembly recognises that early intervention is critical for children with epilepsy to ensure that they get the best possible support at the earliest opportunity.

It has, as already referred to, been estimated that some 46% of children who have autism also have seizures. When we in the Chamber look at issues like the statementing process and the colossal waiting list for child psychological assessments, we must also bear in mind their impact on children suffering from epilepsy. All have a knock-on effect, and it is important that we have an intergovernmental, cross-disciplinary approach to tackling the issues facing children with epilepsy.

Epilepsy in adults can have severe consequences, as it is a very difficult and unpredictable condition. There are people who have seizures every 10 to 15 minutes, and this has an impact on their health, employment and social well-being. I know first-hand because I have a neighbour with chronic epilepsy who has to wear a helmet to protect her from falls during seizures. She is afraid to go out, she cannot socialise and she needs round-the-clock care. This is the harsh reality that many sufferers of the condition live with daily. We can only imagine what it must be like for someone who has to wear a helmet, especially a woman. It impacts completely on her dignity as a human being.

It is important to remember that a significant number of people with epilepsy have avoidable seizures. That is what makes the debate and the work of the all-party group so important. If the correct treatment is given at an early stage, many of the negative consequences associated with the condition can be avoided, for example, the loss of employment, or having to give up studies, due to a lack of support. Following diagnosis, it is important that there is a pathway to ensure that people with epilepsy are properly supported. Often, that reduces the ongoing bills in the health service. There are guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence that lay out a clear pathway, where there must be a wrap-around service in place following GP referral and there must be access to specialised nursing.

I know that there are issues with misdiagnosis in GP practices and delays in referral to consultants, and that has already been spoken about today, but equally important —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Mullan: Statistics show that across the North there are only about 10 epilepsy specialist nurses, with only a 0.5 whole-time equivalent in the Western Trust.

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

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I thank the Member for proposing the motion, which provides us with the opportunity to consider the services provided to those living with epilepsy. I thank all those who made considered and valuable contributions throughout the debate.

Like others, I start by recognising the work of the all-party group on epilepsy, as it has shown a clear commitment to highlighting the needs of epilepsy patients. I would like to put on record my appreciation of the valuable contribution that Epilepsy Action makes in our bid to improve the lives of epilepsy sufferers.

I also want to pay tribute to the hard-working epilepsy nurses, consultants and all the Health and Social Care staff who play such a vital role in the delivery of epilepsy care in hospitals and in the local community.

A diagnosis of epilepsy can have a tremendous impact on an individual and their family, and many Members referred to that during the debate. Apart from the physical impact on health, epilepsy can also have significant repercussions on an individual's ability to work, provide for a dependent family, and their ability to live a normal life.

Epilepsy is not a single condition; there are over 40 types of epilepsy, consisting of at least 29 syndromes and a further 12 or so clinically distinct groups, defined by the specific cause or underlying cause. Estimates by the Health and Social Care Board indicate that there are between 7,000 and 9,500 people living with epilepsy. It is, of course, fundamentally important that they receive the care and support that they need to lead an active and normal life. The incidence of epilepsy here is estimated to be around one in 100, and that is broadly similar to estimated incidence rates in Britain and in the South of Ireland. Epilepsy can start at any age, but it most often begins during childhood. It is often not possible to identify a specific reason why someone develops the condition, although some cases, particularly those that occur later in life, are associated with damage to the brain.

Epilepsy is most often diagnosed after patients have had more than one seizure; that is because many people have a one-off epileptic seizure during their lifetime. The most important information needed to make a diagnosis is a description of the seizures by the patient and by someone who witnessed the event.

It is also important to be aware that epilepsy is not something that can be cured overnight; it is a long-term condition that many patients will have to deal with throughout their life. Medical treatment is, therefore, only part of dealing with epilepsy. As with other long-term conditions, it needs to be managed, and patients and their families play a pivotal role in that.

The contribution of the patient in making the diagnosis and in the management of the condition supported by clinical staff cannot be ignored. The key to that is ensuring that appropriately trained staff, working with patients and their representatives, design and deliver care and treatment pathways that are patient-led and tailored to people's lives and circumstances.

The specialist epilepsy nurses in each of the five health and social care trusts already play a key role as a contact point for patients and a valuable support for GPs and primary care teams in managing the care of these often vulnerable patients. I want to see that specialist service enhanced, and a regional group is working on the modernisation of neurological services, and that includes epilepsy. As part of that work, the Public Health Agency has established a regional neurology nursing group. One of the group's functions is to review the staffing

complement for all neurological nurse specialist posts, including epilepsy provision, across the North.

The group will also consider future models of service delivery aligned to patient needs, succession planning for staff and, most important, ensure that there is sufficient capacity in teams to meet the demand on services and that people can access the treatment and information they need.

The motion also highlights concerns regarding the creation of a database to aid in the care of epilepsy sufferers. While an epilepsy database does not currently exist, I am assured that the HSC trusts maintain medical records for all patients and their care is documented accurately in those records. Details captured include an account of the advice and support offered, the investigations required and the treatment options. However, there is no doubt that improvements in medicine are at least partly driven by better understanding and better analysis of the evidence and information available.

Condition-specific databases can help to inform how services and treatment are structured and delivered and can provide a more detailed picture of what works and what needs to be improved. Technology and data can be great enablers of quality improvement, and it is important that we exploit them to drive innovation and a better service for patients. I have therefore asked my officials to look again at what information we hold and whether there may be merit in creating a distinct database for epilepsy.

As Minister, I am committed to ensuring that Health and Social Care provides the best possible services for epilepsy patients within the resources available to my Department. I look forward to working in partnership with the all-party group and Epilepsy Action. I urge them to continue their important work representing the needs of patients and their families, and I will continue to work in partnership with them in the time ahead.

Ms P Bradley: I start by also thanking my party colleague George Robinson for tabling the motion and asking me to countersign it. I also thank and pay tribute to the all-party group. I sat on the all-party group in the last mandate and saw at first hand just how conscientious and focused it was in trying to make a difference for people who suffer from epilepsy. The third group I want to thank is our Research and Information Service for what, I imagine, was a very challenging task in trying to find information on epilepsy services and statistics in Northern Ireland, because, as we know, those specifics are few and far between. It has been so difficult to collate the information due to the lack of a database and the notes being kept. I know that that has been said before in the Chamber, but we have not had too much overlap in what has been said here given that we had such a small amount of information to work on today. I definitely commend Members for that.

We know that the number of people with epilepsy living in Northern Ireland is around 20,000. I think that Ian Milne, the Minister and others mentioned that there were about 40 types of epilepsy and 40 types of seizure, so it comes as no great shock to us — Robbie Butler brought this up — that there is misdiagnosis. We know that that happens on a regular basis. People are unnecessarily given medicine that has severe effects on them, and others are not being diagnosed and have to live with the severity of that.

It is timely that we discuss this today, given that we are all looking towards the future of Health and Social Care and

even the reconfiguration of services. In the last mandate, through various consultations, there was overwhelming advice that long-term conditions, of which epilepsy is one, should be managed in the community and in the home. What the motion asks for will go an immense way towards achieving that.

On another point, in the Health Committee we had a briefing last week from the Ambulance Service, during which it told us about the various appropriate care pathways (APCs). An ambulance is deployed to someone's home, wherever that may be, and, a lot of the time, they are able to go in, treat the patient and refer them on to an appropriate pathway that suits their needs. Unfortunately, it is my understanding that there are no specialist teams of nurses to cover all the trusts in Northern Ireland. We know that there are some, but they certainly are not across all the trusts. If we had more specialist nurses, we would see our Ambulance Service being able to refer all the people who do not need hospital admission, which is what we are looking towards. What we want to achieve is to reduce the number of people who turn up at our emergency departments.

I see the nurse specialist having a pivotal role in those care pathways in our Ambulance Service.

4.30 pm

I know that Jo-Anne also talked about the lack of data and the provision of accurate information. As I said, that happens through the lack of recording. As someone who worked for the health service for a number of years, I know about recording. Sometimes it is difficult to get that accuracy, especially in admissions to hospital and treatments in hospital. People can come in with ailments that are sometimes registered as a certain ailment, not the underlying cause. That also happens.

Mr Robinson, in his opening statement, highlighted a need for a more positive future for people living with epilepsy and for ensuring value for money in the health service. That is something that all of us want to see and achieve.

I turn my attention to some of the comments made in the debate. Mr Robinson brought up an answer from the Minister in which she said there had been no plans: I am delighted to hear that the Minister is stating now that she will ask her Department to look at this again. I think we all welcome that today. Even as I read through our packs and saw a lot of the questions to other Health Ministers over recent years, I noticed that a lot of the answers were very scant because the information was not available yet again. So it was good to hear that from the Minister.

Mr Ian Milne highlighted the fact that this concerns not just those born with epilepsy; we have a very high incidence of people who develop epilepsy, whether through stroke or brain injury. We need to remember that and remember that it affects not just children. There are many adults who have lived what we would like to describe as a relatively normal daily routine whose lives are affected by this. Mr Milne also highlighted how the information could help with the reduction of hospital admissions, and he said that the database was not without merit.

I have referred to some of the things Mrs Dobson said, and she was absolutely right when she said that services were continuing to struggle. We know that that is across the board, but this is what we are discussing today. She talked about self-care and how those around the sufferer

of epilepsy are the ones who know best. They are the most stressed and are constantly having to look out for the signs and symptoms. Those people, as carers, need our support as well, and that is something we would hope to look at.

Mr Durkan said that, after reading the pack, he saw just how common this is, and he is absolutely right. He talked about the last debate we had in the Chamber, back in 2013, if I remember rightly. Mr Robinson and I brought that debate too. It was looking at, again if I can remember, children and young people and reducing the stigma of epilepsy. Other Members mentioned that we needed to reduce the stigma.

Ms Bradshaw talked about long-term conditions. She is absolutely right: this is yet another long-term condition that goes unnoticed. There are so many. We know about the big long-term conditions, like heart disease and diabetes. Those are the ones that are talked about often, but some of the other, lesser-known ones are talked about less. I will take issue with something she said about the Health Committee not working together. I do not think that is the case; it is rather naive. I think we work very well together, and we do not need the Bengoa report to work well together, albeit that I would love to have it in front of us. I suspect Members think that the Bengoa report will be some panacea: I do not know that it is. We will know when we get it, but it certainly will not stop me working hard towards a better service.

I am slowly running out of time, and I cannot read my writing, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I will move on to Mr Middleton. He talked about life restrictions and a lack of support and education in the workplace. He also talked about the impact on the wider health service and said that, if we had the right support targeted in the right areas, that would bring about major savings.

Mr Sheehan talked about a reduction in waiting lists and how what we are asking for could go some way towards looking at that. He also asked the Minister to bring forward an accurate database. Mr Butler talked about misdiagnosis, as was mentioned earlier, and the high rate of that. He said that the system does not best signpost people as to where they should go. I thank Mr Mullan for his input, for being a part of the all-party group, for going forward with that and for sharing with us the story of someone he knows and how that affects her daily life.

In closing, I thank the Minister for what has been a very positive debate. When it comes to health generally, all of us in the Chamber want what is best for the people whom we represent. I thank her for her comments and her commitment to trying to make a difference.

Finally, I want to go back to something that Mr Robinson said. He reminded us earlier of the 35 people who died in Northern Ireland in 2014 because of epilepsy. I have a neighbour who just last year lost her son to a seizure, and I know full well how that affected her family's life greatly. If we can go some way towards helping those people who are suffering from this dreadful condition, I welcome the debate today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly commends the work of the Assembly all-party group on epilepsy and the Northern Ireland advisory council of Epilepsy Action; and calls

on the Minister of Health to establish a patient-led approach to epilepsy service provision, with particular emphasis on the protection and extension of epilepsy nurse specialists, and the creation of a database that will enable service provision to be directed towards the most used service areas for the benefit of the 20,000 people in Northern Ireland who live with epilepsy and their families, and to ensure the best use of resources.

Mr Kelly: On a point of order, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. It is not actually a point of order. I would like to apologise for not being in my place for questions to the Agriculture Minister.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for that point of order.

Mr Robinson: I apologise to you and the House, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, for not being able to complete my contribution on epilepsy due to a throat problem.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The contribution that you made was a very valuable one, and we thank you for that.

Adjourned at 4.37 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): With your permission, Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the twenty-second meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 14 September 2016. The statement has been agreed with Minister Hazzard. Chris Hazzard MLA, the Minister for Infrastructure, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Denis Naughten TD, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, who chaired the meeting.

Ministers had an initial discussion on the implications of the UK EU referendum result. They welcomed the continuing cooperation on the main sources of EU funding in the environment sector: Horizon 2020, INTERREG V and LIFE. Cooperation includes joint meetings of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland contact points, joint training and information events in both jurisdictions and reciprocal access to partner search databases.

The Council noted that cross-border roadshow events had taken place in April and May 2016 on Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges 2 and 5. An information day for Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 5 will be hosted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 7 October 2016.

The Council also noted that cooperation between both jurisdictions continues on preparations for a package of joint projects with a value in excess of €70 million, covering the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments with the INTERREG Va programme. Ministers noted that the call for proposals under LIFE 2016 opened on 19 May 2016 and recently closed in September 2016. It was expected that a small number of proposals containing projects in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would be submitted.

The Council noted that the work programme will be kept under review at future NSMC environment meetings, having particular regard to matters arising from the outcome of the UK referendum on EU membership.

Ministers agreed that, within the work programme, consideration should be given to cooperation on water and sewerage services, as well as to the opportunities for cooperation on wider environmental issues. Ministers also

agreed that the proposed updated work programme will be considered at a future NSMC plenary meeting.

The Council noted that, since the introduction in both jurisdictions of a new fuel marker in April 2015, there has been a decline in reported fly-tipping incidents involving waste from fuel laundering. The Council also noted the number and cost of diesel-laundrying waste clean-up operations undertaken by the relevant authorities in border counties. Ministers agreed that officials should continue to work jointly with all the relevant agencies to tackle the scourge of fuel laundering and its links to organised crime.

The Council noted that the agreed repatriation programme for 2015-16 has been completed with the removal and repatriation of waste from two illegal waste landfill sites. Site works on the first site, at Altnamackan, were completed in November 2015, and work at the second site, at Mayobridge, was completed in March 2016. Ministers noted that discussions are under way between officials from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), with a view to agreeing a work programme to complete the remaining repatriation sites.

Ministers reaffirmed the continuing need to work together and target resources at joint enforcement action against those involved in illegal waste activity. That includes the continued exchange of intelligence and information on problem areas and coordinated joint inspections.

The Council noted that pay by weight for household waste collections has been introduced in the Republic of Ireland. The publication of the three regional waste management plans in the Republic of Ireland was also noted. Transboundary consultation was undertaken with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in the context of the strategic environmental assessment process associated with the development of the plans.

The Council noted the continued investment in recycling in Northern Ireland and the latest recycling rate. That has been accompanied by the introduction in Northern Ireland of legislative measures to reduce the amount of food waste sent to landfill, as well as the introduction of further legislation to discourage criminality in the waste industry.

The Council noted that the DCCA-commissioned study on the export of waste from the Republic of Ireland was published in November 2015 and that the consultation period closed on 14 March 2016.

Ministers noted developments in the establishment of a producer responsibility initiative (PRI) for tyres in the

Republic of Ireland and that DAERA officials continue to attend tyres working group meetings.

The Council noted that, in 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency offered funding of over €8 million to a total of 43 projects across a broad spectrum, including climate, water, sustainability and green enterprise, and that its 2016 research call was announced in May 2016.

Ministers noted that the report of the NSMC-commissioned all-island air-quality research study has been finalised and presented to relevant Ministers and is available through the DAERA and DCCAE websites.

The Council noted that a report on phase 1 of the all-island joint research programme into unconventional gas exploration and extraction — fracking — is expected in the latter part of 2016.

The Council noted the establishment across both jurisdictions of a collaborative evidence programme known as ShARE. So far, a programme of research has been developed, and 10 projects are ongoing. New project calls in priority areas are likely to commence later this year.

I turn now to water quality. Ministers welcomed the establishment of the new Local Authority Waters and Communities Office in the Republic of Ireland. Ministers noted that the public consultation on significant water management issues closed in the Republic of Ireland on 18 December 2015 and that the final second cycle of river basin management plans for Northern Ireland was published on 22 December 2015.

Ministers acknowledged the cross-border cooperation on the development of river trusts, including promotion, awareness and community engagement in the cross-border River Blackwater Catchment Trust.

Ministers recognised the continued coordination on the Clean Coasts and Coast Care schemes and welcomed the level of beach awards in both jurisdictions for 2016. The Council noted the continued engagement between the Department for Infrastructure, DCCAE, Irish Water and Northern Ireland Water on exploring opportunities for cooperation, including on applications to access EU INTERREG V funds. Finally, the Council agreed to hold the next environment meeting in spring 2017.

Mr McKee: I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she detail whether the announcement of a nationwide ban on burning smoky coal in the Republic of Ireland, and the desire of some officials and organisations to extend this to Northern Ireland, was discussed? If so, I hope that she did not overlook the likely impact that such a ban would have on the numbers of rural households in fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. While we had that discussion, it is not my intention to bring a similar ban into Northern Ireland.

Ms Dillon (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I thank the Minister for her statement. I note in paragraph 3 that the Ministers had an initial discussion on the implications of the EU referendum result. Can the Minister elaborate on the implications discussed, in particular the impact of the result on future cooperation on joint projects that depend on EU funding?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Chair for her question. Yes, we did discuss Brexit. At the meeting, I outlined what the immediate implications were for Northern Ireland. I highlighted that, in the meantime, existing environmental legislation in Northern Ireland will continue to apply as before, as will our current environmental policy and operational practice. I also committed that my officials would continue to cooperate and collaborate with the Republic of Ireland both before and after the UK withdrawal.

As the Chair will be aware, the Treasury has said that it will guarantee funding after we leave the EU for projects that rely on EU funds if they secure multi-year EU funding before the exit date, which will probably be in March 2019. However, projects going forward under INTERREG Va, for example, are cross-border in nature and require contributions from the Republic of Ireland. The issue for us is that the Republic of Ireland has been unable to obtain guarantees of EU funding from the European Commission; the funding position is, therefore, unclear. We are continuing to work with them in order to obtain clarity, but the UK position is clear.

The environment element of INTERREG Va is €84 million for 2014-2020, €12 million of which is match-funding provided by the two Governments, and €72 million of which is provided by the EU on a roughly 70%/30% split between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It is that 30%, which is just over €20 million, that the Republic of Ireland cannot guarantee. Nine projects are in the process of applying for INTERREG Va funding, including the large shared waters enhancement and loughs legacy (SWELL) project, which is worth over €30 million and which will upgrade, or build, wastewater treatment works in the Foyle and Carlingford catchments. That is where we are with regard to EU funding.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I ask Members who wish to have a meeting in the Chamber to continue that meeting outside so that the Minister can be heard across the Chamber.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for her statement. The legal disposal and dumping of waste is a major problem that causes much damage to our environment. Minister, did you have any discussions with Minister Naughten regarding the removal and repatriation of waste that originated in the Republic of Ireland?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. You will be aware of the commitment in the road map agreement with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland to undertake the repatriation of waste from illegal landfills. In total, 17 sites were identified, with an estimated total of 273,000 tons of waste to be removed. A total of 12 sites have been completed since repatriation began in 2010, and this means that a total of 93,000 tons of waste has been repatriated. However, the five remaining sites are the most significant. As you will understand, this action was initiated after threats from the EU about infractions, so it is important that this waste is repatriated. I would like the repatriation of the waste at the remaining five sites to be completed without unnecessary delay. There are issues due to financial constraints and with the Irish Republic's capacity to use its land for the waste. I have been pushing very hard to get this programme completed.

10.45 am

The Member might also be aware that a further four sites were identified earlier this year: two at Galbally, one at Ballygawley and another at Sandholes. Although they were not part of the original plan, they have been identified as containing waste from the Irish Republic, and we need to continue the conversations with them on the repatriation of that waste.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for her response to date. Regarding water quality, the statement says that the Council noted the continuing engagement between the respective Departments and their agencies on collaboration to access EU INTERREG funding. Can the Minister give any indication as to how fruitful that collaboration and cooperation has been to date by way of practical projects that have been funded?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Collaboration is important as we continue in our quest for good water quality across Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. You will be aware of the river basin management plans that have been developed. They have been useful, particularly in areas such as the Shannon area where there are shared waters. We have also been working with our colleagues in the North/South working group on water quality. It meets twice a year and other technical meetings take place. I understand that officials enjoy an excellent working relationship and discuss a number of issues pertinent to water quality. You will also be aware of the beach awards and the work that goes on across both jurisdictions on that and with good outcomes.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her statement. She will realise that the concentration on reducing the environmental impact of fuel laundering is particularly welcome to me, given the double-sided interest that I have. Can she give us any information on the involvement of the two environment agencies with the cross-border task force on organised crime?

I also note a significant number of references to Horizon 2020 and INTERREG. Is the Minister aware of information that I have received that there is a significant reluctance elsewhere in Europe for bodies to enter into consortia with UK bodies in the wake of the referendum vote? Has she any ideas as to how we will be able to continue to participate in those bodies?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his questions. I appreciate his previous role and, particularly, the work on fuel laundering. As he will know, HMRC has led on these matters given that it is financially driven crime. My officials have been working well and play a valuable supporting role, along with colleagues in the PSNI, when it comes to determining who has responsibility for dumping waste and pursuing them through the courts accordingly. My officers have also been directly involved in clean-ups of the waste left behind. That is costly and time-consuming. Between June 2012 and April 2016, the NIEA cleared more than 3,141 tons of fly-tipped, fuel-laundered waste from 423 incidents, with the overwhelming majority of the clean-up operations taking place in the border counties of Armagh and Down.

That, in itself, is not insignificant. Between May 2013 and June 2015, the NIEA has overseen five convictions for the illegal depositing of fuel-laundered waste, prosecutions

that have secured £25,000 in fines. A further two cases involving fuel-laundered waste are in the courts system.

The Member also raised INTERREG and a reluctance to get involved in consortia. I have heard very little about that; only rumours. I am keen to pursue that to see whether there is any truth to it and what we can do to assist. There are obviously partnerships in which non-EU countries are significant partners in consortia. I do not see why the United Kingdom cannot be part of those as we move on.

Ms Archibald: I thank the Minister for her statement and responses so far. Paragraph 23 of the statement references the all-island air quality report. Will the Minister elaborate on what actions she intends to take based on its findings?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. I am obviously still considering the report's recommendations, and if there are any that I feel are worth taking forward, I will consult with Executive colleagues, Committee members and stakeholders. The report makes a number of recommendations, including further expanding our smoke control areas in Northern Ireland; that this expansion takes place alongside policies on energy efficiency; fiscal measures to promote the uptake of low-emission fuels; publishing information and raising awareness of the issue; and, where possible, ensuring that fuel poverty does not arise as an unintended consequence of that policymaking process. As I said, we have received the report and I will consider it.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. Minister, I want to go back to fuel laundering. You referred to the volume of waste that was removed. Paragraph 13 of your statement also refers to the cost that was incurred in removing that waste. Will you update the House on how much has been paid to remove fuel-laundering waste?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I do not have that information to hand but am happy to get it to him.

Mr McMullan: Minister, earlier you mentioned two sites of repatriated waste. You said that there were four remaining sites and that there are another five. I am a little bit confused. How many sites are there? Is it nine, five or four? Will you list where they all are?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. There were originally 17 sites. Twelve have been completed, so there are currently five remaining that sit within the road map agreement. An additional four sites were identified earlier this year: two at Galbally, one at Ballygawley and one at Sandholes. The five remaining sites that are still to be cleared as result of the road map agreement are two at Newtownhamilton, one at Cookstown, one at Crumlin and one at Portglenone.

Mr Attwood: I refer the Minister to paragraphs 4 to 8 of her statement, which deal with the INTERREG, LIFE and Horizon 2020 programmes and EU funding. Will the Minister indicate, hopefully by answering yes or no, whether she endorses today's proposal from the Irish Government — it has been endorsed previously by others — that, when it comes to Brexit negotiations, to safeguard the interests of people in Northern Ireland, including their access to all those funds, there should be a legally binding agreement about the special status of Northern Ireland post-Brexit? That would —

Mr Allister: *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Attwood: I note what Mr Allister just said. That would guarantee special status and, potentially, special funding for Northern Ireland. We would be out of the European Union but would have a legally binding special status in respect of it.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. We will need to look at all those things as we go through the negotiations on the exit programme. In the meantime, that is not something that I will commit to today.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Minister for her statement and responses. I refer her to paragraph 24. Were there any discussions of an all-island moratorium on fracking, given the very real concerns in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone about the potential damage to tourism, agriculture and the environment?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. As she will understand, a piece of research, the unconventional gas exploration and extraction report, has been carried out. This was to give us an evidence base on the issues, specifically in relation to the unique environment in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The report will not be subject to public consultation, but the Department will see it later this year and will be able to take information from it. There was no further discussion of fracking at the meeting.

Mr Allister: There are now nine waste sites awaiting repatriation, five of them known about for quite a long time, yet if I understand the Minister correctly, there is no agreed work programme to deal either with those five or the four new ones. Why is that? Is the Republic of Ireland dragging its feet because of the cost involved?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I find it unacceptable that it has been going on for so long since they were identified. I pressed the matter at the meeting and expressed my disappointment at the pace of progress on the programme. I would like to see this resolved without unnecessary delay. I understand that the issues are in relation to cost and a lack of capacity for land waste in the Irish Republic. Those two things combined are not helpful, but we have certainly been pushing to get a resolution as quickly as possible.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Minister for her statement. With regard to EU funding, can she provide an update on the Horizon 2020 projects?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question on EU funding and, in particular, Horizon 2020. We are continuing to discuss this work with Ministers in the South. As I explained to the Chair, there is an issue with funding coming forward for the INTERREG side of things. However, we are working together to progress Horizon 2020 projects.

Mr E McCann: Is the Minister aware of large amounts of illegally dumped waste in the Derry area being carried by the truckload, in broad daylight, across the border and dumped — again illegally, apparently — in County Donegal, even as, so I understand from her statement, significant amounts of waste are being carried in the opposite direction? Is that not a bizarre situation that demands immediate attention?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, any illegal dumping needs to be cracked down

and addressed with urgency. I am happy to discuss that issue with the Member.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

11.00 am

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

North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act regarding the twenty-ninth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 14 September 2016.

The Executive were represented by Minister Chris Hazzard and me. The Irish Government were represented by Denis Naughten, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and Seán Kyne, the Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and Natural Resources. I chaired the meeting. This statement has been agreed with Minister Hazzard, and I am making it on behalf of both of us.

Ministers noted that the Loughs Agency had undertaken an initial scoping exercise to consider the impact of the result of the UK referendum to leave the EU. We noted that the process of exiting the EU is still at an early stage and agreed to review developments at future NSMC meetings in the aquaculture and marine sector. Ministers were encouraged to hear that it is very much business as usual for the Loughs Agency.

The Council welcomed a presentation from the Loughs Agency that outlined its work programme and key objectives. It also received a report on the agency's activities, including its ongoing conservation and protection efforts and participation on the North/South fisheries liaison group.

In particular, Ministers noted the agency's nominations for tourism and visitor attraction awards; the progress made on the draft corporate plan 2017-19 and the draft business plan for 2017; the outcome of the internal audit; the update on the survival of the native Lough Foyle flat oyster; and the loss of the agency's survey vessel, the MMV Ostrea.

Ministers welcomed the Loughs Agency's role in facilitating discussions with interested parties and undertaking a feasibility study that led to the resumption of the Foyle ferry service from July 2016.

The Loughs Agency reported on its activities to promote and market the Foyle and Carlingford areas. In particular, the Council noted the angling development initiatives. Ministers also welcomed the marine tourism initiatives, including the Foyle Maritime Festival and the official opening of the Ark at Benone strand. We also noted the agency's education and outreach activities, including the maritime ambassador programme and the Foyle ambassador project.

Ministers considered a paper on the various external funding opportunities that the Loughs Agency is exploring. We noted the Loughs Agency's success to date in securing external funding. The agency's plans to avail itself of future funding initiatives, including the European social fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund, INTERREG V and the rural development programme, for the benefit of the Foyle and Carlingford areas were also discussed.

The Council noted the Loughs Agency's annual report and draft financial statements for 2015. Following certification of the financial statements by the Comptrollers and Auditors General, these will be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Parliament.

Ministers considered and approved the Carlingford Area (Definition of the Mouth of the Clanrye River) Regulations 2016 and authorised the joint secretaries to the North/South Ministerial Council to signify approval on its behalf.

Finally, the Council paid tribute to the outgoing chairman of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, Mr Winston Patterson, whose second term of office comes to an end shortly.

The Council agreed to hold its next aquaculture and marine sector meeting in spring 2017.

Mr McKee: I thank the Minister for her statement. She explained that the Loughs Agency had undertaken a scoping exercise to consider the impact of Brexit. Will she provide further detail on what was established by that exercise?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The chief executive of the Loughs Agency outlined his initial views on the likely impact of Brexit on the agency's operations. The Loughs Agency, in conjunction with my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, has undertaken an initial scoping exercise to consider the impact of the result of the UK leaving the EU. We were advised by the agency that its approach to Brexit is, as the statement said, very much "business as usual", particularly as formal negotiations have not yet started. EU funding will be a challenge for the Loughs Agency. It has indicated that there will, undoubtedly, be challenges ahead, but it believes that they will not be insurmountable.

Ms Dillon (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I thank the Minister for her statement and answers so far. I will follow on from the question asked by Mr McKee: can the Minister provide further detail on the scoping exercise and tell us when it might be made available to the Committee?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Chair for her question. I understand that the Committee anticipates a number of papers from us, and certainly an update on the scoping exercise. As she will understand, it is still really very early days for any work that we are doing. I will be more than happy to share that when I have sight of it, and I will do that as soon as possible.

Mr Poots: Netting is a significant problem when it comes to maintaining our fish stocks in rivers. Are there still netting issues on the loughs? What action is being taken in that respect? I trust that the Queen of Ulster will do a very good job of monitoring illegal activities there.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The Loughs Agency has seen an increase in poaching and other illegal activity in 2016, which is unfortunate. Seizures by agency staff have risen compared with 2015. In 2015, there were 125 seizures of items such as boats, nets, rods and fish, compared with 197 in 2016, and that is only to date. It is a significant increase.

We want to move forward with prosecutions, and, to date in 2016, the Loughs Agency has taken 47 court cases:

30 relating to angling offences, eight to netting offences, seven to pollution offences and two to other types of offence. Three of those cases have successfully gone through the court system. The figure of 47 represents a rise compared with 2015, when a total of 35 prosecution cases was taken. It is unfortunate that we are in this situation, but staff are doing what they can to bring to justice those who are causing issues, particularly in areas that they have jurisdiction over.

Mr McGlone: Paragraph 12 of the statement refers to:

“The Agency’s plans to avail of future funding initiatives”.

I see that three of the four initiatives emanate from the European Union. Will the Minister advise what actions the Department has taken to source other measures that could be put in place to compensate for the loss of those three initiatives and how such measures would be funded?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, we noted that, and the Loughs Agency is looking for alternative means of funding. However, given the comments made by Mr Ford in response to my previous statement, the agency will be looking along the lines of being involved in consortia. As we move through the process, we will look at that and at what additional funding is required.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for this second statement. She will be pleased, I think, that following the valiant efforts of Mr McKee, Mr McGlone and Mr Attwood, I will not continue on the issue of European funding. Her statement mentions the reinstatement of the Foyle ferry service. For those of us who come from County Antrim, the Derry bypass — from Magilligan to Greencastle — is an attractive way of accessing Inishowen. Can she give us any understanding of the likelihood of being able to maintain a service on that route in the long term?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. He is aware that the service has been offered for an initial three-year period, which commenced in July. Proposals include an option to extend the contract for up to another four years, and discussions on that will continue.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she comment on the resources available to the Loughs Agency and whether she believes there are opportunities for the organisation to raise additional revenue?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I will reiterate the comments I made in my answer to Mr McGlone’s question. Obviously, a number of funding streams have been explored by the Loughs Agency regarding European funding and they have been successful to date. In excess of €15 million has been secured with partner organisations; that is not insignificant.

The Member may be aware that I recently visited the Loughs Agency and had the opportunity to look around its visitor centre and aquarium, Riverwatch. I believe that it is an incredible and invaluable educational resource that, to date, has been available for free. The activities on offer encourage learners and visitors to learn, explore and engage but it requires some investment. Given my long interest in the Exploris aquarium in my constituency, I believe that the Loughs Agency can learn valuable lessons from how Exploris currently operates and from the lessons

it learned from the past. Again, that is a vital resource for those in the area as regards education and learning. Ministers have asked the agency to look at how Exploris operates, including how it charges for the services it provides. I understand that arrangements have now been made with the Loughs Agency to meet Ards and North Down Borough Council to discuss these matters further.

Ms Archibald: With regard to paragraph 11 and the Loughs Agency’s successes to date in securing external funding, will the Minister outline some of those successes and whether they have all been EU-based funding streams?

Miss McIlveen: As I indicated, the agency has been successful to date in gaining in excess of €15 million working with partner organisations. The most significant of these are €4 million for marine tourism and angling development and €8 million for the integrated resource management programme across the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland. As I said in my statement, the agency plans to avail itself of future funding initiatives, including the European social fund, Heritage Lottery Fund, INTERREG V and the rural development programme. This is all for the benefit of the Foyle and the Carlingford area. The agency is hopeful, given the Chancellor’s recent announcements with regard to EU funding that has been successful, that these funding commitments will be honoured.

Mr Swann: Minister, in an earlier answer to a Member you mentioned the success rate of the Loughs Agency in tackling poachers and removing nets. How is the work progressing in your Department to extend the Loughs Agency’s remit into other waterways? There used to be a conflict of interest between the old DCAL fisheries division and the Loughs Agency in certain parts of waterways. Will you give an update as to how that is progressing?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, we were on the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee at that particular time. If there are any issues, I am keen that they are resolved. However, I understand that the Loughs Agency is stretched as it is with the remit it has. If there are opportunities to share work and experience, we will certainly encourage that.

Mr McMullan: Were there any talks at your meeting regarding the territorial powers of the Loughs Agency, with regard to the British Government and Irish Government giving it powers to license aquaculture on the Lough? This has been going on for a while and I have listened attentively this morning about environmental projects that actually cannot go ahead unless the power is given to Loughs Agency to license aquaculture on the Lough.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As he indicated, this is a historical issue, and, because it is a jurisdictional issue and is primarily regarding Lough Foyle, it is a reserved matter.

11.15 am

I am reassured that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been engaging with the Department of Foreign Affairs, and that steady progress is being made in an attempt to find a compromise on the jurisdictional issue. Like the Member, I am frustrated at the lack of progress and the impact that it is having on the licensing of aquaculture activities on the River Foyle. I reiterated my frustration at the meeting, and I welcome the fact, as did Minister

Naughten, that steady progress is being made, but we are looking for a speedy resolution.

Mr Attwood: Would the Minister agree to table a report in the Assembly Library outlining what the Department is doing, in a dedicated way, about the aquaculture and marine sector and the environment sector on the issues that are likely to arise from Brexit, and what remedies the Department is looking at for those matters?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. We are still working through those issues, so I am not in a position to table any report, but when we have the findings, we will speak to the Committee in the first instance and go from there.

Mr M Bradley: Minister, fishing is very important to the Northern Ireland economy. Have there been any discussions over the summer months regarding pollution, and can the Loughs Agency help in any way to alleviate pollution?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. At the meeting, we had a report from the Loughs Agency on pollution incidents in their area of jurisdiction, and pollution is, unfortunately, on the rise: a total of 100 incidents were dealt with in 2015, compared with a total of 150 to date in 2016. The Loughs Agency was directly involved in dealing with a recent major pollution incident that killed in excess of 1,000 fish in the River Faughan.

Reducing pollution is one of my ministerial priorities. I believe that the Loughs Agency has a responsibility to work closely with farmers here and in the Irish Republic to reduce pollution, and the inevitable fish kills that follow, in the catchment areas. Ministers have asked the agency to work with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Irish Farmers' Association with a view to preventing pollution incidents by raising awareness of the issue among farmers and educating them through early intervention. As a consequence, the number of fish kills will hopefully reduce. I am pleased to say that the Loughs Agency has already made contact with both farming unions, and a meeting is expected in the very near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Thank you, Minister. That concludes questions on the statement.

Committee Business

Standing Orders: Amendments

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): We now move to the next item of business. As the next four motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders, I propose to conduct the debate as follows: to group the four motions as detailed on the Order Paper and conduct a single debate. I will ask the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move the first motion. The debate will then take place on all four motions in the group.

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 will have five minutes. When all who wish to speak have done so, I will put the question on the first motion relating to Standing Order 3. I will then ask the Chairperson to move formally the motions relating to Standing Order 23(3); Standing Order 30; and new Standing Orders 100 to 109. I will put the question on each of these motions without further debate. I remind the House that cross-community support will be required for each. If that is clear, I shall proceed.

Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

Leave out Standing Order 3 and insert

"(1) At the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, members having met at the place and time appointed for that meeting -

(a) the Clerk shall read the notice sent under Standing Order 2(2) convening the meeting; and

(b) the outgoing Speaker shall take the chair.

(2) If, for any reason, the outgoing Speaker cannot take the chair, it shall be taken by an Acting Speaker, who shall be the oldest member present at the meeting.

(3) Members shall then take their seats in accordance with paragraph (7)

(4) All members shall have the opportunity to take their seats before any other formal business is conducted in the Assembly.

(5) A member shall not participate in Assembly proceedings or have title to the privileges of office until the member has taken his or her seat.

(6) The decision of the Speaker or Acting Speaker as to whether a member has taken his or her seat shall be final.

(7) A member shall take his or her seat by -

(a) giving the undertaking set out in section 40A(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and

(b) after the member has given that undertaking, by signing the Roll of Membership.

(8) A member shall give the undertaking by signing a document provided for that purpose.

(9) At the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, the document referred to in paragraph (8) and the Roll of Membership shall be located in the Chamber.

(10) *Where a member does not take his or her seat at the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, he or she may do so thereafter by arrangement with the Speaker and in accordance with paragraph (7).*

(11) *After signing the Roll a member may enter in the Roll a designation of identity, being "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other".*

(12) *A member who does not enter in the Roll a designation of identity shall be deemed to be designated "Other" for the purposes of these Standing Orders and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.*

(13) *A member may change his or her designation of identity only if -*

(a) *(being a member of a political party) he or she becomes a member of a different political party or he or she ceases to be a member of any political party;*

(b) *(not being a member of any political party) he or she becomes a member of a political party. Any such change takes effect immediately after notification in writing is submitted to the Speaker.*

(14) *The Clerk shall draw up a list of the party affiliations of the members. Each member shall have the opportunity to confirm or correct his or her affiliation as stated in that list.*

(15) *A member may change his or her party affiliation at any time. Any such change takes effect seven days after notification in writing is submitted to the Speaker."*

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

Leave out Standing Order 23(3) and insert

"(3) Any papers or accounts not subject to a requirement to be laid or presented to the Assembly which are deposited in the Assembly Library shall be published in accordance with law." — [Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

After Standing Order 30(3) insert

"(3A) Where the Speaker is of the opinion that a Bill is a Hybrid Bill, the Speaker shall direct that the Bill be referred for Preliminary Scrutiny in accordance with Standing Order 101." — [Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

After Standing Order 99 insert

"100. Stages of Hybrid Bills

(1) Subject to Standing Order 106, the Assembly stages of a Hybrid Bill are -

(a) *Preliminary Scrutiny Stage: consideration as to whether the Bill satisfies the conditions at Standing Order 101;*

(b) *Introduction and First Stage: introduction of the Bill to the Assembly;*

(c) *Investigation Stage: initial investigation by a Hybrid Bill committee into the principles of the Bill, and the period during which objections must be lodged;*

(d) *Second Stage: general debate on the Bill with an opportunity for members to vote on its general principles;*

(e) *Committee Stage: detailed investigation by the Hybrid Bill committee and opportunity to propose*

amendments to the Bill, followed by report to the Assembly;

(f) *Consideration Stage: consideration of and an opportunity for the Assembly to vote on the details of the Bill, including amendments proposed to the Bill;*

(g) *Further Consideration Stage: opportunity for members to consider and vote on amendments proposed to the Bill; and*

(h) *Final Stage: passing or rejection of the Bill without further amendment.*

101. Preliminary Scrutiny Stage

(1) *A Hybrid Bill shall not be introduced in the Assembly unless the standard conditions and any applicable information conditions are met.*

(2) *The standard conditions are that -*

(a) *there is proof of need for the Bill;*

(b) *no suitable alternative to the matter proceeding by way of a Hybrid Bill is demonstrated;*

(c) *there has been sufficient consultation with those who may be affected by the Bill;*

(d) *the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly; and*

(e) *the Bill would not impose any charge on the Consolidated Fund.*

(3) *The Speaker may direct that one or more of the information conditions apply to the Bill.*

(4) *The information conditions are that -*

(a) *The Bill is accompanied by an explanatory and financial memorandum;*

(b) *The Bill is accompanied by a statement in writing signed by the Promoter, to the effect that, in the Promoter's view, the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly;*

(c) *The Bill is accompanied by an environmental statement; and*

(d) *The Bill is accompanied by such other documents as the Speaker may require.*

(5) *The explanatory and financial memorandum must be in such form as the Speaker may direct and must set out -*

(a) *the issue the Bill is intended to address;*

(b) *the consultation undertaken;*

(c) *the options considered;*

(d) *the option selected and the reason therefore; and*

(e) *the cost implications of the proposal.*

(6) *Paragraphs 6 to 8 of Standing Order 30 shall apply to Hybrid Bills as they apply to Public Bills.*

102. Introduction and First Stage

(1) *When the Speaker has signified to the Promoter that a Hybrid Bill may be introduced, notice of introduction on a sitting day may be given by the Promoter.*

(2) *The Bill shall be accompanied on introduction by -*

(a) *the statement of legislative competence;*

- (b) *the explanatory and financial memorandum, setting out the matters at Standing Order 101(5); and*
- (c) *such other documents as the Speaker may require.*

(3) *On introduction, the Bill's title shall be read to the Assembly, and this shall constitute the Bill's First Stage.*

(4) *After the Bill's First Stage, the Bill shall be ordered to be printed and the Bill shall stand referred to a Hybrid Bill committee for its Investigation Stage.*

103. Investigation Stage

(1) *Investigation Stage shall commence when the Bill is referred to a Hybrid Bill committee.*

(2) *Investigation Stage shall last at least 60 working days.*

(3) *The committee shall carry out an initial investigation into the general principles of the Bill and report its opinion on the Bill to the Assembly.*

(4) *Investigation Stage is concluded when the committee reports to the Assembly.*

(5) *On the report being made to the Assembly by the committee, the Bill shall be set down in the list of pending future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.*

104. Objections

(1) *Any objections to a Hybrid Bill must be lodged within 42 working days, beginning with the day on which the Bill is referred to the Hybrid Bill committee for Investigation Stage.*

(2) *An objection to a Hybrid Bill received outside the objection period may be lodged only if that objection is approved by resolution of the Assembly, and may not in any case be lodged after the Investigation Stage is concluded.*

(3) *The Hybrid Bill committee shall consider an objection lodged in accordance with this order and admit it if –*

- (a) *the Objector has shown that his or her property or interests are directly and specially affected by the Bill;*
- (b) *the objection is in such form and accompanied by such information as may be required by the committee; and*

(c) *the objection is accompanied by such fee as the Assembly Commission may determine.*

(4) *An Objector may take no further part in committee proceedings unless the objection is admitted.*

(5) *An Objector cannot subsequently raise any issue not contained in the initial objection.*

105. Second Stage

Standing Order 32 shall apply to Hybrid Bills as it applies to Public Bills.

106. Treatment as a Public Bill

Where no objection is received or admitted to a Hybrid Bill during Investigation Stage, the Bill shall be treated as a Public Bill and shall proceed in accordance with Standing Orders 33-42.

107. Treatment as a Hybrid Bill

Where an objection to a Hybrid Bill is received and admitted during Investigation Stage, Standing Orders 88 to 95 and Standing Order 97 shall apply to that Bill as they apply to a Private Bill; and Standing Order 37A shall apply to that Bill as it applies to a Public Bill.

108. Hybrid Bill Committees

(1) *The Assembly shall establish a Hybrid Bill committee in respect of each Hybrid Bill proposed to be introduced in the Assembly.*

(2) *Each committee will discharge the functions conferred on it by Standing Order 103, and, where applicable, the functions conferred on it by Standing Orders 88 and 90.*

(3) *A member with a personal or constituency interest in the Bill shall not be eligible to sit on the committee.*

(4) *The committee shall consist of five members, and have a chairperson and deputy chairperson elected by the committee.*

(5) *The quorum of the committee shall be three. Members linked by a video-conferencing facility shall not count towards the quorum.*

(6) *All questions at the committee shall be decided by a simple majority. Voting shall be by a show of hands unless otherwise requested by a member of the committee. The chairperson shall have a casting vote.*

(7) *Members of the committee shall normally attend all meetings of the committee and may be absent from a meeting of the committee only in exceptional circumstances.*

(8) *A Hybrid Bill committee may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.*

(9) *A Hybrid Bill committee may permit the Promoter or an Objector to cross-examine any witness giving evidence to it.*

109. Interpretation

(1) *In these Standing Orders, "Hybrid Bill" means a Bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interest of other persons or bodies of the same category or class.*

(2) *In Standing Orders 100 to 108 –*

"Objector" means a person objecting to a Hybrid Bill;

"Objection period" means the period of 42 working days following the referral of a Bill to a Hybrid Bill committee;

"Hybrid Bill committee" means a committee established in accordance with Standing Order 108;

"Promoter" means the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce a Hybrid Bill.

"Statement of legislative competence" means a statement in writing signed by the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce the Bill, which states that in the view of the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce the Bill, which states that in the view of the member, the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly." — [Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Mr Lyons: On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring these motions to amend Standing Orders to the House today. Members will be aware that

there are four motions in the Order Paper. The first motion relates to the undertaking given by Members before taking up their seats. The second is on the publication of papers deposited in the Assembly Library. The other two motions make provision in Standing Orders for hybrid Bills. This may seem a strange combination to bring together, but it is purely for expedience rather than there being any link between them.

The first motion relates to the undertaking given by Members before taking up their seats and will amend Standing Order 3. The background to this proposed amendment is the Fresh Start Agreement, which required all Members to give an undertaking before taking up their seats. In giving the undertaking, Members set out their commitment to uphold the rule of law and non-violence. Subsequent legislation, the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016, provided that the procedures for giving this undertaking should be set out in the Assembly's Standing Orders. The Act also made specific provision for a transitional procedure for the giving of the undertaking by those Members elected to the Assembly following the 2016 elections. In considering this matter, the Committee examined the interim procedure used by Speaker McLaughlin at the start of this mandate. The Committee agreed that this procedure should be adopted by the Assembly going forward and codified in Standing Orders.

Today's motion to amend Standing Order 3 gives effect to the Committee's decision and sets out the procedures for the giving of the undertaking by Members, which includes Members printing their name, entering the date and signing the page provided on which the undertaking is printed. The giving of the undertaking is supervised by Assembly officials. A Member is not permitted to sign the Assembly's Roll of Membership unless he or she has given the undertaking in accordance with the procedure.

The next motion is to amend Standing Order 23(3), which relates to the publication of papers deposited in the Assembly Library. There has been some ambiguity about whether to publish deposited papers on the Assembly website. The preference of the Assembly Library is to publish all deposited papers on the Assembly website, except where there is a lawful reason not to publish. This is consistent with the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. The Committee considered this matter and agreed to amend Standing Order 23 to clarify this position.

The final two motions make provision in Standing Orders for hybrid Bills, and perhaps I could set out the background to the proposed amendments. A hybrid Bill is a Bill with the properties of both a private and public Bill. It is a Bill introduced by an Assembly Member and affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interest of other persons or bodies in the same category or class.

Standing Orders currently make provision for public and private Bills, however they are silent on Bills with hybrid properties. In December 2015, the former Speaker wrote to the previous Committee on Procedures requesting that consideration be given to the development of Standing Orders for hybrid Bills. This was as a result of a submission of a Bill with hybrid properties. The previous Committee considered this matter in detail and agreed to bring forward amendments. However, as the draft

amendments were not available before the end of the mandate, it was agreed that this should be included in the Committee's legacy report. The current Committee considered the work undertaken by its predecessor and agreed to take the matter forward in accordance with that Committee's recommendations.

On 13 September, the Committee agreed the draft Standing Orders on today's Order Paper. The proposed new Standing Orders 100 to 109 draw on the existing Standing Orders for public Bills and private legislation. They clearly set out the procedure for dealing with hybrid Bills by the Assembly. The amendment to Standing Order 30 is a consequential amendment that gives effect to the Committee's decision that there should be a Preliminary Scrutiny Stage before a hybrid Bill is introduced in the Assembly.

The four motions before the House are straightforward. On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I commend them to the House.

Mr F McCann: I support the motions. The Chair has quite adequately set out the reasons for them, so I will be brief. Obviously, the motions are in relation to the signing of the declaration and the placing of papers in the Library. On the hybrid Bills, I have to mention my former MLA colleague Bronwyn McGahan, who brought the initial motion in relation to the Garrison Ely Trust Bill to highlight some of the injustices that face many groups that are struggling to get finance and resources. That was in relation to the creation of the Garrison Ely Trust as a charitable trust for the public benefit in relation to specified lands in County Fermanagh. I wanted to just place on record where this came from. She put a lot of time and effort into the Bill. I am glad that, today, we will see the fruition of her work.

Mrs Barton: I welcome the opportunity to speak on these changes to Standing Orders. Of course, the changes to Standing Order 3 have their roots in the so-called Fresh Start Agreement, which was set against the backdrop of two brutal murders on the streets of Belfast last year. In the subsequent talks, the Ulster Unionist Party put dealing with paramilitarism at the top of its agenda. While the eventual agreement led to commitments such as those that we are implementing today regarding an undertaking to act lawfully, it totally ignored the elephant in the room: the IRA still exists, it still has access to weapons, and the army council oversees Sinn Féin strategy. Sinn Féin would not admit it, and the DUP does not want to talk about it. It still will not.

I welcome the amendment to Standing Order 23(3), which should provide clarity on the requirements of the Assembly Library to publish information. I reiterate my opinion that all information, unless there is a strong reason not to publish, should be made fully available in the interests of transparency.

I also welcome the provision for hybrid Bills. It has resolved a maybe uncommon but important discrepancy in the Standing Orders; thankfully, it will allow private and public legislation to be brought through the House.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his presentation about these changes today. There are three important elements. Whilst they are maybe not groundbreaking, it is most important that they be enshrined in our Standing Orders so that they are codified for us.

I will speak first about the undertaking. Whilst it has been a practice of the Assembly, it is important, given the importance of the issue, that we have it in Standing Orders so that everybody is required to do that. Being wed to exclusively peaceful means and adhering to the law of the land is very important and exceptionally basic. I do not think that anybody in the House would argue that we should not sign up to making sure that that happens.

The change to Standing Order 23 will make sure that as much as possible is placed in the public domain in the Library here in the Assembly. Openness and transparency is the bedrock of any democracy. I am sure that we will hear about that on several occasions today. That is critical. It is important for the public to have faith in what we do, so they should be able to see the information that we see when we discuss and debate matters. Having as much information in the Assembly Library as possible for the public, in the interests of openness and transparency, is a very good thing. I welcome its being placed in Standing Orders.

11.30 am

I do not proclaim to be an expert or entirely to understand the ins and outs of hybrid Bills, but, unfortunately, the one thing that I do know is that the accompanying note from the Executive Office states that it is highly unlikely that we will ever use them. However, the fact that they are there and that we have the capacity for them and the ability to use them means that we will have more available means to pass laws that will, hopefully, help people in Northern Ireland.

This is a general tidying-up exercise to ensure that Standing Orders reflect the work that we do in the Assembly, and the SDLP is happy to support that.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Procedure Committee's motion to amend Standing Order 3 on MLAs undertaking support for the rule of law; Standing Order 23 on the publication of Assembly Library papers on the Assembly website; and Standing Orders relating to hybrid Bills.

It is only right and proper that all MLAs make clear their support for the rule of law, their commitment to work collectively with other Members of the Assembly for a society free of paramilitarism and paramilitary activity, and absolutely towards the disbandment of all paramilitary organisations, and to challenge paramilitary attempts to control communities. It is somewhat concerning that there remains a need to make this undertaking explicitly clear so long after significant ceasefires and decommissioning. I have some concern as to how exactly MLAs will be held to account on this undertaking. I believe that there is more work to be done in that regard.

With Standing Order 3, I want to note the Alliance Party's ongoing concern about and objection to the fact that the Standing Order maintains the provision that a Member of the Assembly is required to sign a roll of designation of identity being nationalist, unionist or other. I believe that it is an indictment on the Assembly that the mechanism is incapable of reflecting the increasingly diverse and layered identities of people in Northern Ireland and that it builds and institutionalises a wholly inaccurate binary reflection of identity in Northern Ireland. It contradicts the Executive strategy to build a united community in Northern Ireland,

and I believe that it is a barrier to true peace building in our community.

Standing Order 23 addresses the publication of Assembly Library papers on the Assembly website, which makes common sense. The standard and quality of Assembly research papers produced in the House are, at times, extremely high and are always useful to our debates, and their publication will expose the issues that we are working on to members of the public. It is consistent with the principle of openness and transparency that should reign in the Assembly and the Executive. I agree with my Ulster Unionist colleague that, regrettably, it does not always reign for the Executive.

We have seen significant information on the implications of Brexit, and an investigation into links between achievement and deprivation commissioned by OFMDFM in 2012, a draft report for which was submitted to OFMDFM in December 2015, with important findings that, almost a year on, have yet to be published. I hope that we will also see the spirit of openness and transparency established for the Assembly by Standing Orders today in Executive practice.

On the Standing Orders relating to hybrid Bills, I agree with my colleagues that this is a common-sense provision.

The Alliance Party is content to support the motions.

Ms Gildernew: I concur with the points made by my colleague Fra McCann, and I want to clarify this for the House. Mr McGrath said that he did not think that the hybrid Bill Standing Orders would be used. I assure the House that they will be used. I have had extensive discussions with the Ely Trust and hope to introduce a hybrid Bill in this mandate to sort out the outstanding issues. I want to put down clarification of that. I have been looking forward to the Standing Order going through so that we can proceed with that as soon as possible.

Mr Attwood: Clearly, all three proposals are useful. Of course, the difference — the yawning gap — that could arise between what is on paper and what happens in deed is what should most preoccupy us. Let me give you one example: there is now a commitment on Members to uphold the rule of law "in word and deed", which comes from Fresh Start. Another element of Fresh Start was additional moneys.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Would the Member mind pulling his microphone towards him? We cannot hear him.

Mr Lyons: Keep it where it is. It is OK. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Mr Attwood, some Members cannot hear you, or perhaps do not want to hear you.

Mr Attwood: Clearly, Mr Poots wants to hear me, which is a first, and I welcome that. I will not repeat what I have just said because I will cover it now anyway. The commitment entered into by Members is to uphold the rule of law "in word and deed", and it arises from Fresh Start. At the time of Fresh Start, we were one of the parties that circulated to other parties its papers dealing with criminality and paramilitarism. We did not hear of or see many papers from other parties, save from the Alliance Party, but we put forward very firm proposals about what that code should look like. To some degree, the new code reflects some of that thinking and, no doubt, the thinking of others.

Fresh Start also agreed new funding to deal with the issues of the rule of law in Northern Ireland. In that regard, the National Crime Agency was asked to bid. This is relevant to the work and to our obligations arising from the code. The National Crime Agency (NCA) —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. Let me remind the Member that the debate is on amendments to the Standing Orders agreed by the Committee on Procedures. It is not on anything else. I have been reasonably flexible. I ask the Member to bear that in mind.

Mr Attwood: I will bear it in mind, and I will bring my point to a close very quickly. On the last day of October 2015, the NCA was asked to put a bid in for work to do with the rule of law. It was, if you like, to help Northern Ireland society, and all of us, deal with the issues of the rule of law, including to ensure that we live up to the code that we are now subscribed to. The NCA was subsequently advised by the British Government to withdraw that bid. Over the summer, the new Secretary of State advised Colum Eastwood, the SDLP leader, that that letter from the head of the NCA, in October 2015, in which she asked for new moneys, was for illustrative purposes only.

The NCA's bid was to help Northern Ireland society deal with the rule of law and help us to live up to our commitments to the rule of law in this new code. However, the NCA was sent chasing its tail when it came to new moneys to deal with organised crime in the North of Ireland. Whatever all that was about, it was not good enough because it interferes with the commitment of the parties and Members of the Assembly, in word and deed, to the rule of law. The NCA, in my view, was acting with one hand tied behind its back. I hope that, very quickly, the NCA will get additional funding in order to ensure that what we commit to in word in this new code is the reality when it comes to the life of our citizens in Northern Ireland. If not, people will again be chasing their tail when it comes to funding and strategies to deal with the enduring issue of organised crime in the North, not least the issue of assets, both current and historical.

I look to the NCA and the police to support Members in their commitment to the code of practice on the rule of law to deal with assets, including historical assets.

I will move on. I welcome the moderate progress being made on hybrid Bills, but progress needs to be made on the management of Bills, not least and in particular the equal marriage Bill and having ownership of that Bill in the name of more than one Member. I look to the Speaker: given the advances being made on the management of Bills that were referred to by members of Sinn Féin in particular, we must see progress being made on the management of Bills where there is more than one Member and more than one party wanting to co-sponsor a Bill in order to demonstrate to wider society that there can be ownership of policy in the Assembly across all or most of the parties in it —

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

Mr Attwood: — in a way that advances people's lives.

Mr Poots: I thank the Committee Chairperson for outlining the changes to Standing Orders, and I thank the Members who have spoken to them.

The motion to amend Standing Order 23(3) will remove any ambiguity in relation to the publication of papers deposited in the Assembly Library. Mr McGrath welcomed the greater openness.

The final two motions will make provision in Standing Orders for hybrid Bills, and the Chairperson outlined those provisions.

I will respond briefly to some of the issues raised by Members. Mrs Barton referred to the "so-called Fresh Start Agreement". There is nothing "so-called" about it: it is the Fresh Start Agreement. The Ulster Unionist Party might not understand that because it ran away. Paramilitarism was not at the top of the agenda because they were not there to set the agenda. I remind her that they were happy to sit in government when the IRA was regularly carrying out punishment beatings and when 12 people were shot by Direct Action Against Drugs. She need not come here forgetting the past and whitewashing the past in that respect.

My Lyttle raised a valid point about holding Members to account on the undertaking. If he wishes to raise that further, I am perfectly happy to continue to look at it, because it is important that we get it right. He also referred to designations. Again, I will give him some latitude. He is relatively young and might not realise what took place in the past, but the Alliance Party was one of the most significant advocates of the Belfast Agreement, which, of course, established the designations in the first place. He may want to take that up with the former leadership of the Alliance Party, most of whom have moved on now, in absolute fairness.

Unfortunately, we missed the first 27 seconds of Mr Attwood's speech, but we got the rest of it. I assume that the first 27 seconds were the best part of it, given what I what heard after that. He referred to the undertaking. I point out to him that some of us have issues with politicians who campaign to get terrorists released from prison, with politicians who name play parks after terrorists and, indeed, with politicians who carry the coffins of terrorists. Perhaps we can look at that in terms of the undertaking. He also made considerable reference to the NCA operating with one hand tied behind its back. Of course, it did not operate at all for quite a number of years after it could have been brought into Northern Ireland because of the shenanigans of Mr Attwood and his colleagues in holding that organisation back. We see the benefits of the good work that it does now in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the amendments to Standing Orders. I encourage the House to give them its full support, and I commend the proposals from the Committee Chairman today.

11.45 am

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that all four motions require cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

Leave out Standing Order 3 and insert

“(1) At the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, members having met at the place and time appointed for that meeting -

(a) the Clerk shall read the notice sent under Standing Order 2(2) convening the meeting; and

(b) the outgoing Speaker shall take the chair.

(2) If, for any reason, the outgoing Speaker cannot take the chair, it shall be taken by an Acting Speaker, who shall be the oldest member present at the meeting.

(3) Members shall then take their seats in accordance with paragraph (7)

(4) All members shall have the opportunity to take their seats before any other formal business is conducted in the Assembly.

(5) A member shall not participate in Assembly proceedings or have title to the privileges of office until the member has taken his or her seat.

(6) The decision of the Speaker or Acting Speaker as to whether a member has taken his or her seat shall be final.

(7) A member shall take his or her seat by -

(a) giving the undertaking set out in section 40A(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and

(b) after the member has given that undertaking, by signing the Roll of Membership.

(8) A member shall give the undertaking by signing a document provided for that purpose.

(9) At the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, the document referred to in paragraph (8) and the Roll of Membership shall be located in the Chamber.

(10) Where a member does not take his or her seat at the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, he or she may do so thereafter by arrangement with the Speaker and in accordance with paragraph (7).

(11) After signing the Roll a member may enter in the Roll a designation of identity, being “Nationalist”, “Unionist” or “Other”.

(12) A member who does not enter in the Roll a designation of identity shall be deemed to be designated “Other” for the purposes of these Standing Orders and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(13) A member may change his or her designation of identity only if -

(a) (being a member of a political party) he or she becomes a member of a different political party or he or she ceases to be a member of any political party;

(b) (not being a member of any political party) he or she becomes a member of a political party. Any such change takes effect immediately after notification in writing is submitted to the Speaker.

(14) The Clerk shall draw up a list of the party affiliations of the members. Each member shall have the opportunity to confirm or correct his or her affiliation as stated in that list.

(15) A member may change his or her party affiliation at any time. Any such change takes effect seven

days after notification in writing is submitted to the Speaker.”.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

Leave out Standing Order 23(3) and insert

“(3) Any papers or accounts not subject to a requirement to be laid or presented to the Assembly which are deposited in the Assembly Library shall be published in accordance with law.” — [Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

After Standing Order 30(3) insert

“(3A) Where the Speaker is of the opinion that a Bill is a Hybrid Bill, the Speaker shall direct that the Bill be referred for Preliminary Scrutiny in accordance with Standing Order 101.”. — [Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

After Standing Order 99 insert

“100. Stages of Hybrid Bills

(1) Subject to Standing Order 106, the Assembly stages of a Hybrid Bill are -

(a) Preliminary Scrutiny Stage: consideration as to whether the Bill satisfies the conditions at Standing Order 101;

(b) Introduction and First Stage: introduction of the Bill to the Assembly;

(c) Investigation Stage: initial investigation by a Hybrid Bill committee into the principles of the Bill, and the period during which objections must be lodged;

(d) Second Stage: general debate on the Bill with an opportunity for members to vote on its general principles;

(e) Committee Stage: detailed investigation by the Hybrid Bill committee and opportunity to propose amendments to the Bill, followed by report to the Assembly;

(f) Consideration Stage: consideration of and an opportunity for the Assembly to vote on the details of the Bill, including amendments proposed to the Bill;

(g) Further Consideration Stage: opportunity for members to consider and vote on amendments proposed to the Bill; and

(h) Final Stage: passing or rejection of the Bill without further amendment.

101. Preliminary Scrutiny Stage

(1) A Hybrid Bill shall not be introduced in the Assembly unless the standard conditions and any applicable information conditions are met.

(2) The standard conditions are that –

(a) there is proof of need for the Bill;

(b) no suitable alternative to the matter proceeding by way of a Hybrid Bill is demonstrated;

(c) there has been sufficient consultation with those who may be affected by the Bill;

(d) the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly; and

- (e) *the Bill would not impose any charge on the Consolidated Fund.*
- (3) *The Speaker may direct that one or more of the information conditions apply to the Bill.*
- (4) *The information conditions are that –*
- (a) *The Bill is accompanied by an explanatory and financial memorandum;*
- (b) *The Bill is accompanied by a statement in writing signed by the Promoter, to the effect that, in the Promoter's view, the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly;*
- (c) *The Bill is accompanied by an environmental statement; and*
- (d) *The Bill is accompanied by such other documents as the Speaker may require.*
- (5) *The explanatory and financial memorandum must be in such form as the Speaker may direct and must set out –*
- (a) *the issue the Bill is intended to address;*
- (b) *the consultation undertaken;*
- (c) *the options considered;*
- (d) *the option selected and the reason therefore; and*
- (e) *the cost implications of the proposal.*
- (6) *Paragraphs 6 to 8 of Standing Order 30 shall apply to Hybrid Bills as they apply to Public Bills.*

102. Introduction and First Stage

- (1) *When the Speaker has signified to the Promoter that a Hybrid Bill may be introduced, notice of introduction on a sitting day may be given by the Promoter.*
- (2) *The Bill shall be accompanied on introduction by –*
- (a) *the statement of legislative competence;*
- (b) *the explanatory and financial memorandum, setting out the matters at Standing Order 101(5); and*
- (c) *such other documents as the Speaker may require.*
- (3) *On introduction, the Bill's title shall be read to the Assembly, and this shall constitute the Bill's First Stage.*
- (4) *After the Bill's First Stage, the Bill shall be ordered to be printed and the Bill shall stand referred to a Hybrid Bill committee for its Investigation Stage.*

103. Investigation Stage

- (1) *Investigation Stage shall commence when the Bill is referred to a Hybrid Bill committee.*
- (2) *Investigation Stage shall last at least 60 working days.*
- (3) *The committee shall carry out an initial investigation into the general principles of the Bill and report its opinion on the Bill to the Assembly.*
- (4) *Investigation Stage is concluded when the committee reports to the Assembly.*
- (5) *On the report being made to the Assembly by the committee, the Bill shall be set down in the list of*

pending future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

104. Objections

- (1) *Any objections to a Hybrid Bill must be lodged within 42 working days, beginning with the day on which the Bill is referred to the Hybrid Bill committee for Investigation Stage.*
- (2) *An objection to a Hybrid Bill received outside the objection period may be lodged only if that objection is approved by resolution of the Assembly, and may not in any case be lodged after the Investigation Stage is concluded.*
- (3) *The Hybrid Bill committee shall consider an objection lodged in accordance with this order and admit it if –*
- (a) *the Objector has shown that his or her property or interests are directly and specially affected by the Bill;*
- (b) *the objection is in such form and accompanied by such information as may be required by the committee; and*
- (c) *the objection is accompanied by such fee as the Assembly Commission may determine.*
- (4) *An Objector may take no further part in committee proceedings unless the objection is admitted.*
- (5) *An Objector cannot subsequently raise any issue not contained in the initial objection.*

105. Second Stage

Standing Order 32 shall apply to Hybrid Bills as it applies to Public Bills.

106. Treatment as a Public Bill

Where no objection is received or admitted to a Hybrid Bill during Investigation Stage, the Bill shall be treated as a Public Bill and shall proceed in accordance with Standing Orders 33-42.

107. Treatment as a Hybrid Bill

Where an objection to a Hybrid Bill is received and admitted during Investigation Stage, Standing Orders 88 to 95 and Standing Order 97 shall apply to that Bill as they apply to a Private Bill; and Standing Order 37A shall apply to that Bill as it applies to a Public Bill.

108. Hybrid Bill Committees

- (1) *The Assembly shall establish a Hybrid Bill committee in respect of each Hybrid Bill proposed to be introduced in the Assembly.*
- (2) *Each committee will discharge the functions conferred on it by Standing Order 103, and, where applicable, the functions conferred on it by Standing Orders 88 and 90.*
- (3) *A member with a personal or constituency interest in the Bill shall not be eligible to sit on the committee.*
- (4) *The committee shall consist of five members, and have a chairperson and deputy chairperson elected by the committee.*
- (5) *The quorum of the committee shall be three. Members linked by a video-conferencing facility shall not count towards the quorum.*
- (6) *All questions at the committee shall be decided by a simple majority. Voting shall be by a show of*

hands unless otherwise requested by a member of the committee. The chairperson shall have a casting vote.

(7) Members of the committee shall normally attend all meetings of the committee and may be absent from a meeting of the committee only in exceptional circumstances.

(8) A Hybrid Bill committee may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(9) A Hybrid Bill committee may permit the Promoter or an Objector to cross-examine any witness giving evidence to it.

109. Interpretation

(1) In these Standing Orders, "Hybrid Bill" means a Bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interest of other persons or bodies of the same category or class.

(2) In Standing Orders 100 to 108 –

"Objector" means a person objecting to a Hybrid Bill;

"Objection period" means the period of 42 working days following the referral of a Bill to a Hybrid Bill committee;

"Hybrid Bill committee" means a committee established in accordance with Standing Order 108;

"Promoter" means the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce a Hybrid Bill.

"Statement of legislative competence" means a statement in writing signed by the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce the Bill, which states that in the view of the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce the Bill, which states that in the view of the member, the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly." — [Mr Lyons (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

Executive Openness and Transparency

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other speakers will have five minutes.

Dr Farry: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern at ongoing problems with openness and transparency from the Executive and the implications for public trust and confidence.

The motion provides an opportunity to make clear the growing unease at matters around openness, transparency and accountability on the part of the Northern Ireland Executive. We have deliberately kept the motion on a high-level basis to allow for a free-flowing and wide-ranging debate. We have consciously tried to avoid getting bogged down in any particular remedies as such, but have no difficulty with either of the proposed amendments. However, it is important that we highlight a range of issues in the debate.

Over the past few months, we have seen numerous breaches of what should be the accepted standards of good governance, including disregard for Assembly processes, unnecessary secrecy, control freakery and cronyism, to name just a few.

I suspect that those today who will seek to defend the Executive will claim that their antics are little different from what happens in other Governments. So let us be clear: what is happening here is at the extreme end of the spectrum of what is supposed to pass for democratic government.

We often hear the mantra, "We won the election", but democracy means more than just majority voting. It about good governance, human rights and the rule of law. Others may dismiss this debate as part of the Stormont bubble, but this stuff really matters in terms of the nature and quality of outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland.

Good governance, including effective scrutiny, lends itself to better value for money and maximises the best use of resources, allowing more to be done in terms of investing in the key drivers of our economy or expanding public services. Indeed, there is a persistent trend of DUP and Sinn Féin MLAs on Assembly Committees being reluctant to countenance scrutiny of their own Ministers. This has had a particular effect on the Committee for the Executive Office and its predecessor, the Committee for OFMDFM, as a majority of members come from the ministerial parties.

There are numerous examples of decisions or the handling of issues that give substance to this motion. Let us take, for example, the appointment of the Executive press

secretary. Before the opponents of the motion start to engage in “whataboutery”, in terms of what other parties have done, let me be clear that the issue at stake is not that the Executive chose to headhunt somebody, let alone that that person is David Gordon. Rather, the concerns are that the First Minister and deputy First Minister thought that it was appropriate to use the royal prerogative in an area already covered by legislation and did not use one of the already generous special adviser allowances to accommodate the post, which happens in other jurisdictions.

Turning to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) scandal, it is a matter of some bewilderment that the DUP and Sinn Féin chose to close ranks to water down what would have been a more far-reaching motion in the Assembly. The issues at stake here are not just criminal; they also relate to the degree of due diligence around public appointments and the approach to decision-making within Stormont Castle.

Also in the news this past week was the failure of the First Minister (FM) and deputy First Minister (DFM) to disclose in a timely manner the document on the implications of Brexit, prepared by their civil servants almost a year before the referendum. A lot has been said about this in public, but one particularly troubling aspect is that it took a freedom of information (FOI) request to produce it. The FOI request was tabled in February, and while most normal public bodies would take regard of their duties to produce documentation within 20 working days, it was only released on the rather convenient day after the referendum. The processing of FOI requests is governed by statute, and compliance is not supposed to fit in around political convenience. This is not an isolated example. The response rate of OFMDFM, in particular, to FOI deadlines is appalling. Of course, it is conceivable that they have used the royal prerogative to change the freedom of information legislation to exempt themselves from this requirement and just have not told us.

The pattern of no respect for compliance with FOI deadlines is replicated in the time taken to answer questions. The protocols governing the timescales for responses are readily flouted with impunity. Again, some Departments and Ministers are serial offenders, with — surprise, surprise — OFMDFM, now the Executive Office, as the worst offender. Yet, some Ministers, from a range of parties, have proven in the past that it is possible to respect deadlines around FOI requests and questions; those Ministers include David Ford and me.

In terms of Ministers offering themselves for accountability, we also see a reluctance to make major announcements in the form of ministerial statements to the Assembly, so providing Members with the opportunity to question.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I have listened to him now for about four and a half minutes, and I presume that the myriad of problems that he is describing never occurred at DEL when he was the Minister?

Dr Farry: Indeed, that is the point. I made numerous statements to the Assembly, to the point where the Chair of my Committee was almost frowning at the number of times he was forced to come in to receive and listen to them.

Mr Swann: I will add to the Member's contribution. I admit that, as Minister, his openness to the Employment

and Learning Committee left many other Ministers in the shadow, including a lot from the DUP. I am not sure how often the FM and DFM appeared in front of the OFMDFM Committee in the last mandate.

Dr Farry: I stress that this is spontaneous coordination across the opposition. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. The record can be checked, but, if my memory serves me correctly, I think that there was a period of more than a year in which the First Minister and deputy First Minister failed to even report to the Committee for OFMDFM in the last mandate. Hopefully, that is something that will change.

Dr Farry: I congratulate Mr Stalford on a very successful intervention. *[Laughter.]* Another case of secrecy that risks becoming counterproductive is the way in which the Health Minister is currently sitting on the Bengoa report. This report was commissioned by the previous Minister, with a key desire to build a cross-party consensus on a generational change in Health and Social Care, and all of the main parties were engaged and consulted in the development of the proposals. This report has been with the Minister since the start of the summer, and there seems to be no intention of publishing it until the Department has agreed its own response. This approach strikes me as missing an opportunity to continue the informed debate and to build consensus, particularly given the current state of the health service and what is at stake with public finances.

Poor governance extends more widely to the nature of the Budget process. The Budget for this financial year was presented to Ministers outside the two lead parties with 20 minutes before it was actually adopted. To be clear, I am not talking about the draft Budget but the actual final Budget. The Executive may well have been facing an incredibly tight schedule that was not of their making, but there was still space for some structured engagement with key stakeholders. There was an air of getting the matter out of the way in order to progress the DUP leadership transition. We are now facing a similar situation for the next financial year. Even with the tight timescale arising from the autumn statement, lessons need to be learnt from last year. However, the indications are not encouraging.

Drilling down into Budget changes also becomes more difficult when we look at the issue around monitoring rounds, and what happened in June is a lesson that we have to avoid. There was a lack of detail from the Finance Minister, and, indeed, a lack of engagement more generally with Committees. The Public Accounts Committee is now doing its job in trying to get to the bottom of the ongoing problems arising from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's black hole on public finances.

We also have a growing culture of major financial decisions being taken without approval of a proper business case. I do accept that there are some cases where ministerial directions are appropriate, but that argument becomes weaker when the scale of resources increases. Concerns have been expressed at the decision-making process, including consideration of value for money and opportunity costs, related to the subsidy to United Airlines and also the financial support to the City of Derry Airport. Perhaps the most serious example in this regard was the decision of a Sinn Féin Minister to relocate DARD, now DAERA,

to Ballykelly without a business case. This actually cost more than the status quo and does create major questions around business continuity. The dawning that this project is in difficulty reflects the dangers of not fully exploring all of the risks through a business case.

I will finish with the issue of the social investment fund (SIF), which is a walking recipe for bad governance. The fund seems to exist as a means to bypass the normal purposes of distributing and of how government engages with the community sector and delivers on employability and deprivation issues. The attempt seems to be to direct funding to particular favoured organisations. It has been dogged by delays and controversies, and, in particular, the recent announcement in regard to east Belfast sends out a terrible message in the aftermath of the Fresh Start commitments on addressing paramilitarism. Perhaps we might be better off if the social investment fund were wound up, with the money being invested in our health service.

The issues that are addressed by the social investment fund are not unique or new but are things that could have been addressed in the past by my Department — the Department for Employment and Learning — and the Department for Social Development through proper procurement measures, which can engage with the community and voluntary sector. When we end up bypassing those procedures, a whole range of risks are being borne by government, and we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg in that regard.

Mr Agnew: I beg to move amendment No 1:

At end insert

“; and calls for the creation of a standards commissioner for the Executive to investigate alleged breaches of the ministerial code.”.

It is the height of arrogance and disrespect that, when we are debating a motion around transparency, openness and accountability, the Executive Office, with its four Ministers, could not send one to respond to this debate or even, indeed, one from the suite of Ministers that we have in government. We call on the whole Executive, and any one could have answered on behalf of the Executive, yet not one is here today to answer the criticisms that have been made.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way.

Mr Swann: Will the Member agree that, potentially, the response from that empty glass sitting up there could be more beneficial?

12.00 noon

Mr Agnew: That is effectively what we are getting. That highlights the point that is being made in this debate, as mentioned by the proposer: we have an Executive who say, “We have the votes. We have the power. We don’t have to”. If I ever again hear a Minister say to me, “We don’t need legislation for this”, because this Executive have shown that, if they are not required to do something, they will not do it. There is no respect, no accountability and no openness, and that has to change if we are to have a genuine thriving democracy and our devolution is to meet the standards of other devolved regions and other Parliaments.

Accountability requires transparency, and, for Ministers to be accountable, we have to know about the decisions

they are making and how they are making them. Over the summer, we saw a number of issues that we would not even have known about were it not for investigative journalists bringing them to light. The appointment of David Gordon was announced but the process was kept hidden, and it was Sam McBride’s work that uncovered the mechanism used. The Brexit document, which the proposer mentioned, was uncovered after a freedom of information request. The legal responsibility was ignored until it was convenient to publish the information. We have heard the First Minister say that she never saw that document. I put it to her that, if I knew that a referendum of such significance to Northern Ireland was coming up, I would have been asking my officials, “Have you done any work on the outcomes of this?”. There are two possibilities: the First Minister saw the document and chose not to publish it, or she never asked to see it, in which case she is not on top of her brief on such a major issue.

Mr Lyons: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It seems to me that Mr Agnew is accusing the First Minister of misleading the House with the comments that she made yesterday with regard to that document. Would you be able to rule on that?

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order, Mr Lyons, but you have made your point on the record.

Mr Agnew: I made the point that there were two possibilities; I did not say which one was true.

We have a situation in Northern Ireland where business cases, which are ordinarily published at Westminster, sometimes do not even exist. Let me look at issues that arose over the summer. Where were the business cases for the bailout of City of Derry Airport and the Newark flight? Where did that money come from? Where was the accountability to the Assembly? We are operating with lower standards than should be expected of a devolved Government.

I am a former member of the Standards and Privileges Committee, and the ministerial code of conduct came up time and time again in that Committee. I was checking the figures, and, in the last mandate, the Standards and Privileges Committee received five complaints against Ministers. On each occasion, we were unable to investigate and had to tell complainants that there was no process for investigating their complaint. The only recourse for the general public is a judicial review, which is prohibitively expensive for most people.

As Members, we are held to the Northern Ireland Assembly’s code of conduct — rightly so — and we have an independent process for the investigation of complaints. On this, Ministers in the Executive have nothing to fear if they are acting with probity and integrity. It works against both the complainant and those who are complained about. I alleged a breach, for example, when the First Minister, who was then the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, licensed an area for fracking. It turned out that her husband owned land within that licensed area, and I argued that that should have been declared. She argued that such a declaration was not required, and I argued that there had been a breach of the code. What is left is suspicion among the general public. Arlene Foster, the First Minister, who was the then Enterprise Minister, can declare her innocence and I can allege her guilt, but we never get a conclusion or satisfaction.

If I am making a spurious allegation, that should be brought to light. There should be an independent

process, and I should be put in my place and told, "That was a scurrilous accusation". Equally, if a Minister has acted inappropriately, there should be an independent, transparent process of investigation. Ministers should be held to account, as Members are, for their actions in the role as Minister. What is the point of having a ministerial code of conduct if there is no mechanism for investigating breaches of it? It is not worth the paper that it is written on.

That is a historical case. We have it again with the allegations around the Brexit document. I come back to the point that I cannot stand here and say with absolute certainty that the ministerial code has been broken. I suspect that it has. I say to the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and every other Executive Minister, "Open yourself up to independent, transparent and fair process". If you have done nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear. That is what I hear from the Benches opposite quite regularly. If that is the case, why do the Executive not come forward with a proposed amendment to the ministerial code to initiate a process by which these allegations can be heard and adjudicated upon in an independent manner?

Often, the stumbling block in these cases is cost. However, we already pay in the region of £60,000 a year for the role of our Commissioner for Standards and its office. That could be the cost of a single judicial review that would have to be taken to investigate allegations of breaches of the ministerial code. There is a way of doing this: we can extend the role of the Commissioner for Standards. We have the mechanism and model in place, because that is how we investigate Members. If we are to meet the levels of democracy, accountability and transparency that we want, we cannot continue to have the situation in which I, as a Member, am open to scrutiny but a Minister of our Government is not open to the same level of scrutiny.

Mrs Little Pengelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way.

Mrs Little Pengelly: Does the Member accept that there are a number of different accountability mechanisms set up under the Assembly? One of those is the Committees, and they legitimately scrutinise Ministers. *[Laughter.]* Members may laugh, but there are procedures there. The Member has made some comments about the First Minister, Arlene Foster. The First Minister spoke to the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee about this matter. She made it clear, publicly and to the House, that she considered that she had no conflict of interest. She outlined that to the Committee, a Committee with the role of scrutinising that Minister.

Mr Agnew: I am sure that every criminal would love to be able to go court and say, "I am sure that I have done nothing wrong, Mr Judge". Would that not be a wonderful judicial system?

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Very briefly.

Mr Allister: Is the parallel not in fact that it would be like having the criminal law but no courts to adjudicate on whether there had been a breach? We have a ministerial code but no process to adjudicate on whether there is a breach. It is as farcical as that.

Mr Agnew: It is indeed. I repeat the point that the then Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister was very clear that she felt that she had not breached the code. I was very clear —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Agnew: I will indeed. I was very clear that I felt that she had. What we need is a process to decide who is right.

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move amendment No 2:

At end insert

“; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to acknowledge these concerns and to outline to the Assembly how they will ensure, in the future, that the mandate of the Assembly is respected.”.

As I move amendment No 2, let me also make clear that we support amendment No 1 and thank those who tabled the motion. Fundamentally, it comes down to this simple question: who represents the primary authority? Is it the judiciary? Is it the Executive? Is it the media, the so-called fourth estate? Is it the Chamber? I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that it is the Chamber and the 108 Members herein because we are the lawmakers. As we know, Members of the Executive can be law amenders.

Let me put it on the official record of the House that I have discovered that the deputy First Minister, the self-styled proud and principled republican, has conferred upon himself the powers of a monarch to change the law, not once, not twice, but no fewer than three times in league with the DUP First Minister. On all three occasions it was to make appointments. We have yet to get to the names of the other two, but clearly it was so important to them to get the right person, as they saw it, that they changed the law. For a republican to give himself the power of a king is nothing short of perverse, as perverse as booking a fine-art establishment in Birmingham to sip champagne with the Conservative Party that you have spent years deriding for its austerity.

Of course, Executive Ministers are not just law amenders; sometimes they ignore the opportunity to amend the law without reference to their Executive colleagues. Sammy Wilson, as Finance Minister, could have said to his Executive colleagues, "The law on defamation in England and Wales has been changed, and we could adopt it with a legislative consent motion". He did not, and, three years later, we find the current incumbent of the Finance Ministry, Mr Ó Muilleoir, sitting on a report, commissioned from Dr Andrew Scott, that recommends a change in the law, yet the Minister continues to sit on it. The Minister of Health sits on the Bengoa report, even though we hear this morning on our radio, read in our newspapers and see on our television screens, about hospital waiting lists, not of a year or a year and a half but of two years and more.

The defamation law was important for scrutiny, because we rely on the media, and that point was made during the debate. We do not have a second Chamber, as they do in Dublin and London, and until the last couple of months, we did not have an official Opposition. I note that the First Minister will apparently set down her champagne flute long enough to praise the development of an official Opposition in this House and admit that it has forced the two parties of the Executive to raise their game. That is a good thing, and I think that we can all agree on that.

Openness and transparency is not just for the Chamber; it is also for the Committees. Mr Lyttle, who was Deputy Chair of the Committee for OFMDFM in the last mandate, made the point that there was a time when we went for over a year without hearing from the principals, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. He could also have told the House that the Committee had to threaten to use its legal powers under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to force them to come to the House. It was not just about the principals; it was about the information flow. There were late cancellations of briefings by officials, late responses to requests from the Committee for information, and the late delivery of papers, which was so ridiculous that, one Wednesday, we received a sheaf of financial information at 1.55 pm — five minutes before the Committee was due to consider that information. Nobody can say to me that that is good government.

Looking ahead, if those two parties are to achieve outcome-based accountability government, which will involve cutting across two or more Departments, we must not allow our Statutory Committees, whose job is to assist and advise Ministers, to fall behind and remain in silos. It is a role, Mr Speaker, that I know you are already giving consideration to, as must the Chairpersons' Liaison Group and we, as MLAs. There is no point in waiting for the Executive to advise us, because they could not even be bothered to turn up for today's debate.

Looking back, when we had all those difficulties in the last mandate with late delivery, cancellation and all the rest, I went privately — I was interested in sorting it out rather than grabbing a headline — with the permission of the Committee, to see the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. This is what happens: you go to the east wing of this Building and have a private chat and say, "Here is a problem". They direct you to the west wing and say, "That is where the problem lies". So, you walk the 365 feet from one wing to the other and have a private chat and are told, "Actually, the problem lies at the east wing, because we have cleared it here at the west".

12.15 pm

It is not just about us in this Chamber or this Committee. What about the people out there who rely on us? Let me give you an example. A social economy organisation contacted me recently. They wanted to brief me about a development that they imagine could reimagine a famous area in this city. It seems to me to be a very good plan, but, of course, they need finance, so they applied for a grant from the Executive. They were unsuccessful and were advised:

"the application has been determined to be of merit it has not been considered of sufficient strategic priority to progress at this time."

They wrote and asked whether there had been a scoring matrix. There had been, and, my goodness, what did they score on their contribution to strategic objectives? Five out of five. What did they score out of five on the contribution to an existing strategic plan or scheme? They scored five. They got a perfect 10 on their contribution to strategic development, yet, in the previous letter, they were told that it was a lack of "sufficient strategic priority" that was holding them back. The two letters were signed by the same person. One stated that there was a lack of strategic vision but the second stated that it was because

of the cocktail of funding: that was the problem. Yet, they know that there is a prior example of a very similar scheme in another city in this country that had exactly the same cocktail of funding. This is not open, and this is not transparent government.

We certainly support the motion; we certainly support our amendment and that of Mr Agnew. It is just wrong that Members of the House are under greater scrutiny and threat of sanction than members of the Northern Ireland Executive. It is one of those fundamentals that, at any moment, can further undermine public confidence in our devolved institutions.

This was supposed to be a new era for the Executive. Maybe it is, because the shutters seem to have come down more firmly than ever before down at Stormont Castle. My Committee used to pore over monitoring rounds and take briefings on what was being bid for, but those are now a mystery to the other Members of the House because the DUP and Sinn Féin have decided, for their own purposes, not to disclose monitoring bids any more.

A moment ago, Mr Agnew focused on the existence of the paper on the implications of a Brexit. I listened very carefully to the First Minister's responses yesterday and, on two occasions, she said that neither she nor her predecessor had seen that paper. What she did not say was whether the deputy First Minister had seen it.

Dr Farry: Or her SpAds

Mr Nesbitt: That was not clear or transparent government. As the Member said, she may not have seen it because those surrounding her chose not to let her see it.

Mr Irwin: The motion from the Alliance Party comes just a few short months after the DUP, as the largest party in the Executive, was returned once again as the largest party in Northern Ireland. It must be pointed out — *[Interruption.]* There is a reason for that, I am sure; the electorate make the decision. It must be pointed out that the motion also comes a few months following the Alliance Party's departure from that same Executive.

Having walked the streets of Newry and Armagh for weeks before May's Assembly election, I was encouraged by the support of voters for the DUP. Many on the doorstep took the time to outline their support for our role in the Executive.

The vision of the First Minister and my party leader, Arlene Foster, for Northern Ireland resonated with the electorate. The positivity of what she presents, matched by her enthusiasm for the role of First Minister, is proving that Northern Ireland will continue to thrive within the United Kingdom under her leadership.

As the opening weeks of the new term have shown, the Opposition are struggling to come up with any meaningful business. What in effect has been seen from the Opposition is opposition within the Opposition. In other legislatures where an Opposition is present, there is normally a degree of collaboration and an understanding of purpose; however, for reasons best known to these parties and individuals involved in the Opposition, that level of understanding has been very much lacking. The motions tabled on what was termed Opposition day were on issues not within the power of the Executive, rendering the benefit of the motions marginal. Then the Alliance Party tabled this motion today.

The accusation of lack of openness and transparency stands at odds with the record of my party's involvement in the Executive — *[Laughter.]* — and with the many developments overseen across the DUP Ministries. Even — *[Interruption.]* Even in recent days, there has been significant progress in my constituency. The Communities Minister, Paul Givan, made a very important announcement of the creation of additional jobs at the Armagh Social Security Agency offices, an announcement that has been very well received in the wider Armagh area. The Alliance Party raises the issues of public trust and confidence in their motion. In response, I have given an example of the type of evidence that garners public trust and confidence. Local to me, and in response to a concern I raised, Minister Givan delivered a solution to a problem that was brought to his door. Localised delivery on issues that matter most: that is what people want.

The issue for those engaged in trying to form a meaningful Opposition is that they know that the electorate they say they represent wants Northern Ireland to flourish. People want positive politics. That is the very message the DUP took to the doorsteps, and it was endorsed wholeheartedly. Indeed, the Opposition parties got their answer from the electorate just a few months ago.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Irwin: I will. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way, and I note the hyenas in the corner. I am interested to know, in the interests of transparency, whether anything was held back in relation to the fitness of the infrastructure at Magilligan prison. Perhaps, at a later stage, the Alliance Party can tell us how fit for purpose that facility is, even for refurbishment.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. Indeed, that will be very interesting.

I believe that the Opposition have a grave dilemma. I fear that they will slip into the trap of opposition for opposition's sake. That, of course, is a decision for them. In the meantime, the DUP will continue with its plan for delivery, and we will ensure that Northern Ireland moves forward and thrives.

Mr Maskey: I rise on behalf of Sinn Féin to reject the motion and the amendments. I will make a number of points, and maybe we could have a respectful discussion; but that is in the gift of the Speaker, not me.

Stephen Farry, on behalf of Alliance, proposed the motion and spoke to it, but it is very interesting that no one, apart from some on the sidelines, said that there has been anything illegal, inappropriate or wrong in the various decisions that have been taken or in the delay or non-production of documentation at any given time. The issues that Stephen Farry raised are really policy matters and manifesto commitments that parties have made, and you either agree with them or you do not.

For example, the decentralisation of her Department by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the means to do that were raised as being somehow inappropriate. The fact of the matter is that it was a commitment given to the electorate and delivered upon. Whilst I accept that there may be arguments against that,

there are many very good arguments for it. The fact of the matter is that it was a policy decision that was taken in the interests of the people who were served by the Minister and, I suppose, the Executive as a whole.

To also suggest for one second that the current Minister of Health is sitting on the Bengoa report is actually quite disgraceful. I accept that, in his presentation, Mr Farry was, for the most part, very respectful in his contribution, but I think that it was very wrong to imply at all that the Minister is sitting on the Bengoa report.

Dr Farry: Where is it? Will the Member give way?

Ms Bradshaw: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: No, you will all have plenty of time. You will have your Opposition days. You will have all sorts of opportunities to ask your questions. I have to try to condense what I have to say in just a few short minutes.

What I am saying is that there are issues, whether they be the Bengoa report, decentralisation or Executive funding programmes like SIF. All the Executives, from the initiation of the Assembly in 1998, have had a variation of Executive programme funds, which allowed, in the first instance, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party to establish the Executive funds by which they could cross-fertilise ideas and fund bigger programmes, including support for children's programmes and all the rest. The fact that this Executive and the previous one, which had Ulster Unionist Party and SDLP involvement, have had Executive programmes is hardly a surprise, because it has been the practice since the day and hour that the Assembly was formed in 1998-99.

Likewise, Mr Agnew referred to the decisions about support for the New York flight and City of Derry Airport. Mr Agnew is entirely entitled to his opinion on whether to oppose the financial and other support for those initiatives — the airport and the flight. He is entitled to have that opinion, but so, too, the Minister and the Executive are entitled to take some positive action to address those issues. I dare say that the vast majority of people right across the North and maybe further afield will also very much welcome the fact that support was given to both the New York flight arrangements and the City of Derry Airport. Those policies are delivering for people.

I have to say that, on quite a number of occasions in the last mandate, as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister — Mike Nesbitt, the former Chair of that Committee, will know and, I presume, would concur — I supported him in calls to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that the Committee was treated respectfully and properly and was given papers on time and proper briefings. I raised that myself within my party.

As everybody around this table knows, we have had three or four years of significant debate in the public around what was then called the "dysfunctionality" of the Executive; an argument that was put forward by both parties that have proposed amendments this morning. We all discussed that dysfunctionality argument. Part of their problem — and I think that it has been proven — is that, first of all, the public rejected their arguments about where the fault for that lay. Quite clearly, whether people like it or not, Sinn Féin and the DUP have been returned as the two largest parties. The two parties who are making the

loudest noise about dysfunctionality are those that were rejected as Government parties because people did not trust them to solve the leaks, the permanent and systemic leaking, from the Haas talks, the Stormont House talks and Executive meetings; leaks which were coming from those parties —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Maskey: — which were not designed to inform the public but to put themselves in a better light.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. It is a very important debate because, over the past number of months, despite this being a new mandate and the various pledges that were made in the Fresh Start Agreement, we have seen the Executive — the Government parties — close the gaps with regard to providing information, rather than loosening the strings. It is more autocratic leadership than joint leadership. In an era of openness and effective democracy, we have already seen in this mandate the Executive shut down rather than open up government. There are issues surrounding a hidden Brexit paper, the use of prerogative powers to appoint a press secretary and allegations linking a certain political party to the dealings of the NAMA Project Eagle sale. They have all undermined the democratic processes of the House. They may fly in the face of due process: I will not even mention the rule of law.

12.30 pm

Only last week, we heard, through the excellent work of 'The Detail' with an FOI request, that a 15-page document was drawn up by the European policy and coordination unit in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that listed 20 ways in which an EU exit would hit the Northern Ireland economy. The document noted:

"we could lose access to: €862million in Structural Funds and European Social Fund ... €2.5bn in Common Agricultural Policy funding ... and loss of access to competitive EU funding".

If we are operating with an open and transparent Government, we have to ask ourselves this: why was that document not released? Was it not, surely, in the public interest? The only conclusion that I can come to is that it was at odds with the DUP's ridiculous position on the referendum and that it certainly did not want it. Sinn Féin, who supposedly wanted to remain but did not even register as a campaigner, was happy to go along with the DUP agenda.

I do not agree with the deputy First Minister's claim that the statistics were already in the public domain. The unit that compiled the report had expert knowledge of the EU and its relationships with the North. The information did not make its way into the public domain, despite being clearly in the public interest.

Then, of course, we have the monitoring round bids, with information about departmental priorities being made available for Committees to scrutinise. In our new era of openness and transparency, that has been closed down. We are shut out. We are told, "You're in the Opposition now. Just get on with it". I have to say, I love the DUP and Sinn Féin's approach to openness and transparency: they tell you nothing.

When we then look at the recent appointment of David Gordon as the Executive's media spin doctor, we see that further issues about secrecy and transparency arise. Prerogative powers are meant for the most serious of issues: in this case, they were used to bypass employment law. That is not what the powers were designed for, and it is ironic that Sinn Féin, a supposedly republican party, was happy enough to bow to the Queen and accept her royal prerogative.

Perhaps the biggest financial crisis facing this institution and the wider North has been the NAMA sale and Project Eagle. Serious allegations have been made against certain Executive parties. There have been moves to prevent the House from conducting a Committee inquiry, despite legal advice that there was no conflict here with the NCA criminal investigation. Again, we have to ask ourselves this: what is being covered up?

I was looking forward to the spirit of openness and transparency and to hearing what the Ministers would say. Unfortunately, we do not have a Minister from our Executive brave enough to come down and hear what they do not want to hear: that the public of the North are interested in openness and transparency. I fear that the public might perceive it as a tactical and wilful obstruction of the House and its processes that no Minister would come down and give us a response.

I welcome the amendments. The amendment proposed by Mr Agnew, which was tabled jointly with my SDLP colleagues, calls for a commissioner to investigate breaches of the ministerial code. I support that, especially —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr McGrath: — concerning the withholding of the EU document. I also welcome the joint Ulster Unionist/SDLP amendment, which calls for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to act. That is very welcome. I urge the House to support the motion and the amendments.

Mr Stalford: Today, we could be talking about health, education, roads, jobs or anything, but, instead, the bold, brave Opposition, under the leadership of the Member for Strangford, are interested in an insiderish political bubble-type story that will not put one loaf of bread on anyone's table. That, I think, speaks —

Mr Allister: It puts bread on your table.

Mr Stalford: That, I think, speaks — Do you want me to give way?

Mr Allister: It is interesting that we do not have a Minister, but we have a collection of wannabe Ministers here to impress those in whose hands they think their future lies. When the Member pontificates about not debating all those issues, that of course, is a mere distraction from a party that has made a lifetime's existence out of failing to come to the House —

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member that interventions should be short.

Mr Allister: — with statements.

Mr Stalford: No one will ever accuse the Member of being a wannabe Minister, just a wannabe.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: The fact is that they had the opportunity to use their precious time in the Assembly to talk about issues that are of real import to the people out there, and, instead, this is how they decide to use their time.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: No.

That speaks volumes. The motion refers to “ongoing problems”. The definition that I have of “ongoing” is “continuing or still in progress” which means they must have started at some point. I presume that that means that they started when the Ulster Unionist Party, Alliance and the SDLP were in the Government.

Dr Farry: Yes.

Mr Stalford: Well, if they started then, why did you not speak in the House on them? The fact of the matter is —

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: No. The fact of the matter is that the problems are not as they describe. The fact is that we are now having an attempt by three parties, two of which decided to walk away from their opportunity to serve in the Government. Instead, we are having time wasted with stuff like this.

The Member from South Down referred to royal prerogative powers being used. I asked him to give way, and he refused. I am glad to take the opportunity to remind the Member that, when the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP were the largest parties in the Chamber, Mr Trimble and Mr Mallon, the then First Minister and deputy First Minister, also used those powers in making a public appointment. There are probably very few people who were here at that time, but I do not recall hearing then the outrage that we hear from others now about the use of royal prerogative powers.

When they say that there is not proper accountability or scrutiny in the House, what they are really saying is that they are not up to the job. This is supposed to be the Opposition. This is supposed to be the power —

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: I will give way to Robin in a few seconds. *[Interruption.]* I like people from North Antrim. It is Mr Allister and then Mr Swann. I like North Antrim: it always sends a good DUP squad here.

I hear people saying that there is no proper scrutiny in this place: they are saying that they are failures at the job of opposition. When they say that they want information and access to this and that, they are really saying that they want the Government to do the job for them. Having elected to be irrelevant and on the sidelines, they now want the Government to assist them because being in opposition is too much like hard work.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much. You know what we want. As the Opposition, what we really want is for Ministers to answer us and for them to appear in the Chamber and actually respond to the Opposition rather than hiding away at champagne receptions. Thank you for giving way.

Mr Stalford: I am happy to. There have been numerous references to the champagne reception. Look, Robin, I promise I will get you an invite for next year. You were out with us — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, the Member must be heard.

Mr Stalford: I think we should make it an annual occurrence. Given the rate at which people are leaving the Ulster Unionist Party to join the DUP, Robin might be with us next year, so he would be more than welcome.

Today, the Opposition, when they decry the inability to hold Ministers to account, are effectively admitting that they are not up to the job. Some comment was made about the social investment fund. I would like to respond to it, and I have spoken about it before in the House. The greatest criticism that I have of the social investment fund is that it took too long to deliver it. I accept that it took too long to deliver.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Stalford: Yes. I will say that the social investment fund is delivering and will deliver massive improvements to some of the communities that I represent, and those projects were selected independently and fairly.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Lynch: I oppose the motion and the amendments. We are all for openness and transparency — *[Laughter.]* Yes, absolutely — and we are all for inclusive and positive government. It is ironic that the parties that are laughing walked away from the Executive and are now complaining that they do not know what is going on in it. When they were there, they adopted a negative agenda, opposing almost everything and routinely voting against every —

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lynch: No. — every initiative and every Budget. I could accept that if they had proposed alternatives, but they did not. It was a political strategy to oppose everything; a failure to demonstrate any kind of positive or collective leadership. We had the election, as other Members mentioned, on 5 May. The electorate had its say and, as a result, the same parties find themselves taking up the negative agenda in opposition on the Back Benches. They walked away from the responsibilities of governing and delivering for the people who elected all of us to the House.

Last week, we had what looked like an Opposition day in which two of the three motions tabled were not in the competence of the Assembly. Yes, I want to see rural banks stay open, particularly in Belleek in my constituency, but it is misleading to raise people's expectations when we could not resolve the issue in the Assembly. It was the same with the changes to pensions that impacted women born in the 1950s. It is an important issue, but it is one that cannot be dealt with in the Assembly. There was a motion on roads maintenance, and a Member — he is not here today — from my constituency, led the House to believe that there had not been a pound spent on the roads in Fermanagh in decades. The reality is that the new Minister, Chris Hazzard, announced a roads initiative worth millions of pounds that is being rolled out on 56 roads in Fermanagh at this moment. That is positive, constructive leadership, dealing with real issues that affect people's daily lives, not carping from the sidelines. Not once during the debate did the Opposition come up with a constructive idea.

The SDLP walked away from the Health portfolio; it was handed to them, but they refused it and sat on their hands. When I hear SDLP Members raise issues in my constituency, whether it is the GP crisis, adult learning

funding, or services in Enniskillen, they should let everybody know from the outset that they were offered the portfolio but did not take it; they want to sit on the sidelines.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lynch: No, I am not giving way. It reminds me of someone who refuses to take the post of manager of a football team but continues to criticise from the sidelines. A well-known and successful GAA manager once said, when asked about his detractors, "Empty vessels make most noise".

These two parties were elected to deliver, and that is what we are doing.

Mr Lyons: I know that the Members who spoke today do not like to be reminded of the fact, but this is seen as — I think that Mr Farry mentioned it — a "Stormont bubble" issue. It is seen as something that does not really affect the lives of the majority of the people whom we represent. When I think back over the last week and the issues that —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: No, I will not. The issues that people have raised with me have been about broadband, special needs education, social housing, agriculture, road safety and all those other things. I defend the right of the Alliance Party and others to bring whatever motion they want before the House; that is their right, and they have the opportunity to do so. However, I do not think that it is an issue that is high in public concern. Perhaps that demonstrates why the DUP had a good election while some of the parties to my right did not. I also know that those Members do not like to be reminded of that, because they get very annoyed when they are reminded about the electoral mandate that we came to the House with. When we spend time speaking about these issues, we lose some of the trust and confidence of the public.

12.45 pm

The public think, "Here they go again, talking about process and issues that appear to pertain to what is going on in that Building rather than what is going on outside". That said, the Member has taken the opportunity to table a Motion, and we will address it.

Members spoke about openness and transparency in this place. A lot of the scrutiny of the Executive and legislation has to take place at Committees, but the same Members will say, "Oh, but we're not very good at doing that" or, "We are not able to do that" or, "We haven't had success in doing that". Use the powers that you have, and, if you do not believe that you have the powers, ask for the powers. We hear so much about constructive opposition, but all we have had today is a whingeing session from the other Members. What is this all about today? This is all about opposition. This is not about the Executive, and it is not about openness and transparency.

Dr Farry: It is.

Mr Lyons: No, this is about the Opposition struggling to come to terms with the fact that they are no longer in government. They have had one foot in and one foot out of government over the last number of years, and now —

Mr Ford: Will you give way?

Mr Lyons: You have all had your time, and I am sure that you will have time later, Mr Ford, and you can respond to me then.

Mr Speaker: The Member has indicated that he is not willing to give way. Members should not persist.

Mr Lyons: We have an Opposition that is struggling to come to terms —

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I will not give way to Members until I get through a few more of the points that I want to make. This is about opposition and the poor quality of opposition. What is it over the last number of days that the Ulster Unionist Party has crowed about most and been most concerned about? It is the fact that the DUP is hosting a champagne reception at the DUP — sorry, the Conservative Party — conference.

Mr Nesbitt: You are one.

Mr Lyons: I never stood on an electoral platform with them, so the Member should be very careful.

That is what this is all about: the fact that they have nothing of any substance to bring. They focus on issues of process. The Opposition, and I wish them well in their task, need to learn to do their job a little bit better. They need to learn not to rely on journalists or the Executive to do their job for them — that is what is happening.

I am sure that, if Members have any positive suggestions about how we can be more open and transparent, those will be listened to, but they should not expect others to do their job for them.

Mr Swann: Before I talk on the motion or the amendments, I would like to respond to Mr Stalford's invitation to join the DUP. It is not the first I have received, but I will give him the same answer as I gave every other one, "Never, never, never". *[Laughter.]* That came from north Antrim as well.

The currency of leadership is transparency, and if we use that to measure the Executive's response today, the Executive are bankrupt. They have failed to send a single Minister to address the issue of openness and transparency, and the concerns raised by a significant number of Members in the House. That is where the failure lies.

Openness and transparency are the key weapons that the people of Northern Ireland have, and the Opposition in this place have, to hold this Government to account. If you fail to deliver openness and transparency, that engenders in people the sense that there is, by default, dishonesty and corruption. That is where this place, if we do not look to the openness and transparency that can be delivered, is in danger of going today.

I listened to the DUP and Sinn Féin contributors; they want to deflect from the real concerns — concerns that their MLAs have raised in the House and in Committee at different times. Mr Lyons spoke about using powers. The OFMDFM Committee was nearly forced to use those powers to bring OFMDFM to account and to bring Ministers in front of it. It should not have to; that is the point. The Ministers should be open and transparent about their policies and beliefs and about what their Executive are trying to deliver. They should not hide behind royal prerogative or monitoring rounds, which no longer come before Committees, no matter whether Committees ask for them, Mr Lyons. I assure you that they have asked.

We have been told, "No, you're not getting the monitoring rounds; you'll see them when they're done" — like the last time. That only came about —

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member giving way. One of the great arguments about opposition was that people wanted to move towards a more Westminster style of doing things. That is precisely how things are done in Westminster with the monitoring rounds. Similarly, the Chancellor of the Exchequer generally gives the Budget to the Leader of the Opposition about 45 minutes before he delivers it in the House of Commons.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I accept the Member's intervention. Opposition is about making this place more open and transparent. If the Executive take that backward step and use other places as a reason to hide what they are doing, they are wrong. They should use the procedures that were established in the House and practised by his Ministers in the past in regard to monitoring rounds. It was only when the current Executive came about that monitoring rounds started to become secretive and were done behind closed doors.

Dr Farry: I am thankful to the Member for giving way. If the DUP wants to use Westminster as its benchmark, does Mr Swann agree that, in Westminster, it would not be tolerated if papers were late for Committees, Ministers were not showing up frequently and announcements were being made by press release as opposed to on the Floor of the House of Commons, where Back-Bench MPs can hold Ministers to account?

Mr Swann: I fully accept the Member's contribution. This place is not Westminster. If it were as simple as that, we would be drinking champagne with the DUP. *[Laughter.]* Mr Irwin hailed his Communities Minister, who came to Newry and Armagh and made the great job announcement. That was great for your constituents. What about the other offices that were closed? The representatives in the House, including representatives from your party, did not get a chance to ask your Minister about those. Do you know why it was not done in here? It was because they did not have the answers. It is about giving sweeties to the people to try to keep them happy. It is about subterfuge rather than being accountable politically to this place.

I have some sympathy for the DUP and Sinn Féin contributors today. It is obvious that they are the Lobby fodder of their parties. Their Ministers failed to show for this debate today to be held accountable. Much has been said about us not using this time to debate broadband or special needs. The point of the motion and the amendments is that, when it comes to debates on broadband or special needs in the House, or when projects are being delivered by Ministers, we, as elected representatives, have the opportunity not just to question but to contribute to those debates and shape that policy. The special needs inquiry that was put through the Employment and —

Mr Speaker: I call on the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Swann: — Learning Committee prior to devolution is something that should be delivered in the House by Ministers.

Mr Poots: We have heard quite a bit from the Opposition today about issues of transparency. My colleague Mr Stalford pointed out quite correctly that it is the job of the Opposition to probe and question and to seek out and find information. It is not the job of the Government to hand it all to them — *[Interruption.]* It is the job of the Government to deliver and ensure that delivery is carried out. Very often, releasing information in advance of that can inhibit delivery. Very often, people will come in and seek to exploit things for party political interests as opposed to the interests of the public. It is incredibly important that those people who are in government carry out their work in a way that is proficient and ensures that delivery happens. Delivery on the ground is fundamentally important to the public, not the issue that is being raised.

Mr Ford: I am grateful for the fact that at least one Member of the DUP has the grace to give way, and I thank Mr Poots for that. Mr Poots and I have been in this House since 1998. The 1998 Northern Ireland Act specifies that the role of Committees is to "advise and assist" Ministers. Perhaps Mr Poots will now explain how that is to be their function if they are not given any information by Ministers.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his intervention. I had rather hoped that he would deal with the issue of Magilligan, which I mentioned earlier, but he failed to tell people what is going on.

Mr Ford: I will do it later; do not worry.

Mr Poots: I welcome that because I think that there could be something interesting in relation to it.

Nobody is suggesting that Committees are not given information. Who is actually suggesting that Committees are not given information? I found in my past role that, sometimes, Members can get information that was not previously made available to Ministers. Sometimes civil servants do not want all the information available to go to Ministers, so I always welcomed good, probing questions being asked that got to the issues and that could assist a Minister in the execution of their duties.

Mr Allister asked many questions, and he referred to wannabe Ministers. Mr Allister is, of course, a wannabe leader of unionism, which has never happened for him, and he is a wannabe MP, but Ian Paisley showed him a very clean pair of heels when he made that attempt. We will not be taking any lectures from Mr Allister about wannabees.

Mr Allister: You are a sacked Minister.

Mr Poots: I had six and a half years of it, so I did not do too badly. They took a brave while to catch me on. *[Laughter.]* We are here today, and what we are interested in as a Government, as an Executive and as a party of government is delivery for the people of Northern Ireland. Breast cancer and the issues around that were raised earlier. Those are the issues that are fundamental, and Mr Durkan, in fairness, has a question down on that. I know that the Opposition are just finding their feet, but they appear to be clambering about and taking a stab here and there without any real coherence. They appear to be somewhat leaderless and rudderless, and having Mr Nesbitt as leader of the Opposition is somewhat worrying for those of us who would like to see an effective Opposition in this House because, after all, he is a failed

political leader. In virtually every election that he goes into, he comes out with a worse result.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate the Member's giving way. There has been an attempt to turn this into something that is only relevant to the people in this room. When Arlene Foster issued a licence for fracking in Fermanagh, there was a public petition, which I presented to the Assembly, there were protests and there was huge public interest. The complaints that came to the Standards and Privileges Committee against Ministers were from members of the public. This is an issue of importance to the public.

Mr Poots: The Member has raised many environmental issues, and many of them I disagree with. I would much prefer that, if there were resources available here in Northern Ireland, we look at that and see whether we can use those resources for the population in Northern Ireland, as opposed to importing oil from regions in the Middle East and Africa and gas from Siberia and so forth, where, very often, much poorer environmental conditions apply. If you are looking at the global earth, it would be much better to do the thing right here than import it from somewhere else and ignore what is going on. Perhaps Mr Agnew will reflect that in his green policies. Is it just green here in Northern Ireland, or is it green elsewhere?

Those are issues that we are very happy to take on and debate. The issue that is in front of us today is, for the general public, a non-issue, and it has been brought forward by a somewhat rudderless Opposition.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to meet at 1.00 pm today. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the first item of business will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McGlone] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Infrastructure

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): We start with listed questions. Questions 8, 9 and 11 have been withdrawn.

A2: Road Improvements

1. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans to invest in road improvements to the A2 Bangor to Belfast dual carriageway. (AQO 380/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): The A2 Belfast to Bangor road is part of the strategic road network and carries around 45,000 vehicles a day. My Department has long-term plans to improve a number of the junctions along this route to improve road safety. A route study was carried out on the A2 in 2011, and a number of junction improvements were identified. Two particular schemes at A2/Ballyrobert Road and A2/Ballymoney Road have been taken forward to detailed design. Progression of those schemes will, however, be subject to the satisfactory completion of the statutory processes, the availability of funding in future years and prioritisation.

My Department also has a proposal in its strategic road improvement programme to upgrade the Sydenham bypass between Dee Street and Tillysburn from a dual two-lane carriageway to a dual three-lane carriageway. That is now at the third stage of a three-stage development process.

At this time, the Executive have identified a number of flagship projects, where indicative funding has been agreed for future Budget periods. Unfortunately, the Sydenham bypass upgrade/widening is not one of those projects, and its progression is dependent on the availability of finance through future budgetary settlements.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. As he mentioned, the A2 is an extremely busy road, with 45,000 users going through sections of the road over a 24-hour period. Sadly, this year, we have already had two fatalities on that section of road. Does the Minister recognise that we also have two other very dangerous junctions — at Carney Hill on the Devil's Elbow and at Larch Hill — where residents take their lives in their hands as they leave and enter their homes every day. What plans has he in place to address those issues?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question and his interest in road safety. I do not have specific information to hand on the two junctions, but let the Member be aware, if I can put him at ease, that road safety is a priority for me and my Department. We constantly keep road safety on all our roads under review. The A2 is a busy road, and, as I said, it carries 45,000 vehicles a day. If there are issues like that on which the Member wants to correspond with me, he should please feel free to do so.

Mr Chambers: I welcome the news that the Minister has given us that there are plans to improve some junctions on this busy road. I am disappointed to hear about the Sydenham bypass because that would have made a big contribution to traffic progression. Has the Minister any plans to provide any more physical central traffic separation to prevent crossover collisions, which, given the speed and sheer volume of traffic on this road, can prove fatal?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member. Indeed, there is also a very unfortunate situation with fatalities on the A1. I know that Members are well aware of the urgent need to upgrade the likes of the A1. We have a £50 million safety plan in place over the next number of years to address that. Whilst the A2 does not receive the same amount of attention with regard to previous fatalities, the issue is on the horizon all the time. We keep road safety on all our major roads under review, but there are no current plans to look at this. The Member referred to the Sydenham bypass. These upgrades would be in the region of £40 million to £50 million, so it would be a significant investment. As we go forward looking at different capital projects, that is something I have to bear in mind.

Dr Farry: I want to add to the list that my colleague Gordon Dunne very wisely mentioned: the junction at the turn-off into the Kinnegar area in Holywood is also very dangerous. Is the Minister prepared to consider the long-term future of the Rathgael Road in Bangor, which is a feeder onto the A2 dual carriageway? It is an extremely busy road. Technically, it is a rural road, but it has seen massive housing developments in recent years and, indeed, is a feeder for the outer edge of Bangor onto that road. Can we manage the traffic in that area better?

Mr Hazzard: The Member referred to the Kinnegar Road. Changes were made recently to the signal timings for the pm peak between Redburn Square and the Esplanade to allow easier egress from Redburn Square turning right towards Bangor. On the specific question on the Rathgael Road, I do not currently have any plans to look at what the Member is asking for, but, as I said to Mr Chambers, if the Member wishes to correspond with me on that, perhaps we could look at options for the time ahead.

LED Street Lighting

2. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the LED street lighting pilot scheme in Craigavon and Banbridge. (AQO 381/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In 2014, the Strategic Investment Board carried out a review of street lighting. It recommended that my Department implement a pilot project to retrofit sodium street lighting units with LED replacements in response to the ongoing street lighting resource pressures to achieve energy and maintenance savings. It was agreed that the Craigavon and Banbridge areas would be used as a representative pilot.

The completion of the LED pilot has seen the replacement of over 15,000 sodium street lighting units with new low-energy, long-life LEDs that produce good-quality white light. It is estimated that the LED pilot will provide annual savings of around £360,000 in electricity, carbon and maintenance costs for an investment of around £3 million. The pilot also allowed my Department to gain direct experience of how it can best deliver the necessary surveys, the design specification of LED equipment and

the procurement of the equipment, as well as to assess the LED technology in a wide range of residential scenarios.

I acknowledge that concerns have been raised by residents, elected representatives and councils about the loss of generalised lighting to the front of houses, gardens, pathways and front doors. However, it is the Department's responsibility to light adopted roads and footways only. In all, it has been a worthwhile pilot that delivered on its aims to provide savings and a better understanding of LED street lighting.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am sure that you are well aware, Minister, that the pilot scheme was rolled out across Craigavon and Banbridge with little or no consultation. I am sure that you are also aware of the many complaints regarding the level of lighting now in place. I know that adjustments have been made in certain places, but are you really satisfied — you said that maybe it is a good scheme — that the lighting scheme as it exists is acceptable? Do you intend to roll it out right across Northern Ireland?

Mr Hazzard: I want to take greater stock of the assessment of the pilot before we consider rolling it out right across the North. You referred to the complaints. As of 26 September, there were 268 complaints, typically in relation to reduced lighting levels and the level of light spilling into residential gardens. All complaints received are individually recorded and assessed, with lighting levels checked against the required standards. An assessment of the lighting levels at each of the sites found that 199 were within the appropriate levels that the Department aims to provide, and 69 were, indeed, adjusted to come up to that level.

Infrastructure Projects: Five Priorities

3. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his five priority infrastructure projects between now and 2021. (AQO 382/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Executive's Programme for Government (PFG) is focused on outcomes that will support a prosperous economic future for all the people of the North. The Executive have already committed to the delivery of four flagship infrastructure projects: the A5 and A6 major road schemes, the Belfast transport hub and the Belfast rapid transit programme. I have been clear that my top priority is redressing the infrastructure deficit, particularly in the west. Projects like the A5 and A6 are critical to addressing that historical imbalance. Regarding the latter, I was delighted to announce recently the £160 million investment in the Randalstown to Castledawson phase, making a difference for 18,000 commuters daily. Advance work has now begun, and I will monitor the progress of the project very closely indeed.

I am very keen to promote active travel and will shortly publish a strategic plan for greenways. It will set out an ambitious 25-year plan to develop a greenway network right across the North. My plan will aim to give people ready access to a safe, traffic-free environment for health, active travel and leisure. I want significant investment in greenways during the current mandate. Developing the greenway network will contribute to several PFG outcomes through delivering active travel infrastructure, reducing congestion, improving air quality and providing a safe and accessible recreational resource for healthier, active lifestyles.

Finally, progressing North/South projects such as the Narrow Water bridge and the Ulster canal will be a key priority in the years ahead, as set out by the Fresh Start Agreement. Following the recent North/South Ministerial Council plenary, which was held in July, officials North and South have been engaging with stakeholders associated with both projects to advance construction and to source suitable funding. I met the Narrow Water bridge campaigners in Warrenpoint in the summer, and I recently co-chaired the newly established Ulster canal advisory forum with Minister Heather Humphreys.

Ms S Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. You very astutely referred to the Narrow Water bridge, which, I am sure, you pre-empted as the subject of my supplementary question. You talk about the years ahead. Will you give a clear answer: do you see the Narrow Water bridge being delivered during this mandate?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her supplementary question and for her compliment about being astute. With that in mind, let me continue to be astute. I will certainly endeavour to do all that I can to ensure that projects such as the Narrow Water bridge, the Ulster canal and the A5, as outlined in the Fresh Start Agreement, progress as we all would wish.

Mrs Palmer: Will the Minister reassure the House that the York Street interchange, which will dramatically improve the flow of traffic in greater Belfast for commuters and commercial traffic from across Northern Ireland, will not be sacrificed to secure funding for other projects that are likely to have a smaller impact on traffic numbers?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question. I can confirm that none of these projects will be sacrificed so that smaller priority projects, as the Member outlined, can go ahead. There is no doubt that the recent European referendum result has cast doubt and has created fresh challenges and hurdles that the Department would rather not have had to face. That is something that I have to take stock of when I look at my priorities going forward.

Mr Robinson: Will the Minister state whether he will consider as a priority the dualling of the A37 Coleraine to Londonderry road at Gortcorbies, including the Greystone Road and Broad Road A37 junction roundabout scheme, to aid in attracting inward investment to the north-west of the Province and to help road safety?

Mr Hazzard: I am more than happy to consider any project if it has the advantages that you have outlined, such as opening up the north-west to tourism and economic growth. However, I have no plans to progress any dualling schemes on the carriageway that you have mentioned.

Mr F McCann: The Minister has partially answered my question. I welcome his commitment to cross-border projects, but are there any additional projects besides the ones that he has laid out that will be prioritised before the end of the mandate?

Mr Hazzard: Yes, certainly. I referred to the greenway project and the strategy. A large section of the greenway will connect to existing greenways in the neighbouring counties of Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan and in Louth in our part of the world around Carlingford lough. The Ulster canal, the A5 and the Narrow Water bridge are outlined in the Fresh Start Agreement, but we also have a great opportunity to expand our rail connections and look at

the Derry to Dublin rail infrastructure. Where possible, we should look to join up the great work of our local ports. There is a great relationship between our ports, and that is something that we will look to enhance in the years ahead.

Ms Bradshaw: What independent advice has the Minister received in developing his priorities?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question. I receive lots of advice day and daily. One of the drawbacks of having a social media account is that there are lots of experts telling you what you should do and which projects deserve more money than others. It is something that we take on board. My Department is stacked with officials who are experts in their field, from greenways to developing road and rail infrastructure. I listen to advice day and daily, and never more so than in setting out my priorities for addressing the infrastructure deficit west of the Bann. You have only to talk to Members who travel daily from the west into places like Belfast to know the real need to move forward in a balanced way.

2.15 pm

Road Resurfacing

4. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how Transport NI prioritises the resurfacing of roads. (AQO 383/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department undertakes an annual programme of carriageway reconstruction and resurfacing works commensurate with the availability of financial resources. Article 8 of the Roads Order 1993 places a duty on my Department to maintain all public roads and footways in a safe and serviceable condition. To this end, Transport NI operates a system of regular safety inspections to ensure that essential response maintenance is identified and completed as necessary.

In accordance with its policy document, 'Road Maintenance Standards for Safety', Transport NI inspects the condition of public roads. The information collected, along with consideration of a number of other factors including road usage, general surface condition, structural deformation, public inquiries and public liability claims, is used in the preparation and prioritisation of Transport NI's annual reconstruction and resurfacing programme. These programmes are subsequently presented by Transport NI to the various councils at their spring and autumn meetings.

I am pleased to say that additional capital funding was prioritised by the Executive for structural maintenance as part of the June monitoring round. I listened to concerns about the deterioration in rural roads, and I announced a £10 million package for rural roads initiatives to target maintenance measures at around 1,000 locations on our rural road network. Work on those schemes is now well under way.

I assure the Member that I will continue to discuss with Executive colleagues the requirement for additional baseline funding for structural maintenance as part of the next capital budget.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Can he explain why my constituency is having the least capital structural maintenance expenditure spent on it, with the likes of Beechfield Drive and William Street in

Donaghadee, which are well over 40 years old and falling apart, being ignored?

Mr Hazzard: Transport NI, the Department and I have to prioritise on the basis of need. When you break areas down into a list, one part of the world will be bottom of the list and another part will be top. With that in mind, I do not want to suggest that the Member's constituency, by any way of sorts, is losing out. It is a reflection of need. As I have laid out, criteria are set for the divisional managers and teams to assess this. Be under no illusions: there is no sleight of hand. I have no doubt that the Member's constituency is well represented by active Assembly Members. As I said, the Department looks at need, and I have no doubt that the constituency will receive money on an equal basis.

Mr McAleer: The Minister referred to his rural roads initiative, which has been very welcome, nowhere more so than in the western division. Is he in a position to give us an update on how that is progressing?

Mr Hazzard: Following June monitoring, the Department embarked on a £10 million rural road initiative to address the rural roads in the worst condition and therefore help to reduce a backlog of rural road resurfacing and repair needs. It is estimated that around 1,000 locations on the rural road network will be improved. The funding was allocated to the four Transport NI divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators. Northern division got £2 million; southern division got £3.5 million; eastern division got £500,000; and western division got £4 million. Work is well under way, with around 350 locations receiving intervention thus far.

Mr Durkan: I congratulate the Minister on the work that has been done on road maintenance, although sometimes I wonder whether Transport NI fixes the potholes or just moves them around so that you cannot memorise them. Does the Minister have a ballpark figure for the cost to the Department through claims for damage caused to vehicles due to poorly maintained roads?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member. Let him rest assured that the Department is not moving potholes about. Unfortunately, there is a considerable backlog in road maintenance. An awful lot of roads, especially in rural areas, certainly require maintenance, and it is something that I will prioritise over the years ahead.

I do not have the specific figures on claims in front of me. This issue has been in the press over recent months, and I will be keeping a focus on it in the time ahead.

Tractors: Speed Limits

5. **Mr Lyons** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to increase speed limits for tractors. (AQO 384/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following consultation in 2015, the former Department of the Environment introduced new regulations that increased the technical road speed limit of agricultural tractors from 20 mph to 24.8 mph. These regulations came into force on 18 April 2016. The consultation was well supported, and the increase in the speed limit took account of the design capabilities of modern tractors. The new regulations align the speed limit for agricultural tractors in the North with those in the rest of Europe and ensure that farmers here are not disadvantaged. Although the

consultation document suggested that further increases in tractor speeds were being considered, I currently have no plans to further increase construction road speeds for agricultural tractors.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I am pleased to hear that that has now changed. However, I ask that the Minister keeps that under review. Obviously, a lot of the tractors that are on the roads nowadays are capable of going at higher speeds safely. Further to the answer that he has given to me, has he any update on the weight limits for tractors and agricultural vehicles?

Mr Hazzard: There are a number of pieces of legislation, and we will keep the issue under constant review. As technology advances, it would only be right to do so. I will have to correspond with the Member. I do not have the information about the weight.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I call Gerry Mullan.

Mr Mullan: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Member has just asked the question that I was going to ask.

Mr McElduff: I think that the Minister indicated that the speed limit was 20 mph. Can he clarify that? Secondly, there is a practice in the country where tractors very often cause tailbacks. I am all for the farmer, of course I am. At the same time, I wonder whether there is a convention or a law in place restricting the number of vehicles behind a tractor before it might be expected to pull in and give way to the traffic. Is it eight, is it nine or is it 10? It is a very important issue.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. I can clarify that the speed limit was previously 20 mph before the legislation. I am not aware of any specific legislation detailing the number of vehicles that can build up behind a tractor before it should pull in. Coming from a rural community, my experience is that our farmers are very much part of the community. They do not want to be the cause of long tailbacks, and, very often, they do find a suitable place to pull in. Long may that tradition continue.

A32: Capital Funding

6. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he plans to allocate capital funding for the proposed A32 realignment scheme in County Fermanagh. (AQO 385/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The A32 Omagh to Enniskillen improvement strategy includes a number of improvement schemes to enhance the transport links between the towns and improve access to the new acute hospital in Enniskillen. The main focus is to upgrade the worst sections of the route to improve comfort for ambulance services and to reduce journey times. Schemes at Shannaragh and Drumskinny have been completed at a combined cost of approximately £10 million, and two further schemes are currently being developed at Cornamuck and Kilgortnaleague.

The Cornamuck scheme involves the provision of 1.4 kilometres of realigned single carriageway and is estimated to cost in the region of £6 million. A public consultation into the draft orders and the environmental statement for this scheme has recently been completed, and no significant issues were raised. The direction order was made in March 2016, which affords the route alignment planning protection. The scheme at

Kilgortnaleague involves the realignment of approximately 2 kilometres of single carriageway, and it is anticipated that it will cost in the region of £7 million. It is hoped that Transport NI will be in a position to identify the preferred alignment for this scheme in 2017.

I have tasked my officials to begin drawing up a new suite of transportation plans, covering key parts of the road network, including the A32, and this work is ongoing. This will set out a long-term programme of investment and provide an opportunity for all strategic road projects across the North, including upgrades to the A32, to be considered for future funding.

Mrs Barton: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. I am sure you are aware that the improvement of the A32 has been ongoing for six, seven or eight years and has been held up due to funding issues. Will the Minister consider transferring capital funding that was originally set aside for the delayed A5 project to the A32?

Mr Hazzard: Very succinctly, no.

Mr Lynch: I hope the Minister has a longer answer to my question. He talked about addressing the imbalance in the west. When will the draft orders for the Enniskillen bypass be made, and when will construction happen?

Mr Hazzard: The preferred alignment for the A4 Enniskillen southern bypass was announced in June of last year. Work is ongoing to prepare the environmental statement and the draft statutory orders. It is anticipated that those will be published in 2017, which may lead to a public inquiry. Subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures, construction of the bypass will be dependent on Budget allocations awarded to my Department.

Mr McPhillips: Will the Minister give us an update on the £600,000 that was allocated to address flooded roads in areas of south Fermanagh?

Mr Hazzard: There are a number of roads — up to 65 — in the Fermanagh area benefiting from various road maintenance works. I was on site just beside the Share centre last week, looking at some of the works that are progressing. If the Member wants to correspond on any particular road, I am more than happy to do so.

A29: Upgrade

7. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the plans to upgrade the A29. (AQO 386/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The A29 North/South link corridor extends from Portrush through Dungannon and Armagh on to the border with County Louth. The section from Coleraine to Armagh is a trunk road. The strategic road improvement programme was established through the regional strategic transportation network transport plan and enhanced by the investment delivery plan for roads in 2008. That programme includes the A29 Carland bridge realignment scheme, which my Department has delivered at a cost of £5 million, and the A29 Cookstown eastern distributor scheme.

The A29 Cookstown eastern distributor involves construction of approximately four kilometres of new single carriageway from the Dungannon Road roundabout south of Cookstown to a proposed new roundabout on the Moneymore Road at the north of the town. The preferred route was announced in 2010. However, development of

that significant project has been deferred owing to financial constraints.

The upcoming revision of the regional strategic transportation network transport plan and the development of local transport plans in conjunction with councils' local development plans provide the opportunity to refresh the strategic roads improvement programme in line with the latest technical evidence, local development pressures and the Programme for Government priorities of economic growth and social equality.

I am keen for my Department to progress the A29 Cookstown eastern distributor scheme. I am engaging with officials about progression of the scheme's development to the next stage, the publication of the draft statutory orders and the environmental statement.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): We have time for a quick supplementary.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for detailing that. Will he give consideration to providing things like overtaking lanes or slow lanes along the A29 so that the business and rural traffic can flow nicely together with commuters, because it is a very important road?

Mr Hazzard: Yes. Whilst many of us jump to the very quick conclusion that we want dual carriageways and motorways everywhere, very often two-in-ones and passing lanes are very successful in alleviating congestion, especially in rural settings. That is something that I am more than happy to give consideration to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

Magilligan to Greencastle Ferry Service: Subsidy

T1. **Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department plans to subsidise the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry service, as it does for other ferry services in the North, given that he will be aware of the benefits that it provides for local people and for visitors to the area and the fact that there remains a lot of concern about its long-term sustainability. (AQT 276/16-21)

2.30 pm

Mr Hazzard: This is something I am certainly more than happy to look at. I have not looked at it yet, and it is not sitting with me at the minute. We have a number of services that are vital to their communities, whether it is the Rathlin Island service or the Strangford lough service. There is an undoubted potential to link the north coast with the Wild Atlantic Way. You talked about the Magilligan ferry: it is certainly an issue I am more than happy to correspond with the Member on.

Mr Mullan: Minister, do you maybe plan to raise the issue at the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting?

Mr Hazzard: I had not planned to do so, but, in the light of some of the other issues we will be discussing, I am more than happy to. There is a transport sectoral meeting happening shortly, and I am more than happy to raise it under the heading of any other business.

Infrastructure: Priority Projects

T2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has spoken to the Construction Industry Group of Northern Ireland to allow it to prepare for an infrastructure stimulus, in the light of his earlier comments about his priority strategic projects. (AQT 277/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have spoken to a number of stakeholders right across the construction industry. The message on coming into post was very clear: the year-on-year budget allocations and one-year budgets are not sustainable going forward. When we look at large-scale infrastructure capital projects, we see that we need to get as much strategic and long-term thinking as possible involved. That is certainly why the forthcoming four-year capital budget will give us the ability to think a wee bit more strategically about our capital projects. I know the industry is very content that that is the way forward.

Mrs Overend: I urge the Minister to speak directly to the Construction Industry Group of Northern Ireland if he has not spoken to it already — I believe he has not. The Minister will know that Mid Ulster is a hub of not only manufacturing but construction employers. When I speak about Mid Ulster, I speak not only for the construction industry but about the infrastructure improvements we want there. On that basis, can the Minister give a commitment that, and a timescale for when, Cookstown can expect a bypass?

Mr Hazzard: I have an open door, and I will speak to everybody and anybody over the next number of years about how we can advance in a very strategic way a number of our infrastructure projects. I will be turning more specifically to Mid Ulster and the Cookstown bypass in the Adjournment debate this evening. I think that is timely. It is a project with merit. I, along with Francie Molloy MP and various MLAs, met the delegation to discuss the need for the bypass in Cookstown. Coming from an area like South Down, I am only too aware of this; we have a county town in Downpatrick that suffers similarly. Our manufacturing industry is calling out for the likes of these distributor roads, which I think could unlock economic growth in areas outside Belfast. As I said, it is a project that I want to advance over the next number of years. I hope that is something we can do.

Narrow Water Bridge: Yes/No?

T3. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in a return to her earlier question, given that his answer left her a little bit bewildered, whether he anticipates that the Narrow Water bridge will be delivered in this mandate, albeit that she would like to embrace the succinct yes/no answers that the Minister is issuing today — a yes would be nice, but a yes/no answer would suffice. (AQT 278/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As, I think, was pointed out by your colleague, another one-word answer, of course, is, "Maybe." There are other one-word answers we could go for. We are constituency colleagues, and we know very well the huge significance that this project would have in unlocking tourism and economic potential in the north Louth and south Down areas. I am working actively with people in the South and with my Government colleagues in the South to advance this project. Officials, North and South, are sitting down with the Narrow Water bridge

stakeholder group this week and next week to advance proposals. We have to take into consideration that the environment we operate in has changed since 23 June, but that does not mean we cannot do all in our power to deliver these sorts of projects. I am absolutely determined that this is a project we will see delivered.

Ms S Bradley: I genuinely welcome that you are determined to see it delivered, as I hope it will be. You rightly point out that the political landscape has changed. Does the Minister acknowledge that there is now greater emphasis on the House and our Departments to deliver on this bridge? I know the Southern Government are firmly on record as being supportive of it, but, in the absence of any European funding, the pressures will be added to us.

Mr Hazzard: Again, it is not for this House but for our counterparts in Dublin. Councils also have a big role to play, as they have done magnificently so far. The memorandum of understanding between Louth County Council and Newry and Mourne District Council and the leadership that chief executives have shown in recent years have been very important. The Narrow Water bridge project is important, as are our large infrastructure plans for the southern relief road, which would be of huge benefit to the town of Newry. There are big plans for that part of the world, and I hope to do all that I can in the years ahead to advance them.

Roadworks: East Belfast

T4. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to account for the strategic planning that went into the timing of various road schemes in East Belfast or to at least accept that there could be a review of that process, given that he might be aware that, in recent years, there have been a significant number of roadworks in East Belfast, with Transport NI working on the Belfast rapid transit scheme, Rivers Agency working on flood alleviation and Power NI working on electricity supply upgrades to the Ulster Hospital, all of which were extremely important schemes, albeit that the cumulative impact has been prolonged congestion and significant disruption to businesses in the area. (AQT 279/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I came into post in May and was not involved in any of the planning stages. I have looked at the impact of some of those works to date, and I believe that there has been a considerable increase in those using public transport to get from East Belfast to the city centre. We need to take stock of the impact of these works in the round. I have no doubt that works can be troublesome, especially for traders, and, as we approach the Christmas period, we need to see as much work completed in advance of that as possible. I am happy to look at the issues in the round. If there are specific needs to address as the works advance ahead of, as you mentioned, the introduction of the rapid transit scheme in 2018, I will be happy to correspond with the Member on any issue.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his response. We certainly give our full support to the ongoing sustainable transport works. The important point is on the cumulative impact of a wide range of different works, and I welcome the opportunity to correspond with the Minister on that. Will he advise businesses in the area whether there are any opportunities to avail themselves of any type of

compensation if there is evidence of significant loss of revenue as a result of disruption to business?

Mr Hazzard: The Member may want to pick up the issues of rate relief or assistance on this with the Finance Minister. I think that I am right in saying that, in particular circumstances, certain traders have, at times, gone down this avenue. If the Member wants to raise anything with me or to discuss any particular works, he can certainly feel free to do so.

Water Charges: Executive Position

T5. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the Executive have taken a position on the water framework directive and the issue of water charges. (AQT 280/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Yes. Recently, the Agriculture Minister, Michelle McIlveen, and I presented a joint paper to the Executive, which received the Executive's support, on continuing our policy of no domestic water charges for local people. We have been clear in the Executive about continuing our opposition to water charges. We told the people that we would continue to oppose domestic water charges, and we have done so.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for that very welcome statement and confirmation of the Executive's position to support people on water charge impositions. How does that reflect on other jurisdictions? I am thinking particularly of how the Irish Government are dealing with water charges.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his supplementary. All this boils down to being straight with the people. If you are opposed to domestic water charges, you have to stand up and, where it counts, have to be there to play the ball. I am aware of a recent Sinn Féin motion in the Dáil to discuss the issue, and some parties ran away from the responsibility. Outside the House, they campaign against domestic water charges, but, when it really matters, they run away. I am proud to say that this Executive continue to oppose domestic water charges. We do not flip-flop on the issue. We say that we oppose domestic water charges, we do oppose them and we continue to oppose them.

Waterside Transport Hub

T6. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, after welcoming his confirmation that the A6 and the A5 are in his top five priorities, for an update on the proposed Waterside transport hub and the potential refurbishment of the old Waterside station to bring it back into use. (AQT 281/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I will be in Derry later this week to talk to officials about the plans for the transport hub. It is an exciting project. Negotiations with landowners about the specific site are in progress and, I believe, are, thankfully, coming to a close. We will make an announcement on that in due course.

A transport hub for Derry, like a transport hub for Belfast, has the potential to be a real catalyst for economic growth in both regions. I am certainly excited by that prospect.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for his response. I appreciate that there are issues with land and agreements to be reached on properties. Can he give any time frame

for when he foresees such a project being brought into use?

Mr Hazzard: I do not want to say anything outside the negotiations that are going on with landowners — I certainly do not want to spoil those waters — but I think that, in the weeks ahead, the Member will be delighted with the announcement. The people of Derry are looking forward to the project. It has been touted for some time, and, as I said, we look forward to delivering it. When I am in Derry on Thursday to speak to officials, I will be keen to hear what progress has been made.

Residents' Parking Schemes

T7. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the ongoing pilot schemes that he referred to in answer to a recent question for written answer on residents' parking schemes for Bangor and Holywood. (AQT 282/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I do not have the information at hand about the specific residential schemes that you have mentioned. We are progressing with a couple of residential schemes, and I discussed those with officials last week.

The current policy, which came into force in 2007, has been an issue to date, and I have tasked officials to look at it. There is demand in many areas for these parking schemes, and we need to meet that demand in a number of areas. We will need a policy that equips us with the legal arguments to take cognisance of objections but move ahead in a fair-handed way.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answer. One of the first questions that I asked in the Assembly, in 2011, was about residents' parking schemes. The issue then was the hold-up in Belfast: now, five years on, what reassurance can he give my constituents that the hold-up in Belfast will not mean that we never get to North Down?

Mr Hazzard: Let me reassure the Member that that will no longer be an excuse. When I came into post, residents in Derry made exactly the same complaint: that their scheme was being held up because we could not get agreement in Belfast. We decoupled the schemes straight away and were able to launch a pilot in Derry. I want to judge each case on its merits. It should not be a case of one town being held up because of another town when there is absolutely no resemblance to the case in hand.

Belfast Transport Hub

T8. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to assure the House of his commitment to the Belfast transport hub. (AQT 283/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Absolutely. As I outlined to your colleague, the transport hubs in Derry and Belfast are much needed. If we look at the Europa bus centre, we see a transport hub that has stood the test of time and done a fantastic job but is coming to the end of its life — I do not think that it is out of place to say that. Translink is getting the best value that it can from the site that it has, but we are coming to a time when we need a modern, fit-for-purpose transport hub. I am certainly determined to help to deliver that in the years ahead.

Mr Humphrey: I am pleased to hear the Minister say that. He will be aware that tremendous investment is required in deprived areas such as the Lower Falls and Sandy Row.

Will he agree to work with Ministers across the Executive and Belfast City Council to ensure that the investment that he talked about and other investments in the area will go towards making people's daily life there much better?

Mr Hazzard: Absolutely. We are not simply talking about a piece of infrastructure that will stand with its back to the communities. It will be open just as much to the rear, to the Grosvenor Road and Sandy Row communities, as it has to be in order to be successful going forward. I was recently in Rotterdam, where the central transport hub is a centre of community activity, and there is no reason why, through working with Belfast City Council, we cannot have something very similar in the newly envisaged living quarter in Belfast.

2.45 pm

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Question 10 has been withdrawn.

Prison Officers: Medical Retirement

1. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers were retired on medical grounds in 2015-16. (AQO 395/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): During the financial year 2015-16, 60 members of prison operational staff retired on medical grounds. The breakdown is as follows: one occupational support grade; four custody prison officers; 40 prison officers, including specialists; three prisoner custody officers; and 12 senior officers.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her response. Previously, I asked the Minister for details of prison officers who had retired as a result of injury on duty and was informed that the information could not be provided, as it was confidential. Can the Minister advise me why it is confidential? Can she assure the House that she will take steps to find out how many prison officers have been retired as a result of an injury on duty? Clearly, the employer should know that.

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his response. The reason it is confidential is that my Department is looking into correspondence issues relating to injury on duty. I am not at liberty to give any more information at this stage.

Ms S Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I ask her to recall that, on 20 September, she said, in answer to a question, that she had had a conversation about the Sean Lynch report. Can the Minister share with us today whether she called a meeting to discuss the report with the Prisoner Ombudsman or senior management in the prison? If so, when does she expect the recommendations of the report to be implemented?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. We accept the Prisoner Ombudsman's report on the case of Sean Lynch. I understand that the Northern Ireland Prison Service has given a commitment, alongside the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, to look at putting those recommendations forward. I alluded at my last Question Time to how we dealt with prisoners with severe mental health issues. I have spoken to the

management of the Northern Ireland Prison Service about how to better support prison officers when prisoners present with exceptional problems, as Mr Lynch did.

Mr Poots: Is it not a mark of shame on the Prison Service that so many prison officers are retired on medical grounds? Given the Prison Service's duty of care to its officers, is it appropriate that people coming out of hospital are, within a week of coming out, being harassed and harangued about getting back to work, when they have a serious illness?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. As I have said in the past, the Prison Service is an exceptional environment. It really is like no other job, and prisons are often in quite isolated areas. We need to be mindful of all those things. The Member is right to suggest that a high level of our sickness absence is related to anxiety, stress, depression and other psychiatric illnesses. Moving forward, I am keen to look at that so that I can better support prison officers. I have reiterated time and time again that, in my tenure as Justice Minister, I will look at how to better support prison officers, with the aim of reducing sickness absence. The wider impact is that other officers are under pressure if there are not enough staff to carry out the duties. I alluded to the care of the prisoners, and we need to be mindful of all those aspects. That starts with training prison officers and better supporting them to carry out their duties to the standard that we expect.

Mr Milne: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Can she give us an assessment of the level of sick leave in the Prison Service and how it impacts on front-line services?

Ms Sugden: The recent Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) report identified significant levels of sickness absence throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service, particularly in the Prison Service, which probably has the worst.

It represents an absence rate of about 8.5%, which is still significantly high. Indeed, the measures I have already outlined in the modernisation programme, looking at how we can better support prison officers in the job that they do day to day, will hopefully try to address that sickness absence rate.

To reiterate: working in a prison environment is unique. It is like no other environment. A lot of the people whom prison officers care for can be quite challenging and that puts a lot of strain and stress onto prison officers. To address sickness absence, we have to look at how we can better support prison officers so that they feel better equipped to do their jobs.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister accept that those anxiety levels and the resulting consequences for prisoners are greatly accentuated by losses of control in prisons, such as that which was seen at the weekend when, in Quoile House, three prison officers were left to deal with 100 marauding prisoners on the landings and had to retreat to the circle? Meanwhile, there were fires in Erne House and Bush House. Is the loss of control and the failure to keep control in the prison not a big contributory factor in the huge dropout rate amongst prison officers?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, how he presents the situation at the weekend, as read

in the local press, is certainly not the detailed report that I received. Yes: we can acknowledge that there was a mechanical fault that led to the opportunity for prisoners to come out of their cells, but it was no more than 13 prisoners in any one instance. My understanding is that only six were ever out in the prison at that stage and that it was very much under control. What has been suggested in the press is not what has been detailed to me.

Pitchford Undercover Policing Inquiry

2. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on any response or communication from either the British Home Secretary or the Metropolitan Police in relation to the Pitchford inquiry into undercover policing. (AQO 396/16-21)

Ms Sugden: On 15 June 2016, I wrote to the former Home Secretary asking that the undercover policing inquiry be empowered to look at evidence relating to the undercover activities of English and Welsh officers in any jurisdiction where it is considering a case in England and Wales and the operative has subsequently crossed a jurisdictional boundary. On 22 July, I received a response that indicated that she had considered the proposal but had concluded that it was not possible to accommodate it in the inquiry's existing terms of reference. The letter also noted that the Home Secretary did not intend to amend the terms of reference as this would require further consultation and delay the progress of the inquiry. I have since made further representations to the new Home Secretary.

The Metropolitan Police Service wrote to my officials on 15 June indicating that they were in the process of reviewing all material relating to the subject of the inquiry in order to progress current investigations and provide full and transparent disclosure.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for that response. Will she comment on media reports about the Attorney General's pledge that no one will face prosecution based on evidence given at the inquiry? Does this mean that former officers will not be prosecuted for anything that they may disclose during the inquiry?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his supplementary. As I am sure he will appreciate, these matters are between the Attorney General and the chairman of the inquiry. However, it is a matter of record that, at the request of the inquiry chairman, the Attorney General has given an undertaking that individuals providing certain evidence to the undercover policing inquiry could do so without fear of prosecution.

Mr Attwood: The Pitchford inquiry deals with the activities of undercover officers. The Minister knows that a number of inquests that might touch on the activities of undercover security personnel are currently delayed in the High Court. Given that, is it not time for her, as Justice Minister, to advise the British Government that they should go ahead and release money to enable inquests to be handled and managed by the Courts and Tribunals Service and High Court judges in Northern Ireland rather than wait and wait for an Executive decision on the matter that is not coming?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his supplementary. As Minister of Justice for Northern Ireland, I am a member of the Northern Ireland Executive. Indeed, I am frustrated that we have not yet secured funding for the legacy inquest

project that the Lord Chief Justice has proposed, but it is something that I am working on, as Justice Minister, along with my Executive colleagues, to see whether we can secure funding for legacy inquests.

As I have told the House before, time is not on our side when it comes to legacy inquests. The people who we need to be working towards in securing this project that the Lord Chief Justice proposed are the victims of those families, and time is not on their side. So, yes, I can assure the Member that I am keen to work with my Executive colleagues on that, but I cannot do this alone. I am a member of the Northern Ireland Executive, and I am keen to work so that we can start moving things.

Ms Armstrong: Minister, given the apparent involvement of police officers from England and Wales in undercover activities in Northern Ireland directly linked to the activities being investigated by the Pitchford inquiry, will you continue to pursue this with the Home Secretary?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. Yes, I will continue to pursue this with the Home Secretary. Indeed, before Question Time, I wrote to the Home Secretary, again asking her to reconsider whether she would extend the terms of reference to Northern Ireland, where it is cross-jurisdictional. So, yes, it is something that I am keen to keep pursuing.

Prison Officers: Mental Health Support

3. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the mental health support provided for serving prison officers. (AQO 397/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I welcome the continuing interest in this matter, which is an area that I am already focused on. As was mentioned at my last Question Time, we are in a post-conflict society, and a lot of people, including prison officers, have been directly or indirectly affected by the trauma of the Troubles. This, in many cases, has impacted on their mental health, as I spoke of earlier. As I also mentioned, a quarter of our prisoners have mental health issues, so I am very conscious of the mental health issues affecting prison officers and prisoners.

There are a number of support mechanisms available to prisoner officers. These include a dedicated staff welfare service, access to the occupational health service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall. These services are provided to staff to supplement the support and treatment available through the National Health Service.

I am keen look at this issue and focus on the support available to prison officers. For the Prison Service to fulfil its aims in relation to the management and rehabilitation of offenders, I am clear that we must provide appropriate care and support for the staff carrying out this challenging work. My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services that are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answer. In response to the first question, the Minister mentioned that prison officers are working in an exceptional environment. Given the challenging work environment, and the trauma experienced by prison officer staff on a daily basis, does the Minister consider six Carecall sessions to be sufficient

provision for those suffering from conditions such as PTSD?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question and, indeed, her continuing interest in this area. I am not sure that the provisions that we have in place are enough to support prison officers in relation to their mental health and the daily pressures that they face.

One of the biggest legacies of our Troubles — throughout Northern Ireland as well as within prisons — is mental ill health. The Troubles, as I said at the outset, brought a lot of trauma to many people's lives, and that has now resulted, I think, in mental health issues, particularly amongst an older population who went through it themselves and saw that trauma at first hand. Now, as they are getting older, perhaps even retiring, these experiences are manifesting as mental health problems.

In this new environment, moving forward, I am really keen, as I have reiterated time and again to this House, that prison officers should be supported, and we do need to be mindful of how they are dealing with the very challenging circumstances that they are faced with day in, day out in their job.

Mr Butler: I welcome this discussion on Prison Service staff. I would like to declare two interests: I worked for the Prison Service for four years, so I am talking from a practitioner's perspective; and I am my party's spokesperson on mental health. We talked about Carecall and the six calls that staff are entitled to. I can verify that it is a unique job, and I welcome what you have said about support. It is a unique experience to work in any of the prisons that we have. However, whilst Carecall is a very good service — and I am not taking anything away from it — would you agree that perhaps there is a need for something more specific to the needs of prison officers and their mental health? Do you have any plans to develop any such system?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, I welcome him to the House. I think this is the first opportunity that we have had to engage on the Floor.

3.00 pm

Yes, there is now an opportunity to look at this in a much more holistic way, and I have instructed my officials to look at how we can better support prison officers. As I said in response to question 1, and to Mrs Cameron's question, we will encourage better rehabilitation and care of prisoners if we start with prison officers themselves. They are much better equipped to do the job that they do but, equally, they need to be considered in terms of the support around them. In answer to your question, I have already instructed my officials to look at this and see how we can do it better. We are talking about a potential modernisation programme which not only looks at the issues around mental health but also looks at their family life, opportunities around shift working and how they can best manage that so that they can have that proper work-life balance, which is also very important when we are looking at mental health issues. It is something that I am quite keen to address. I visited Hydebank Wood with the Health Minister last week. That demonstrates our commitment to work together on these issues, as it is one of her priorities as well. Looking forward positively, we are keen to tackle it. I welcome any input from Members on

how they feel that we can best do that. After all, we are all in this together.

Mr Durkan: What precise mechanisms have been put in place by the Department and, indeed, in the Department, to ensure that the Prisoner Ombudsman's recommendations arising from the Sean Lynch report are implemented faithfully and in full?

Ms Sugden: Since the report was published quite recently, at this stage my Department, alongside officials from the Department of Health, will take time to consider the recommendations. As I have said in answers to previous questions, we accept the report and that lessons need to be learned from this very tragic case. We will look carefully at those recommendations to see how we can best implement them. It is something that we need to take proper time and consideration over, because the outcome was very, very tragic.

Mr Lyttle: Since her appointment, what specific actions has the Minister taken to improve the health and well-being services that are available to prison officers, given the urgent, bespoke and acute needs that they face?

Ms Sugden: At this stage in my ministerial role, I am very much about listening. I come to the House not as someone bringing my own baggage or ideas that I have plucked out of thin air, but as someone very keen to listen to stakeholders on the ground. They can best advise and put forward ideas that best represent them. Certainly, I am very keen to listen to the views of the Prison Service, through the representation of the Prison Officers' Association and anyone else who wants to put forward their views. Elected representatives also have a role; if there are concerns around the welfare of prison officers and, indeed, prisoners, I would be really keen to hear that. Indeed, a lot of Members have been forthcoming in doing so. Right now, it is very much a listening exercise. I want to ensure that I get this right, and I cannot do that by plucking ideas out of my own mind; I have to listen to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I just want to advise Members that if they wish to ask a question they should continue standing, please. Otherwise, I have no way of knowing if the question has already been answered.

Mr Kearney: Maith go leor, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sheas mé trí huaire i ndiaidh a chéile. Go raibh maith agat, cibé ar bith. Gabhaim buíochas leat, a chara, as ucht na bhfreagraí go dtí seo. Thank you for your answers to date, Minister. Do you agree with me that all prison staff, prisoners on both the integrated and segregated wings, families of prisoners and visitors to the prisons deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and that those principles, and adherence to those principles, are at the very foundation of ensuring that we have a prison system that is bereft of stress and creates the best conditions whereby we can ensure that appropriate interventions are made to address prisoners who are suffering with mental illness and mental conditions.

Ms Sugden: Yes, of course. I believe that all people, whether prisoners, prison officers, prisoners' families or people that are engaging in the prison environment are treated with dignity and respect. From my perspective, the judgement about them coming into the prison environment was made in the courts. Certainly, the role of prison is to better rehabilitate and provide care for prisoners. So yes,

I agree with the comments the Member made, and I think it is this good and fundamental basis we need when we are thinking about how we move forward on better care for prisoners and prison officers.

Community Restorative Justice

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of community restorative justice. (AQO 398/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There is a significant body of evidence from Northern Ireland and worldwide that demonstrates the benefits of restorative practices within a criminal justice context, and community-based restorative justice plays an important role in this. Since the government protocol was agreed in 2007, the two accredited community-based restorative justice schemes in Northern Ireland have made positive contributions to keeping their communities safe, repairing relationships and helping to reduce the harm caused by antisocial behaviour and offending. They are also key partners for statutory justice organisations, including the Probation Service and the police. Without their expertise and community presence, many of our criminal justice disposals would lack that restorative element and would be poorer for it.

That positive work was recognised by the Fresh Start panel report 'Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime'. It consequently made a number of recommendations that involve the accredited community-based restorative justice groups in their delivery. All the recommendations have been accepted in the Executive action plan, and my officials will be working with the groups to implement them. In addition, representatives from both accredited groups are helping to inform the drafting of an overarching adult restorative justice strategy that my Department is leading on and that will be published for consultation in 2017.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Minister, do you believe the two restorative justice organisations you mentioned in your answer, although not by name, are making a difference? Can there be stronger linkages between those organisations and the police?

Ms Sugden: Yes, indeed. Restorative justice is an almost controversial practice, and at the outset it received an awful lot of criticism. But I think that here and across the world restorative justice has proved to be an important element of our criminal justice system by connecting with communities and trying to get to the heart of the problems behind why people commit offences and crimes.

Where working with the PSNI is concerned, I understand there are good working relationships with the community-based restorative justice groups, but if we need to look at those to strengthen them, I would be very keen to hear the Member's comments on another occasion about how he feels we can best do so.

Mr McGrath: Can the Minister explain why she intends to bring forward no new primary legislation before June 2017, which will be one full year after the start of the mandate?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. It has nothing to do with the question asked by Mr Humphrey. I am certainly looking at my priorities for the next five years, and there are a number of areas I have identified, including domestic violence, mental health, children

and young people, women, and crimes against older people in particular. I will very much weave them into the responsibilities my Department has as a whole, and I think the next five years will be really exciting. The last mandate, in my opinion, was very much about transition, and I think that right now we are going to transform. This will be the mandate of delivery, and I am keen to see it through.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I will just remind Members that supplementaries should relate to the original question. Of course, it is at the Minister's discretion whether she chooses to answer. On that occasion, she did with aplomb.

Animal Cruelty

5. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the action she will take to ensure maximum sentences are applied in the worst cases of animal cruelty. (AQO 399/16-21)

9. **Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the number of prosecutions for animal cruelty offences in the last 12 months. (AQO 403/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will take questions 5 and 9 together.

Animal cruelty really is a disgusting crime. I fully recognise the Members' concern, and I appreciate that the Members who asked the questions have taken the opportunity to raise the debate inside and outside the House. Sentencing in individual cases is a matter for the independent judiciary, which must take account of the relevant facts and circumstances of any case.

The limited nature of my Department's role in animal welfare issues is to ensure that a suitable legal framework exists that provides courts with appropriate powers to deal with all cases of animal cruelty. That includes ensuring that the maximum penalties are available to the courts where appropriate.

Following the joint review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, undertaken by the former Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and my Department, legislation was brought forward in the Justice Act 2016, which increased maximum penalties for animal welfare crime. The relevant provisions commenced on 1 August 2016.

In addition to increasing the maximum penalties available, my Department provided additional powers to the Director of Public Prosecutions to allow him to refer animal cruelty cases to the Court of Appeal, if he considers that the sentence handed down in certain Crown Court cases is unduly lenient. Those changes provided Northern Ireland with amongst the toughest maximum penalties for animal cruelty of any jurisdiction on these islands.

Decisions on the appropriate sentence are entirely a matter for the independent judiciary. In making these decisions, judges are guided by guideline judgements from the Court of Appeal and sentencing guidance. I understand that the Judicial Studies Board for Northern Ireland, which is the body responsible for judicial training, is to receive a briefing from DAERA and councils on animal welfare issues.

In 2015, 78 cases of animal cruelty were disposed of at the courts in Northern Ireland, 48 of which resulted

in a conviction. In 2016, 44 prosecutions have been disposed of at court, 32 of which resulted in a conviction. As yet, there have been no prosecutions under the new provisions.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answers. Does she agree that the current need is not for new laws but for a more rigorous application of existing laws? Does she welcome the assurance that I received from the Director of Public Prosecutions last week that he stands ready and willing to exercise his new powers to refer unduly lenient sentencing to the Supreme Court? Does she also agree that we should have zero tolerance of anybody convicted of animal cruelty walking free from court, laughing and jeering at the PSNI and animal lovers?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his comments. I agree entirely that we should have zero tolerance. The Member is right to suggest that the current legal framework, particularly the new one that has been in place from 1 August 2016, is certainly robust enough. However, how that is applied in the courts is a matter for the independent judiciary. I am pleased to hear that the Member met the Director of Public Prosecutions, who has given a commitment to ensure that, if sentences are unduly lenient, there will be an opportunity for redress.

Mrs Little Pengelly: The Minister will be aware of the Kirkwood family, whom my colleague referenced, in my constituency of South Belfast, who, despite carrying out what the judiciary called:

“one of the vilest examples of premeditated abuse”,

got a suspended sentence and an animal ban. Just two weeks ago, that family, despite the ban, was caught with animals, which re-emphasises the need for a register. Will the Minister commit to meeting me on the issue, which has progressed through the private Member's Bill that I intend to bring forward?

Ms Sugden: I am more than happy to meet Mrs Little Pengelly about the issue. I acknowledge the opportunity she has taken in the House to raise the matter. The case that she outlined is disappointing. With the current legal framework, it will be up to the independent judiciary to deal with individual circumstances. The purpose of the House is to raise debate on issues like this and to read the public feeling on this issue. As Mr Nesbitt said, there needs to be zero tolerance for people who deliberately commit animal cruelty offences. If we need to look at the legal framework, which I am responsible for, I am happy to do that.

Ms Dillon: The report on the review of the implementation of animal welfare legislation made 68 recommendations. I accept that 68 is quite a number, but will the Minister update us on how many recommendations have been implemented in full?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. I do not have that information to hand, but I am happy to write to her and outline where we are with the implementation of the recommendations. I will follow that up in due course.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): We now move to topical questions.

Maghaberry Prison: Mechanical Fault

T1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the situation at Maghaberry prison, given

that, at the weekend, 100 prisoners were accidentally simultaneously released on to landings, with only three prison officers, who were placed in great danger, to provide supervision. (AQT 286/16-21)

3.15 pm

Ms Sugden: As I said to Mr Allister in a previous answer, I have received a detailed account of the incident at Quoile House in Maghaberry at the weekend. It is right to say that a technical fault, which lasted for 50 minutes, meant that prisoners were not contained in their cells. Despite what was reported in the media, I understand that prisoners did not run riot throughout the prison; it was certainly contained. As I said to Mr Allister earlier, it was a rolling mechanical fault, which meant that only 13 prisoners had the opportunity to be out of their cells at any one time. I understand that six was the highest number of prisoners out of their cells at any one time. Whilst the fault is certainly regrettable, these things happen. I appreciate that there is nervousness about what could have happened. We will take it away and learn from it to see how we can prevent anything like that happening in future.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that response. I am sure that one quote from a prison officer will touch the Minister as much as it touched me:

“Nobody wants to highlight the risk, and how vulnerable we are.”

Will the Minister commit to talking directly to prison officers about this issue to find out about the dangers, their needs and whether the staffing levels are inadequate, as my colleague Doug Beattie said to the Minister?

Ms Sugden: I am very mindful of the vulnerability that prison officers can feel in the challenging and often dangerous environment in prisons across Northern Ireland, not only Maghaberry. I have met representatives of prison officers through the Prison Officers' Association. The Northern Ireland Civil Service handbook prevents me from directly meeting prison officers. If elected representatives have an understanding of the issues that prison officers face, I would be more than happy to meet them so that I can better understand those issues and find a way of addressing them.

Maghaberry Prison: Sinn Féin Visits

T2. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice whether she would like to take the opportunity to condemn the Sinn Féin Members of the House who recently gave succour to convicted terrorists through their visit to Maghaberry prison, where, amongst those they visited, were the murderers of Constable Carroll; and to state whether she accepts that such visits and the accompanying utterances are ready-made propaganda for the terrorists who are at war with this Province. (AQT 287/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Any elected representative is entitled to visit prisoners in custody. However, we need to be mindful of the public message and victims. I remind all Members of the House, in the messages that they send out, to be very mindful of the other people involved.

Mr Allister: On messages, does the Minister have any comment to make on the fact that, recently, an individual with a previous terrorist history, who was convicted of

possession of a submachine gun with intent to endanger life — the most serious offence of possession of which you can be convicted — was gifted a mere four and a half years in prison? Does that not suggest a message that we are only half-hearted in fighting terrorism?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. No, I do not think that we are half-hearted in fighting terrorism. Northern Ireland has come an awful long way given its troubled past. There are certain elements of our troubled past that we need to address head-on; otherwise, we will never address them. It will be a huge failure on the part of the Executive and every Member of the House if we do not address those issues. There needs to be some sort of truth element in the post-conflict society that we now find ourselves in. I do not underestimate that challenge, but we need to be brave because we represent the people of Northern Ireland. I appreciate that a lot of people throughout Northern Ireland are hurting, but it is our job to see whether we can find the best way to move forward. That will not always be the easiest way, but it is something that we have to commit to in the best interests of everyone whom we represent right across Northern Ireland.

Mental Health and Addictions: Provision for Children and Young People

T3. **Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Justice whether she is aware that, in the absence of a specialist unit for children and young people who are suffering acute mental health and addiction issues, they very often end up in custody suites for their own safety, if not in A&E, sitting with police officers for hours; and, if so, does she think that that is in the best interests of those vulnerable children and young people, and is the best use of PSNI time. (AQT 288/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I completely understand what the Member alludes to, and I am not sure that it is. One of the biggest tragedies of the justice system is that it is almost the failure department when every other part of our public services has already failed. In order to tackle that, we need to look at more upstream approaches so that those people do not find themselves in custody.

I find that a lot of young people in custody have a mental health or addiction problem, usually resulting from a trauma earlier in life. Do I think that the best place for them is custody? I am not sure, but the difficulty is this: if they are not in custody, where else can they go? I have committed to working alongside the Health Minister to see if there is a way that we can address this. I do not think that, when we put people, particularly young people, in custody, it helps their situation. If anything, they are probably at the beginning of a downward spiral, and that is not good enough.

We need to look at the best needs of our children and for a safer community and a safer society. When those people are finished in custody, I do not want them going back to the starting block where they began before ending up in custody. We need to look at more upstream approaches. What the Member mentioned is something that the Health Minister and I have been discussing.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister for her answer. As she said, given the overlap between mental health and addiction issues and youth justice and the criminal justice system, will the Minister raise the need for a specialist treatment unit for children and young people with addiction

and mental health issues in her discussions with the Health Minister?

Ms Sugden: I am happy to discuss a number of issues. If the Member is keen to join in any of those discussions, I will be keen to hear her views, as it is something that we need to address. I find that the criminal justice system is a vicious circle. It begins with trauma in the home that then manifests itself in addiction or mental health issues, which is why domestic violence is one of my overarching priorities. We see the manifestations of that in the issues that we have been talking about. We need to look at a wider holistic approach. It should not be a case of satisfying criminal justice outcomes; it should be looking at why we are getting to that place in the first instance.

Prisons: Mental Health Policies and Procedures

T4. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Justice, in a follow-up to Nichola Mallon's question, to give her view on the care policies and procedures in prisons and the training that prison staff receive to aid their looking after people in custody, particularly those with complex mental health needs. (AQT 289/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As I outlined, up to half my prison population presents with mental health issues, so there is an issue around the care that we provide when they are in custody. As I have said in a number of answers today, we can look at how to better care for prisoners when they are in our establishments by looking at the training that prison officers receive and how they can better deal with prisoners with mental health issues. That starts with prison officers and their mental health issues; we cannot look at each issue in isolation. Moving forward with our prisons, I am keen to ensure that we have a system that is fit for purpose. That comes from the perspective of looking after the prisoners in our custody and the prison officers.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her response. There are issues, in that people with mental health problems end up in prison when what they need is treatment and support. I know that that is an issue for the criminal justice system at the other end, but, while people are in custody, I am not convinced that there is enough training and awareness given to prison staff on mental health needs. I encourage the Minister, the Minister of Health and anyone else to ensure that that is the case. In many instances, people end up on a conveyor belt. They get a custodial sentence and end up in prison, but what they really need is treatment. I am not convinced that the awareness is there even to recognise that they need treatment in the first place.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I call Conor Murphy. Sorry, Minister.

Ms Sugden: You are fine, Deputy Speaker.

I agree. The working relationship that I have with the Health Minister and the conversations we have had in recent months have very much centred on the issue you are talking about: how we can better provide healthcare both within prisons and for people coming into prison. Is prison the right environment for them? I am not sure, but there has to be a balance between community safety and the public perception of what prisons are for and, ultimately, rehabilitation. You are right to point out that this

is a conveyor belt. It is almost a vicious circle that begins with an offence and then spirals because people find themselves in custody.

One of the sad things we find is that a lot of the offenders who find themselves in custody get onto a path where their lives are quite organised. They are on the right medication and receive a certain amount of support. The difficulty is that, when they come out of custody, they go back to square one because the support mechanisms are not in place. We have to take an approach that looks at why people find themselves in custody, looks at them whilst they are in custody and then looks at what happens when they come out of custody, so that we can stop them going round and round that circle.

Prisoners: Duty of Care

T5. **Mr Murphy** asked the Minister of Justice whether, with all the discussions she has had recently, she is satisfied that an event such as the tragic death of Patrick Kelly from Omagh, which the Prisoner Ombudsman's report has stated should have been prevented, will not happen again, given that her responses show that she is clearly exercised about the duty of care for prisoners in custody. (AQT 290/16-21)

Ms Sugden: To be honest, I cannot really answer that question. We have received the Prisoner Ombudsman's report of late, and there are lessons to be learnt and recommendations to be put in place. I certainly hope that this will not be the case again, and my sympathies extend to everybody involved in these tragic circumstances and their families.

Moving forward, we have to have a robust system to ensure that it does not take place again. That starts with looking at the recommendations that the Prisoner Ombudsman has put forward and at the wider issues that I have discussed at length in the Chamber today. We cannot look at these issues in isolation. If prison officers are to give better care to prisoners, they need to be supported as well. That is why I am always keen to package the two together. It is an important area of work. We must stop families losing people; it is not good enough and it is something that I am keen to address along with the Health Minister, who has just joined us in the Chamber.

Mr Murphy: I thank the Minister for her response. I listen to what she says, but of course there is a duty of care to the prisoner on the prison authorities. I welcome and appreciate the conversations she may have with the Minister of Health in that regard, but the Southern Trust also has a role in this. Can the Minister ensure that it will play its role in making sure that there are no further instances like this in prison?

Ms Sugden: I do not like to speak on behalf of the Health Minister, who is sitting in the Chamber. We have met on a number of occasions recently, and I think it is fair to say that we are both committed to looking at the issue of healthcare in prisons and for prisoners. As you rightly say, we have a duty of care towards prisoners, but we also have a duty of care towards prison officers. I am keen to address this by taking very much a parallel approach, because they will all be better impacted and we will see the benefit of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): We can take a quick question.

Maghaberry Prison: Drugs Amnesty

T6. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice for her views on the recent drugs amnesty at Maghaberry prison, to state what prompted the amnesty and to list the drugs that were handed in. (AQT 291/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Anyone who takes illicit substances puts themselves at risk. It is no secret that drugs are a problem in prisons as well as outside them. We will continue to face that problem day on day. Governors will use a number of tools at their disposal to keep prisoners safe, and that can include an amnesty, which will protect life, so that we can, perhaps, seize or take drugs out of circulation. The governor at Maghaberry used the limited amnesty for those reasons, because there was a concern around particular drugs that had harmed prisoners. That amnesty almost had a dual purpose. It was about taking drugs out of circulation, but it was also done to raise awareness among prisoners that the drugs are dangerous.

When a governor takes an approach like that, it really does suggest and highlight how dangerous drugs are. If we want to ensure the well-being of prisoners, that needs to be raised with them, as well as trying to take drugs out of our prisons.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Time is up. I ask Members to take their ease, please, while the Speaker takes the Chair.

(*Mr Speaker in the Chair*)

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Health

Breast Cancer: Urgent Referral Waiting Times

Mr Speaker: Mr Mark Durkan has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Health. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually from their seat. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, following a departmental report, which indicated that over 93% of patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area waited more than the target of 14 days for a first consultation following an urgent referral for suspected breast cancer, to outline what immediate intervention her Department is taking to address cancer waiting times.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I am aware that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is experiencing challenges in meeting the 14-day target for urgent referrals for suspected breast cancer. I regret any delays that are being experienced, and I wish to assure you that everything is being done to ensure that those referred are being seen as soon as possible. The provisional figures for September show a marked improvement in performance in the Southern Trust, with 77.6% of urgent referrals seen within the 14-day target. That is as a result of trusts working together to provide additional clinics. In addition, the trust has extended its working hours, and that has facilitated the operation of a fourth breast clinic.

Increasing pressures on cancer services, due to an ageing population and increased referrals, inevitably create a pressure on our health services. For example, between 2014-15 and 2015-16, an additional 10,348 people were referred as red flag because of suspected cancer. Of those 10,348, over 3,000 were red-flag referrals for suspected breast cancer. That is why we need to reform the health and social care system. Longer term, we need to ensure that we have a sustainable breast service in place to ensure that patients are seen within the timescale set. A workshop is due to be held on 26 October with all trusts to identify longer-term solutions for providing a sustainable breast service across the North, given the staffing challenges in breast services right across the piece. Despite those challenges, it is positive that the five-year survival rates for breast cancer — the most common cancer in women — continue to be better than those in England, Scotland and Wales, and I am determined that that trend will continue.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for coming to the House and for her answer. In the light of the awful figures we heard today; the increase in the number of people suffering from cancer, as she outlined; the data gaps in treatment; the fact that people here do not have the same access to life-improving drugs as those living with

cancer in other jurisdictions; and the concerns about the workforce for cancer treatment, does she accept that we should have a cancer strategy for Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: I have raised that issue in the House before and discussed it on the back of a debate in the Chamber, where I said clearly that I would look towards developing a cancer strategy. I think that what we have seen over the last number of months, particularly in the Southern Trust area, has been shocking. I think that it is unacceptable that any woman has to wait any longer than is absolutely necessary. The targets are challenging, and they are challenging for a reason. That is to make sure that we deliver the very best outcomes that we possibly can for any woman who finds herself referred for breast cancer assessment.

We need to continue to do more. I think that this also points to the fact that we need to continue to deliver real, meaningful transformation. I listened with interest this morning to some of the commentators in the media. What Margaret Carr from Cancer Research said was so apt and so appropriate. She said that waiting lists are a symptom of a bad system — a system that is not working. That is what I have been consistently saying to the House, and what I am setting out in my transformation piece is how we are going to deliver better outcomes for people. That is the real test that we need to apply to ourselves in delivering better outcomes for all those people who need any element of our health and social care system.

Mrs Dobson: These waiting times are symptomatic of the human tragedy engulfing the entire Northern Ireland health service. Such shocking performances would see heads roll in other regions, yet again we have a Minister who refuses to take any responsibility. I pay tribute to the amazing staff — the doctors and nurses who are working day in, day out. Will the Minister detail how many of the 215 out of 224 suspected breast cancer patients in the Southern Trust who were not seen within the target of 14 days were subsequently given a breast cancer diagnosis?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, I do not think it is acceptable that we have the situation that we have. As chair of the all-party working group on cancer, the Member is very aware of the workforce challenges that there are, and which were a particular problem in the Southern Trust area. As I said, this all points to the reason why we need to transform health and social care. We have to deliver better outcomes. We have a responsibility as an Executive to deliver better outcomes, and I am certainly up for that challenge. In the next number of weeks, I will announce my direction of travel for what we need to do differently to deliver those better outcomes.

Just so that everyone is very clear, this is a report that I published last Thursday. I published the report and the statistics, because I think that we need to keep putting in the public domain where the health service needs to do better. I published these statistics for that reason and will continue to do so. It is so important that we tackle waiting lists. I said from the very first day I took office that we need to tackle waiting lists, transform health and social care and give mental health parity of esteem alongside physical health. Those are the challenges that I have. I took my position in the Executive knowing that I have many challenges, but I am certainly up for delivering better outcomes. I look forward to all the parties in the House working with me to deliver the transformation that we need to deliver.

Ms P Bradley (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health): I thank the Minister for her answers thus far, and Mr Durkan for tabling the question. I also welcome the Minister's views on a cancer strategy, which is something that I have been fighting for. I listened to the piece on the radio this morning and heard someone saying that we had been a victim of our own success. In a way that is good news, because people are becoming more aware, but that is no comfort to the people who are waiting.

From what I can see, the Belfast Trust seems to be pretty much on time with many of its appointments. Is there any way of sharing services in the trust to alleviate some of the pressures? On the back of that, I know that breast cancer is not the only area where we have severe waiting lists; urology is another one. Is she going to take steps in that area also?

Mrs O'Neill: One of the things that I have been doing is making sure that the trusts start to work more in partnership together. There should be no competition between trusts; it should be about the best outcomes and how they can work with a neighbouring trust to deliver better outcomes for people. There has been a turnaround in the Southern Trust. It is important to say that, in this month alone, over 95% of urgent referrals in the Southern Trust have been seen within the 14-day target.

It is important that no Member of the Assembly has a knee-jerk reaction to media reports. I am not for one minute suggesting that the Member opposite has done that. The report was published last Thursday. I put it out there in the public domain last Thursday, and I made it very clear that the statistics are not good enough. I said that in the Department's accompanying press release.

At the end of September, the Belfast Trust's 14-day performance was at 99%. There is 1% still to go there, and that is what we need to work towards. The Northern Trust was at 99%. The South Eastern Trust was at 100%. The Southern Trust, obviously, has had a problem, and it was at 78% at the end of September. However, I am told that, as of today, it is up to 95% based on its performance of the last week. The Western Trust is at 100%. This is testimony to the clinicians and the people who are working on the front line delivering first-class health services. I know for a fact from my engagement with those people that they are devastated whenever they hear knee-jerk reactions to the service that they are providing. These people are providing excellent services, and those are the targets that they are meeting. Do we fall down in some of the other categories? Yes, the health service does, and that is why we need to do more.

Mr Sheehan: I welcome the fact that the Minister has confirmed the most up-to-date position on the red-flag referrals and the targets that have been met. Given that this is breast cancer awareness month, what is her Department doing to raise awareness of breast cancer?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. This is breast cancer awareness month, and it is important that we continue to raise awareness. The figures I referred to and the fact that over 10,000 more people have been referred show that the awareness campaigns are working. The Public Health Agency is urging all women to be breast aware and to think about attending screening when invited. I use this opportunity again today to encourage all women to do so and to consider attending. We all know that prevention and early intervention are key in saving lives

from breast cancer. Regular breast screening reduces the risk of death from breast cancer. On average, one life will be saved from breast cancer for every 200 women screened.

I encourage all women, particularly those over 70, to consider contacting their local breast screening unit to arrange an appointment every three years. Many women do not realise that the risk of breast cancer continues to increase with age. It is so important that we continue to raise awareness. Some good things are happening in our system, including the fact that, despite all the challenges we have, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer is better here than in England, Scotland and Wales. That does not mean we can rest on our laurels; it means that something is working and is good, so we need to do more of that and more of the same. I think the fact that so many more people are being referred into the system is because the awareness is starting to really kick in and people are starting to take it on board.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for her answer. This is not the only area where I have been advised there are issues with red flag referrals. For example, I have recently been advised that red flag referrals for ovarian cancer are also taking longer than the two weeks, often taking up to three or four weeks. What can the Minister do to reassure people that they will be seen within the two-week period? What specific work has been done to fully implement the service framework for cancer prevention, treatment and care?

Mrs O'Neill: I will work in reverse. We are reviewing the service framework, and I hope to have that information in November, which will then allow us to decide and best inform how we take forward a potential cancer strategy, if we decide that is the best course of action. I do not have statistics with me on ovarian cancer, but I am very happy to provide them to the Member. It would be the same scenario if we were in the situation of people being referred and not being seen within the targets. As I say, I believe in these targets. They are very challenging for a reason. We should never reduce the targets. We should continue to keep the pressure on and make sure the service responds to the need. That is the challenge for me as a Health Minister.

I keep saying this over and over again, but I cannot say it enough: if we do not change how we do things, we are not going to deliver better outcomes. That is certainly what I am committed to doing in the months and years ahead.

Mr Carroll: The Minister might have seen the recent 'Nolan Live' show where a member of the audience detailed a horrific wait for the treatment of abscesses in her child's mouth. That is one of many cases we have seen. Further investigation shows that waiting times for west Belfast are significantly longer than in other areas for treatment for a range of ailments. Will the Minister detail her plans to try to address that postcode lottery?

Mr Speaker: Before the Minister comes to answer the question, I will say that the question for urgent oral answer was on breast cancer. It is for the Minister to decide whether she will answer that.

Mrs O'Neill: I know you are new to the House, so I will be kind insofar as to say that that comes back to the bigger picture of waiting lists. We have to deal with the waiting lists issue, and the only way we will tackle that is by transforming health and social Care. Many bodies

of work have been done over the last number of years. Things have gone well, other things have not gone so well and some things have not been implemented the way they should be. I have received a panel report that looks at the burning platform that is health and social care. I intend over the next number of weeks to set out my stall on how I am going to deliver better outcomes for every individual. That is what we should be about. Whether it is dental waiting lists, referrals for autism assessment or breast cancer referrals, it does not matter what it is. If it is happening to you, it is the most important thing in your life. We need to get to the point where we have appropriate referrals in a timely manner so that people are assessed and getting the help they need. That is the transformation and priority piece I am involving myself in.

Mr Allister: It seems to me that the fact that these figures got so bad suggests there was some deficiency in the departmental or other oversight, because surely the purpose of oversight is to identify and arrest the trends. Therefore, is anything new being done through oversight to identify and arrest such trends in this trust or anywhere else?

Mrs O'Neill: The problems we are talking about today in the Southern Trust are on breast cancer referrals, but I have consistently said that waiting lists across the piece, no matter what someone is being referred for, are not acceptable, are not tolerable and cannot continue. They have continued to grow year on year, and one of the main reasons they have continued to grow is because we have an outdated system that is trying to deliver 21st-century health and social care, and it is not happening. We need to reform the system to allow us to get better outcomes. I want to get to the point at which we can stand in the House and talk about real, positive service developments that make a real difference to people as opposed to talking continually about the negativity around waiting lists.

3.45 pm

As I said, it is the most challenging thing for you as an individual if you are on a waiting list and are in pain, or if you have child who is ill. For whatever reason, you may be on a waiting list, and we have to get waiting lists down. I look forward to working with every Member to make sure that we get to that point. We need to invest in health and social care. We need to invest in people's outcomes. We need to tackle the root causes of why people get sick in the first place. The correlation between deprivation and outcomes, whether that be cancer, tooth decay or many other conditions, is so stark. We need to tackle it with and invest in early intervention and prevention, and we need cross-departmental working. The new-style Programme for Government will be a lot more fit for purpose to allow us to do that and to deliver many more better outcomes.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for her responses so far. Minister, I hope that you will agree that, on the day when there is a debate about openness and transparency, the very fact that you published these figures shows that you as a Minister and others in the Executive want to be open and transparent. I am sure that you are equally concerned about the issue in that trust. Will you join me in expressing disappointment that some today have wanted to sensationalise the issue by suggesting that heads will roll when you have just indicated in your answer that survival rates in Northern Ireland are higher than anywhere else in the UK?

Mrs O'Neill: It is really important that there is never a knee-jerk approach. As I said, I published these figures last Thursday, and it has taken until today, six days later, for the matter to come to the House as a question for urgent oral answer, which begs the question about someone's genuine approach to dealing with the issue. There is genuine concern out there about waiting lists and referrals, which I accept. I met Cancer Focus yesterday, and this is one of the issues that we discussed. There are genuine concerns that we need to address. Nobody should wait any longer than the ministerial targets that have been set out, and, if that continues to happen, that is where we have to take real and meaningful action. Those trusts are working hard. I think that the Southern Trust has turned the picture around. It has faced down the challenges that it has had. Is it acceptable when it happens? No, it is not, but we have to keep driving change forward and making sure that people work together and deliver better outcomes.

Mr Butler: I thank Mark Durkan for tabling the question for urgent oral answer, and I thank the Minister for coming in to address it. I welcome those statistics being published last week, which do not make good reading for anybody. I agree with Dr O'Hagan, who this morning described the situation for urgent cancer treatment as "horrendous". Mr Durkan asks about the immediate interventions that your Department will take. My colleague wrote to you on a specific issue being faced by the Southern Trust, and your answer referred to long-term solutions. Today, you also referred to solutions in relation to sustainable breast cancer clinics and services. What are your solutions, Minister, especially on workforce planning? You talked about the long-term plan —

Mr Speaker: I ask Mr Butler to come to his question.

Mr Butler: Yes, certainly. It is around workforce planning and the determination that you say you have to give us solutions.

Mrs O'Neill: I am always trying to find solutions. I am always trying to deliver better outcomes for people. We will do that by transforming how we deliver health and social care, so, regardless of what we are talking about, it is about delivering better outcomes. It is about early intervention and prevention. Some challenges, particularly in the Southern Trust, have been about workforce planning, but that is not specific to the Southern Trust. Right across the board, there is difficulty with the recruitment of radiologists and consultants. Despite the fact that the Southern Trust went out to recruitment, it was not able to be successful in recruiting anybody to those posts. It is out again to recruitment, and, hopefully, that will start to alleviate the situation in the trust. In the meantime, we are working with the other trusts to make sure that they are able to provide additional clinics and to support people and have them assessed within the timescales, particularly the 14-day target. As I said, the figures now speak for themselves on being able to turn the picture around.

Workforce planning in general is a major issue right across health and social care. It is something that I certainly want to tackle in the time ahead. If we are to transform health and social care and have more investment in the community, we have to make sure that the workforce are fit for purpose and supported, and are doing the job that they do best. That job is to engage with, treat and help people. I am certainly committed to ensuring that we have an overarching workforce plan, which will be key alongside

service delivery, service reconfiguration and a change in how we do things. Key to the success of all that is being able to make sure that the workforce are brought along with you and that they are up for the challenges and the change that needs to happen.

Mr Lyttle: The Executive should not be using this as an opportunity to cite openness and transparency, given that a question for urgent oral answer was required to allow the Assembly to scrutinise the startling statistics on breast cancer consultations. It is also my understanding, as the result of an answer provided to me today, that there is a 31-week wait for urgent heart consultations in another trust. A frequent explanation given for such problems is a difficulty in the recruitment and retention of senior consultants. What are the reasons for that difficulty, and what is being done to address them immediately?

Mrs O'Neill: On your first point about the Executive using the opportunity to talk about openness and transparency, it has taken others six days to bring a question for urgent oral answer to the House. I published this information last Thursday, and I would much — *[Interruption.]* I published the information six days ago. Let us be very clear: not one Member from the Opposition Benches has written to me, asked me a question, emailed me or called to my office — not one person.

Mr Dobson: I did.

Mrs O'Neill: Not after I published the results on Thursday. Mrs Dobson has, in the past, raised the issue of breast cancer referrals; I will certainly give her that. Not one Member, including Mark Durkan, the member of the Health Committee who tabled the question for urgent oral answer, has asked me to talk about this issue. I published the information because it is better to have it in the public domain.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Minister to address her remarks through the Chair.

Mrs O'Neill: Gabh mo leithscéal. I brought the information into the public domain because that is where it should be. I am committed to making sure that we deliver better outcomes for all women who are referred for breast cancer assessment. I will not be found wanting in my priority of dealing with waiting lists and bringing them down, and I will not be found wanting in transforming health and social care. I hope that the Opposition table as many questions for urgent oral answer as possible so that we can talk about every issue, because I am committed to driving forward transformation, and I hope that they assist me with that.

Mr Beggs: The Minister keeps talking about the importance of transforming healthcare and making changes. The last Member to ask a question talked about transparency. When will Members see the Bengoa report, which she has had in her possession for several months?

Mrs O'Neill: In a couple of weeks.

Mr Swann: The Minister has talked a lot about openness and transparency. The Opposition have tabled a debate lasting two and a half hours on health issues for 18 October. If she can be as open and transparent as possible, it would be beneficial.

Mrs O'Neill: Brilliant.

Private Members' Business

Executive Openness and Transparency

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at ongoing problems with openness and transparency from the Executive and the implications for public trust and confidence. — [Dr Farry.]

Which amendments were:

At end insert

“; and calls for the creation of a standards commissioner for the Executive to investigate alleged breaches of the ministerial code.”. — [Dr Farry.]

At end insert

“; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to acknowledge these concerns and to outline to the Assembly how they will ensure, in the future, that the mandate of the Assembly is respected.”. — [Mr Agnew.]

Mrs Little Pengelly: Thank you for the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is a little sad that some of the Members who were here this morning are not present in the Chamber to hear my contribution. It is sad and disappointing because of the tone and attitude of the debate. The scoffing and sneering of those on the Benches opposite — the Opposition, the second opposition and the “I can't believe it's not the opposition” — this morning was a sad reflection on politics in Northern Ireland.

We are committed to positive politics. I spoke to many thousands of people, and they want us to deal constructively with real issues, such as the one that we just spoke about, namely breast cancer, as well as other issues related to health, education and affordable childcare. Those are the issues that matter to people. Trying to scoff and engage in faux laughter at points made by people in the House, as demonstrated this morning, or rising repeatedly during speeches to make interventions designed to be destructive, is not what politics should be about. It should be about respect, and there is lots to reflect on from the debate this morning.

Today's motion should be a bit of a wake-up call. People need to realise that, if you opt out of being in the Executive, you are not in the Executive: you will not have the same influence on Government policy, and you will not get the same access to information as the Ministers who have to formulate that policy. That is a real issue. There needs to be a wake-up call for people in the House that things have changed. They have changed for a reason: parties have opted out of being in the Executive.

A point was raised earlier about Assembly powers and scrutiny. Scrutiny is necessary and right, but we have a range of scrutiny mechanisms in the Assembly, the Executive and Northern Ireland; Ministers are scrutinised by Departments, and the Assembly has a role. However, it is set down in our constitution and in the mechanisms and structures of this body that the Assembly has certain duties and that the Executive have certain duties. There is a separation of powers, and that is fundamental in constitutions.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. She makes a valid point about the scrutiny powers of the Assembly, but how does she suggest that the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister executes those powers if the First Minister and the deputy First Minister hold it in such contempt as to not attend it for over a whole year?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Little Pengelly: Thank you, Speaker. The Member does not live in a bubble, and he did not live in a bubble when there were serious issues happening in the Assembly and the Executive. Everybody was aware of those issues, and there was a commitment to try to get through them. The circumstance that he has spoken about was placed in that context at that time. The Member should welcome that the parties in Government have said very clearly, "We want to improve mechanisms. We want to work together constructively. We are listening to people who want constructive and positive politics, and that is what we are going to deliver".

I have heard some strange contributions in the Chamber today about who has the greatest control and who is answerable to whom. It would be useful for us to have some basic understanding of the Executive powers, the Assembly powers and the prerogative powers, which is one of the oldest traditions in the great British constitution, yet, apparently, it is as if some people in the House just woke up and discovered that it existed. I think that Claire admitted that she was not aware of the background to the issue, but it seemed as though, to Mike Nesbitt and others, this power that has been around for many decades suddenly appeared from nowhere. Members need to understand that there is a division.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that, while there should be scrutiny, all Members should be respectful. I honestly think that the debate this morning and earlier this afternoon was a disgrace, given the lack of respect, scoffing and sneering. That is not what people want, and that is why people are not voting for it. They are voting for those parties that say, "We are going to work at this, and we are going to deliver better outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland".

Mr Allister: Ah, the kingdom of "Marlene". What a dark and secret place where boundless energy is expended on keeping secret their hidden things of darkness. There was no better example than the recent abuse over the amendment to the Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order 2016, when the Executive Office went through all sorts of contortions to seek to conceal why, when and how the law was changed. They took it to the point that, when an investigative journalist, Mr McBride, asked what legislation they were using, they provided an incomplete answer, "The Civil Service (Amendment) Order", without daring to reveal that it was the order made two weeks before in 2016. Why? Because they wanted to conceal that they had used the Executive prerogative powers.

The mischief here of, course, is not the making of the appointment — many would say that the Executive need all the help that they can get from people like Mr Gordon — but the manner in which they surreptitiously changed the law and, Henry VIII-style, rewrote it. We think that we are Members of a legislative Assembly. That cons us into believing that we make the laws, but, oh no, not when,

Henry VIII-style, Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness decide that they will make the law.

They will not even tell the Assembly. Indeed, they will go to great lengths to conceal it from the Assembly. The truth has to be dragged out of them. Then we have protestations about anyone daring to ask questions about openness and transparency.

4.00 pm

The appointment of Mr Gordon is pregnant with irony. One of Ian Paisley's most memorable assaults on journalists was when, agitated by the lawful use of freedom of information legislation, he turned and said that it was being abused by lazy journalists. Of course, one of the lazy journalists, in his terms, was David Gordon, who used it more than most to great effect. The irony is that the *bête noire* is now the spin doctor of this Executive.

Some remarkable things were said during the debate. Mr Edwin Poots told us that it was not the job of the Government to reveal information. Mr Irwin, reading from his script, told us, "We won the election, so just suck it up". There was nothing in the manifestos of Sinn Féin and its partner the DUP that said, "We want a mandate for secrecy, chicanery and tyranny". No. There were protestations in those manifestos of delivering for people through the Assembly and through the Executive but not a mention that their primary purpose, function and focus would be on concealing that which it did not suit them to reveal. It is abundantly clear that this Executive have abused their powers enormously —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Allister: — hence the sensible amendment from Mr Agnew that we need a process to hold to account those who abuse the ministerial code.

Ms Hanna: This has been a timely discussion. Everybody is getting used to the new dispensation of Government and Opposition, and it is useful to shed light on some of the less constructive practices of the Government.

The need for transparency is not unique to Northern Ireland. Everywhere, people have a right to know the processes behind the decisions that are made and what their money is being spent on; and, no matter how cranky the Executive are about being left in government on their own, they have to play by those rules.

During the debate, Members outlined some of the gaps and failings of the Executive. Something of a greatest hits of poor governance was introduced by various speakers. We have discussed delay after delay and excuse after excuse on the NAMA inquiry, including the Government parties joining forces to water down an Assembly motion. We have discussed the use of royal prerogative to appoint more advisers despite the provision being available to appoint them and the failure to acknowledge the substance of concerns. It is not about the inequality of arms; yet more spin doctors. It is not about the headhunting of somebody who we all acknowledge is talented. It is about the fact that many issues, policies and strategies have not come out of the Executive because of inertia and dysfunction but that it was on this issue that you chose to jump the legislative queue. Perhaps, if it had been about something that affected real people rather than feathering this Government's nest, people would not be so annoyed.

We discussed the secret Brexit report and the two stories we are getting on that. The First Minister is telling us that she knew nothing about it. The deputy First Minister is telling us that he was not allowed to release it because of that. We have discussed government by press release and the rush always to the click of cameras instead of to the scrutiny afforded by the Chamber. That happened with the paramilitary report; it happened with the filleting of the NAMA motion, and it happens in the week-after-week refusal to meaningfully answer questions that are not just softballs from the Back Benches during Question Time.

We discussed the failures of a bad budgeting process, which is getting worse with the withholding of even the in-year bid information, which is a key tool for Government scrutiny. We discussed the fact that they have not even got their stories straight. In answers to questions from the SDLP, the Communities and Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Ministers explicitly told us that we are now in a different environment with the introduction of an official Opposition; therefore, processes have changed. When the deputy First Minister was asked the same question, he said that there was obviously a problem with the June monitoring round. He said:

"we will do everything in our power to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Committee",

so that:

*"Committees are accorded the respect they deserve."
— [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 117,
p109, col 1].*

In his contribution, Mr Poots at least had the honesty to tell us that information inhibits delivery and that it is the Opposition's job to force the information out of Government.

An honourable mention has to go to —

Mr Carroll: Will the Member give way?

Ms Hanna: I will in a moment. An honourable mention has to go to the walking exercise in bad governance that is the social investment fund. Again, the rebuttals deliberately miss the point. Nobody in the Chamber denies the need that exists in our communities, but nobody in the Government will explain why that money is not subject to open tenders, why it is an invite-only fund, why there are no transparent criteria and how the multilayered conflicts of interest are being managed, let alone how people who are affected by paramilitarism are supposed to have confidence when people who are inextricably linked to live paramilitarism are being funded to address their social problems.

Members have correctly pointed out the arrogance of this Government in not sending one single Minister to mind the shop — we have a few more Members in. Mr Swann referred to the empty glass; I see that even it has scarpered. It was at least as empty as the contributors, but at least it was transparent. *[Laughter.]* Members of the parties that were in the Executive were lectured that we would not get that information because we are no longer in the Executive. We did not get that information when we were in the Executive. We were given key documents minutes before those meetings. For those Members who want to tell us that we have never had it so good governmentally and critique the UUP/SDLP Executive —

Mr Carroll: Will the Member give way?

Ms Hanna: No, I have a few things to get through. Members who want to critique the UUP/SDLP Executive in the early years of government neglect to mention that their parties were outside using every tool, parliamentary and otherwise, to tear down that Executive.

Sinn Féin has not tired of telling us how, now that we have lost the election, we should just go home and not make any political points for four years because that is exactly how the Opposition conducts itself in the Dáil. If that is not partitionist, I do not know what is. *[Laughter.]* Mr Lyons said that they are open to transparency if we would just bring forward proposals. That is what we are doing; we are bringing forward proposals. Let us have the NAMA inquiry, give us the in-year monitoring round and support our reasonable proposal to enforce the ministerial code.

I do not have time to go over all the arguments from the Back Benches that are usually one of three or four —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a conclusion.

Ms Hanna: — simple categories, but I would say that this Executive would make members of the pre-1972 Stormont Executive blush.

Mr Attwood: I remind people what Mr Agnew's amendment states. It calls for:

"the creation of a standards commissioner for the Executive to investigate alleged breaches of the ministerial code."

If there is a defining feature of democracy and the best practice of democracy in this part of Ireland over the last 40 years, it is the fact that we have oversight and accountability. There was once a time when we did not have it on policing, so we had to go off and create it through Patten and the Policing Board. There was once a time that we did not have it on police complaints, so we had to go off and create the Police Ombudsman. There was once a time that we did not have it on housing and we had to create the Housing Executive, and so on and so forth.

Mr E McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will shortly.

The defining feature of the best practice of democracy, after the abuses of democracy in this part of Ireland, has been oversight and accountability across the full range of public policy.

We know that, year in and year out, the DUP resisted all that accountability and transparency. The question is why Sinn Féin, which tends to make an argument that it embraces these new models of accountability, has resisted Steven Agnew's amendment, which creates ministerial accountability in a way that we did not have before. I understand that it is in the DNA of the DUP to resist accountability because it has done it for decades.

It is allegedly not in the DNA of Sinn Féin, yet today it will vote down a quite moderate measure that would see accountability in respect of the ministerial code. Why? I give way to the Member.

Mr E McCann: The Member referred to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive being created in an open way

as a result of the civil rights campaign in the late 1960s. Is it not ironic that, right now, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is being dismantled in secret and its powers handed over to the Strategic Investment Board — a fact that we know only if we have contacts in the Housing Executive, deeply upset about it, giving us the information? Is that not ironic in the middle of a debate on transparency and accountability?

Mr Attwood: It is.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Attwood: It is also ironic that people are trying to drive a coach and horses through the good work of the Housing Executive over 40 or 50 years. Yes, it lost its way in some ways, but that is no excuse for the DUP to drive a coach and horses through its good authority.

There is also an enormous inconsistency between this week and last week. Remember what the DUP and Sinn Féin voted through last week:

“support ... all efforts to uncover the truth ... and committing to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations.”

Those were allegedly the standards of the DUP and Sinn Féin when it comes to NAMA. Yet, when they have an opportunity, through Steven Agnew’s amendment, to support all efforts to uncover the truth and commit to full cooperation with all ongoing investigations, such as would happen if the commissioner for standards had that power, what do they do? They vote it down. Will they please explain? If they were so keen on those principles last week, why not this week?

The most astounding speech came, as is often the case, from Ms Little Pengelly. Consistent with all DUP Members who spoke today, she said that this is a consequence of going into opposition: “This is how government does its business, because you decide to go into opposition”. What an affront to those who have struggled for democracy to tell them that, if they go into opposition, they go into the darkness, and so do truth and public accountability. The message from the DUP and Sinn Féin — I will be very clear about it — is this: “We won, so we do”. Whether it is on parties in the Chamber or on the people out there, whether it is in respect of Brexit, NAMA, Fresh Start, the Budget or legacy — that will come next — the DUP, Sinn Féin and the British Government will impose their will. They will impose it when it comes to legacy, just as they are trying to do in respect to all those other issues.

I do not think that I have ever quoted him, but I am going to quote him today. Forty years ago, somebody gave the Richard Dimbleby lecture. It was, of all people, Lord Hailsham, who, wherever he may be, will have a smile on his face, because he anticipated what we see happening in the sort of democracy that the DUP and Sinn Féin have imposed. He talked about “executive dominance” and an “elective dictatorship”. We see the reality of that in the conduct of this debate and the practice of democracy as the DUP and Sinn Féin see it.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Ford to conclude and wind up on the motion. The Member will have 10 minutes.

Mr Ford: My colleagues and I tabled the motion as a relatively broad-based motion, not seeking to prescribe specific issues but to highlight them and to allow for a

wide-ranging, high-level debate. That is what Stephen Farry said when he was making the proposal. It is absolutely clear that we got that kind of open, high-level debate, in addition to some specific points. Well, we got it from this end of the Chamber; we certainly did not get it from the other end.

Mr Carroll: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ford: Be quick.

Mr Carroll: Does the Member agree that it is highly ironic that, in a debate about openness and transparency, one party was completely shut out and not allowed to speak?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I will have to leave Mr Carroll to raise that with you, Mr Speaker. I could not possibly intrude on your good offices towards me by agreeing, although it illustrates something of the rules in the Chamber, where speaking rights are based solely on numbers rather than on variety of ideas, with the result that certain people get much less opportunity. Given the paucity of contributions from the other end of the Chamber, perhaps that requires some re-examination by the Business Committee.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way.

4.15 pm

Mr Attwood: Would the Member be interested to know that, when other parties in the Business Committee tried to adjust speaking order so that the smaller parties would have speaking rights and be heard today, it was the DUP and Sinn Féin that voted down that proposal?

Mr McCartney: That is wrong. On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was on the Business Committee when that went through. Sinn Féin voted that the smaller parties would have speaking rights, so Mr Attwood should be asked to withdraw. He is being economical with the truth.

Mr Speaker: I do not believe that is a point of order.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The reason I am right is that that was a decision of the recent Business Committee, which Mr McCartney does not sit on. It is a matter of record that the new Business Committee voted — the DUP and Sinn Féin — to suppress the rights of smaller parties.

Mr Speaker: The minutes of the Committee meeting are available for Members to peruse.

Mr Ford: Mr Speaker, I have lost 45 seconds to points of order.

Clearly, when the motion referred to problems with openness and transparency, two parties in the Chamber wanted to show us the problems they have with openness and transparency. That is being shown clearly, as a number of Members have said, by the ministerial absence from the Chamber for the debate, despite the fact that the motion and one of the amendments specifically call for Executive action and the presumption was there would be a Minister to respond. At this end of the Chamber, there was genuine discussion, but, at that end, there was complete refusal to engage, shown by the refusal to accept interventions, which does nothing to promote the concept that this is a debating chamber. Indeed, the contributions have been summed up by a number of others as “We

won" or actually "We won, so get lost". I think Mr Allister's phrase was something along the lines of "We won, so suck it up". It is not a concept of democracy to say that an election result determines everything for five years. Democracy is about engagement, openness, transparency and everything that has not been shown by the Executive parties today.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. Mrs Little Pengelly made the point about people being respectful: does the Member agree that it shows complete disrespect to the Chamber when Ministers make their announcements via press release, rather than bringing a statement to the House? That would not be tolerated in places like Westminster, to which the DUP looks for guidance.

Mr Ford: I agree —

Mr McCartney: David did it.

Mr Ford: I will happily give way to Mr McCartney if he wishes to give a specific example of when I may have done that.

Mr McCartney: You did it on a number of occasions on prisons, particularly Maghaberry. That was published before —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCartney, hold on. Any Member who gets an intervention should address their remarks through the Chair. Mr Ford.

Mr Ford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will try to make some progress.

Those of us at this end of the Chamber have been accused of discussing issues that are of concern only in "the bubble". Are NAMA and the allegations of potential corruption in this society matters for the bubble? Is the fact that the Bengoa report, prepared with all-party inclusion in discussions, has been sitting since the early part of the summer on a Minister's desk without being published not a matter of public concern, given the question for urgent oral answer we had earlier? Is the cover-up of the Budget and the failure to engage in any meaningful discussion with the Committees appointed to advise and assist Ministers not an issue of concern? Nothing has been done about that. Is DARD moving its headquarters to Ballykelly in a way that is clearly unravelling as the Executive rush around desperately trying to find anybody who is prepared to take a desk in a building that is being built with no business case not an issue of concern? Is the expenditure through SIF, which was carried out without proper due process and not by the Departments with proper responsibility, not an issue of public concern? Of course they are all issues of public concern that two parties wish to cover up. Is the use of the royal prerogative when legislation exists for the appointment of civil servants and special advisers not an issue of public concern? We could have historical lectures on how the royal prerogative originated, but this is the 21st century.

I understood from Mr Lynch's contribution, referring to the three opposition parties, that they opposed everything in the Executive. He did not take an intervention from me because that was not the case. The way in which I treated the Committee as a Minister was anything but the way he tried to present it.

Mr Lyons said that we should not expect others to do the job for us. No, we expect others to provide the information that they are duly bound to provide in the way in which

our structures of government are set up, and then we can do our job of scrutinising properly. This place is not Westminster. This place is set up in a different way, which is supposed to be about partnership, consensus and working together, and that has been completely ignored.

Mr Poots somehow managed to work in Magilligan prison. Let me tell Mr Poots what happened with accommodation at Magilligan —

Dr Farry: He is not here.

Mr Ford: With the bad manners customary of a number who contributed today, he is not here.

The Prison Service recently set out a plan for capital redevelopment, which was praised for its effectiveness and how well constructed it was by a Finance Minister who, at the time, was a member of the DUP, but no money was released to do the essential building work in any of the prisons. There was a consultation on the review team's proposals, which would have closed down Magilligan. When I did consultations in the DOJ, they were open, inclusive and genuine, so, as a result, that proposal was reversed because a good case was made.

The Justice Committee was informed all the way through, just as it was informed about monitoring rounds, even when they were not part of normal Executive processes, because, in the early days, the DOJ was ring-fenced. So I will not take any lectures from Edwin Poots or anybody else as to how the DOJ ran.

The fact that we have had people attempting to pretend that this place can be Westminster, when all our history since 1972 is that this place cannot be a mini-Westminster, is a clear example of their attempt to cover up, although I noticed that even Sinn Féin did not manage excuses like Westminster.

We also need to ensure that we see that the way in which the institutions were set up in 1998 are observed in spirit and in practice and not just as a letter of the law that is largely ignored. *[Interruption.]*

Some Members: There is a Minister.

Mr Ford: We have a Minister — is that not amazing? I can no longer say the line that was coming up next; there must be a DUP spy in the Gallery with binoculars. The fact that there has not been a single Minister in the House until the last two minutes of a debate that lasted an hour and three quarters is an example of the contempt with which the Executive are treating not only the opposition but the people of Northern Ireland and the institutions, and the legislation that set up these institutions to provide a different way of doing government, which is built on partnership between the Executive and the Committees and the Executive and the Assembly. That is what this place is supposed to be about, and that is absolutely what they are not doing.

Whilst it is very welcome to see Mr Weir finally arrive, for the purpose of this debate, there was no First Minister, no deputy First Minister, no junior Ministers, no DUP Minister until the last two minutes and no Sinn Féin Ministers. The Justice Minister was not even present, yet any one of them could have responded to a motion that calls for Executive action. Any one of them could have been here.

Some people may be too busy, and I thought that the Ulster Unionists would have given us a quick quip about

drinking champagne in Birmingham, but perhaps we have overdone that analogy. If the First Minister and the deputy First Minister were not available, any Minister could have done it, yet they just sent out their Back-Benchers to read spurious speeches, refuse interventions and prove absolutely the point that we are making collectively in the Chamber about the lack of openness and transparency, and the fundamental change to close matters down, which has happened since the election in May. That said, some of us are well aware of how little was shared within the Executive at the time —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Ford: Mr Speaker, I did lose 45 seconds for a point of order.

Mr Speaker: You do not get an extra minute.

Mr Ford: That is the reality of the way in which the Executive have been set up. The interesting point in the next few minutes, as we walk through the Ayes Lobby in support of two amendments and a motion, will be to see how many Ministers, who are currently hiding in their rooms around this Building, turn up to walk through the Noes Lobby.

Question put. That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 35; Noes 58.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hussey, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Mr Durkan.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan and Mr Robinson.

Question accordingly negated.

Question put. That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Mr 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-minute rule and move straight to the Division.

Ayes 35; Noes 58.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hussey, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms S Bradley and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan and Mr Robinson.

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 34; Noes 58.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Armstrong and Dr Farry.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan and Mr Robinson.

Main Question accordingly negated.

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It will not have escaped your attention that there was no ministerial response to the debate this afternoon. I understand that that has also been the case in some recent Adjournment debates, although I note that Mr Hazzard is in his place at present. It seems to me that that is an insult to the House and specifically to you as Speaker of the House and our representative. Will you review the record of Ministers in this mandate and the last and consider whether any action could be taken in that respect? I believe that it simply would not be tolerated in any other legislature in these islands.

Mr Speaker: First, that is not a point of order. Secondly, I note your points, but you will understand that I do everything possible to encourage Ministers to come to the House. It is for Ministers to decide whether they turn up and which debates they turn up for. I will review the matter, as you have requested.

I invite the House to take its ease while we change the top Table.

(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker [Ms Ruane] in the Chair)

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Madam Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Road Infrastructure: Mid Ulster

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. As this is Keith Buchanan's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr K Buchanan: I appreciate the opportunity to address the House. It was a great pleasure to be elected for Mid Ulster, to the shock of some, I might add. I will go straight into the debate.

I welcome the opportunity to highlight the road infrastructure in my constituency and the need for additional resources to maintain and upgrade the network. Before I deal specifically with Mid Ulster, I welcome the rural roads initiative and the £10 million allocated to it. I have seen the evidence of that in my area and all over Mid Ulster. I thank the Minister for attending the debate.

In previous mandates, we all felt the brunt of budget cuts that resulted in grass verges not being cut, street lamps not being repaired, and cutbacks to essential road repair programmes. The previous Minister, my colleague Michelle McIlveen, began to rectify the problem by focusing on the appropriate use of her remaining budget when she took office and by ensuring that internal efficiencies were made. She reviewed her Department's budget lines and areas of expenditure to ensure that as much money as possible was available for high-priority activities, such as patching and street lighting maintenance. She also announced that, from the beginning of January 2016, an additional £3.2 million of resource funding and £2 million of capital funding was reprioritised for essential maintenance activities. That was good news for everyone, and it helped the local economy. I hope that the current Minister will continue to improve the infrastructure.

Every week, I receive complaints and enquiries from constituents about defects, grass cutting and general road maintenance. Our rural roads are essential links for our farmers, rural dwellers and those going to work or delivering their produce to market or to buyers. Those roads have a fundamental role to play in Northern Ireland's economy, and it is only right that specific attention is paid to maintaining them.

We must remember that a properly maintained road network helps to reduce potential fatalities or serious injuries on our roads. According to a report by PSNI statistics branch for 2015, the Mid Ulster policing area sadly accounted for the highest number of collision fatalities, with a total of nine killed in the district and a further 44 seriously injured. While I am not saying that poor roads maintenance was a factor in any of those sad fatalities, we must ensure that our roads are up to the highest possible standards. Most road traffic collision

fatalities happen on rural roads, and, of the 74 road deaths in 2015, 57% — 42 — occurred on rural roads.

Rural dwellers do not have the same access to public transport. In Mid Ulster, we have no railway services, and buses do not serve many of our rural communities; at least not on a consistent enough basis. Access to those services can be a big challenge, and it is vital that these communities have a properly maintained road infrastructure. Sadly, the road infrastructure of Mid Ulster has seen the lowest capital investment in the western division in the last 10 financial years. The rural road network in Mid Ulster has had some improvements in recent time. The new Magherafelt bypass, which is due to open, I believe, on Thursday this week is a six-kilometre carriageway linking Castledawson roundabout with the Moneymore Road that is expected to carry 14,000 vehicles a day, thereby reducing traffic congestion in Magherafelt town centre. This significant investment will help to improve road safety, reduce congestion and improve journey times. The new road is welcome news, especially for those who use this route daily, and the DUP team of local councillors and I have welcomed this improvement and are committed to highlighting the need for further improvements to the road network.

I welcome the call for the much-needed Cookstown bypass as this would help to reduce travel times along the busy north to south, Coleraine to Keady A29 corridor. Unfortunately, sometimes it is quicker to travel between Dungannon and Belfast, a distance of 42 miles, rather than travelling the 20 miles between Dungannon and Magherafelt. The removal of through traffic from the town centre would assist in reducing the conflict between strategic and local traffic by approximately 10 minutes, thereby assisting in the reduction of congestion and in the risk of accidents. These benefits would be expected to improve the quality of life for residents and attract more visitors and shoppers to the historic town of Cookstown, improving our local economy.

This project should be part of an overall strategy to improve the key transport and link corridors across Northern Ireland and would demonstrate the need to rectify regional disparity and reverse decades of underinvestment in infrastructure west of the Bann. Sadly, the former Cookstown District Council area was consistently in the lowest areas of capital investment in the last 10 years. The vital A29 Cookstown bypass project would help the region significantly not only from a strategic perspective and at local level, but would provide vital jobs in the local construction industry. It had been hoped that this would have been delivered between 2013 and 2018. I welcome the Minister's earlier comments, and I look forward to the project being developed.

Forty per cent of world manufacturing of wet material machinery, for example stone-crushing and block-making equipment, is sourced and manufactured in Mid Ulster. For us to remain world-class providers and employers, the roads infrastructure needs to be up to world-class standard. Our rural roads network needs to be able to cope with the HGV vehicles that are needed in this industry. There is an ever-expanding agri-food industry in Mid Ulster. For example, Karro Food is the biggest pork slaughter facility in the United Kingdom. Our business parks need additional investment and an exceptional infrastructure network to allow this vital industry to grow and survive.

These industries provide job opportunities in Mid Ulster, which has the fastest-growing and youngest population in Northern Ireland. All these world-class businesses provide employment opportunities to thousands and have continued to expand despite the poor roads.

I call upon the Minister to deliver for the people and businesses of Mid Ulster and improve our rural road infrastructure. From our newest attraction, the Seamus Heaney HomePlace in Bellaghy, Mid Ulster's own Titanic building, and the many historic sites around our beautiful constituency to the many excellent outdoor activities, there is something on offer to all, from the local to the international tourist. However, our rural road infrastructure must be fit for purpose. We need to develop the tourism industry of Mid Ulster and utilise our natural attractions from the Sperrin Mountains and the Lough Neagh shores to our many excellent forests, including Davagh forest. Only with an improved rural infrastructure and the proper maintaining of grass verges will we be able to show off our outstanding natural landscape to the maximum.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I congratulate the Member on his opening speech, and I thank him for it. All other Members who are called to speak will now have up to eight minutes.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic, and I thank the Member for raising it. I congratulate him on his maiden speech. I am pleased that the Minister is here to respond to the debate.

Mid Ulster is a hub of the manufacturing and engineering industries in Northern Ireland. Indeed, recent figures show that 27% of all of the people who are employed in Mid Ulster work in the manufacturing base. Therefore, it is important that the appropriate roads infrastructure is in place to allow our businesses to transport large and heavy products and machinery to customers across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and to the ports with ease in order to develop and grow vital export markets. At present, this is problematic, and I have even heard of goods being transported across the constituency of Mid Ulster and to the port of Warrenpoint because of heavy-load problems on the motorways. This was a surprise to hear, and I think that that is an issue that the Minister and his officials should continue to look into. I know that it was raised last year at some stage.

5.15 pm

Many of our local businesses are big players on the European and global stage, so they would very much welcome improvements in the area. Indeed, road infrastructure projects provide employment to many of the construction sector businesses in my constituency, and so a strategic plan is very welcome for employment purposes.

I welcome the completion of the Magherafelt bypass, which will be officially opened this Thursday. That will be good news for the town of Magherafelt and should go a long way towards reducing its heavy traffic congestion. Improved road safety, speedier journeys and reduced congestion should all bring benefits to the people of Magherafelt and the surrounding area. It was fitting that it was an Ulster Unionist roads Minister who delivered on that project and cut the first sod, and I once again commend my colleague Danny Kennedy MLA for that.

As his Assembly Private Secretary at that time, I felt it a privilege to be part of that historic first step.

The impending progression of the A6 project is also welcome, stretching from the end of the M22 to the Castledawson roundabout and on towards Londonderry. The A6 is a key transport route for Mid Ulster and beyond. Again, that is something that I was calling for long before I was an elected representative. The former roads Minister Danny Kennedy progressed that project as far as he could without the capital funds being made available for it, so it is pleasing to see that that work is coming to fruition. I have worked with landowners, farming businesses and officials to ensure that those who have concerns regarding the project have them addressed. It is important that the Minister and his officials work to resolve the outstanding issues so that no one is disproportionately or adversely affected by this project or any future infrastructure projects in Mid Ulster.

There is much that can and should be done to improve road infrastructure in Mid Ulster. Before the end of the previous mandate, on the Floor of the House I called for the then Minister for Regional Development to reprioritise the A29, make it a key transport corridor and make the necessary improvements to ensure that the road is fit to service the needs of the manufacturing base in Mid Ulster, which, as we previously touched on, is continuously growing and developing. I repeat that call to the current Minister and ask that he consider upgrading the A29, which is currently deemed a link corridor, to a key transport corridor in his future priorities. A bypass was first proposed almost 40 years ago, and, despite a preferred route for the road being announced in 2010, the proposal remains on the shelf. I urge the Minister to revisit the plans, which, again, would bring tangible benefits to local residents, businesses and commuters.

With the imminent completion of the Magherafelt bypass, many people have predicted that the next travel bottleneck will be in the village of Moneymore. With my constituency office located there, I am well aware of the levels of traffic that pass through there daily. The congestion on the main streets and the parking are issues. I urge the Minister to look at those considerations in the future.

Improvements such as those outlined would not only help businesses in Mid Ulster but create a better flow of traffic for all road users, for those living in the towns affected as well as those coming to the constituency on business, to visit friends or relatives, for tourism, as the proposer mentioned, and to shop in our local towns and villages.

Since Madam Principal Deputy Speaker has given me a bit of extra time, I want to raise another couple of issues that I might have mentioned to the Minister during topical questions today. We talked about the A29 and the possibility of having overtaking lanes and slow lanes on it. The A29 is a key transport corridor, and the Minister recognises that it leads from Coleraine right through to Armagh and is very important. There is also the matter of traffic speed in some of the local villages. I ask the Minister to look specifically at the village of Desertmartin. Previous Ministers installed some measures to slow traffic coming into that village, but it remains a concern. I would be interested to talk to the Minister about that village with a view to looking at other measures that could be brought in. There are speeding problems in other villages across Mid Ulster too — I could name Castledawson — but this speech could quickly turn into a list of wishes to the Minister.

As well as capital projects, it is essential that our local roads are well maintained. Roads issues are frequently raised by constituents, who rightly expect us to lobby Transport NI and hold the Minister to account. It is vital that a long-term strategic approach and a degree of planning are adopted. The Sherrigrim Road near Cookstown is an example of a road along boggy lands. It is a feature of many roads across this rural constituency that they can quickly become wavy. They are then unsafe for heavy vehicles, lorries and agricultural vehicles. We need to really plan ahead and not just cover over the cracks so that, if funding is available, we can improve the foundations of those roads for the longer term.

The road network across Mid Ulster continues to require significant investment in new infrastructure schemes and to address historical maintenance problems. The Minister will not be surprised to hear that I will continue to lobby him to ensure that the entire area receives a fair share of funding for new projects as well as ongoing road maintenance.

Mr Milne: Before I get into my prepared piece, I congratulate Keith Buchanan on his maiden speech and wish him well for his time ahead in the Assembly. I also thank him for bringing this Adjournment debate on infrastructure in Mid Ulster to the Floor.

I regularly meet local officials on matters of road maintenance and safety and want to state my appreciation of their time and effort. There can be no substitute for meeting on-site to get a proper understanding of the situation and the impact that it has. It is always refreshing when problems are approached with a can-do attitude.

Travelling daily throughout the constituency, I am well aware of the state of our road network, particularly rural roads such as the Five Mile Straight, with its collapsing verges and the large number of potholes. The Member who spoke previously talked about waves: my experience of that road is that you would be excused for thinking that you were in a small boat on a rough and stormy sea. That is just one example of the results of years of neglect and historical underinvestment west of the Bann. The decision in the previous mandate to reduce spending on street lighting, verge cutting and maintenance on rural roads is well evidenced the length and breadth of the constituency, and it will take substantial investment to catch up again.

Like many Members, my office regularly deals with constituents' queries regarding long overdue repairs and the resultant damage to vehicles and, during the winter months, issues of lighting, gritting and flooding. Thankfully we are beginning to see progress. I commend the Infrastructure Minister, Chris Hazzard, for his commitment to addressing the underinvestment. He has already announced a £10 million road improvement package that will target around 1,000 rural roads across the North. We have also had confirmation that he will invest £18.8 million on road schemes in the Mid Ulster council area. That is all very welcome. Over the last few months, we have heard announcements of a £250,000 bridge strengthening and widening project at Milltown Bridge in Maghera; a £300,000 major carriageway and hard shoulder surfacing scheme on the Glenshane Road; the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dualling project, which is currently on hold pending the outcome of a judicial review but is long awaited by 18,000 users per day; and the A31 Magherafelt bypass scheme, which will open on Thursday.

Of course, there is much still to be done. I have already brought to the Minister's attention issues such as the need, as other Members have said, for a bypass for Cookstown and Moneymore; the upgrading of the A29, which is the main corridor through Mid Ulster; and an increase in capital spend for new lighting projects.

I am well aware, however, that there will always be a gap between what needs to be done and what the budget allows for. Continued Tory austerity and the prospect of leaving the EU will have a serious impact on the funding that might be available for infrastructure projects such as those outlined. I stress the need for continued investment to support business and grow our local economy. I am confident that the Minister, given his announcements thus far, will not forget or neglect constituencies such as Mid Ulster in the manner previously seen.

Mr McGlone: I take the opportunity to thank Mr Buchanan for bringing up this issue and making it the subject of his maiden speech. This is something that is very dear to those of us who have represented the area for quite a considerable time. Rural roads and rural infrastructure are crucially important to not only the social and educational development of our constituencies but their economic development. It provides us with the opportunity to debate roads infrastructure in Mid Ulster.

I begin my remarks by acknowledging the progress that has been made in what has long been a neglected area of the North through investment in infrastructure. Indeed, it is the same with investment in other things but especially in infrastructure. The last significant project to be completed in Mid Ulster was the Toome bypass, which was opened in 2004. That interim measure still awaits the completion of the A6 dualling from Castledawson to Randalstown to be fully effective. I welcome the recent movement on the A6 project. Securing funding has proven to be a major stumbling block for much-needed infrastructure projects, and we have had impending or threatening court actions around the place, but it is hoped that a satisfactory resolution can be found quickly to the objections to the Minister's preferred route.

I also welcome the progress on the Magherafelt bypass. That is a project that has been around for longer than some Members, I have to say, so I welcome that it is finally nearing completion and look forward to welcoming the Minister to the constituency on Thursday to do the dutiful and cut the ribbon on the road. It will provide a welcome respite for the town and its residents from the many heavy goods vehicles that have been forced to negotiate the Castledawson Road, up Broad Street and around the Diamond for many years.

As chair of the Assembly's all-party group on construction, as well as a representative of the people of Mid Ulster, I welcome these projects, the jobs they bring and the economic boost and support for economic development they provide within the constituency. However welcome those developments are, and they are to be welcomed, they represent choices made by the Minister and the Executive. The Executive prioritise high-profile schemes like the A6 and A5. Another major town in the constituency, Cookstown, was referred to. I was on Cookstown council from 1993 to 2006, and the bypass came up year after year after year after year. Perhaps the Minister could see fit to do something about that.

Mrs Overend rightly referred to something that will occur now. As a consequence of good and welcome progress on the Magherafelt bypass, the traffic will now move that much quicker to Moneymore and create a very substantial bottleneck in Moneymore, which is already quite pressurised with traffic at particular times of the day. That will inevitably continue. I do not know what sort of measures can be taken or whether the engineers within the Department have been projecting ahead to see how best they can make sure that, in alleviating one problem, another is not bunged into Moneymore. It is more work and is work we would like to see done. I am just flagging that up for the Minister's attention if he is not already aware of it.

The project in Cookstown has been around for almost as long as the Magherafelt bypass. I have an office in Cookstown and am in Cookstown frequently, and anybody who watches the traffic as it uses the unofficial bypass around Cookstown, the Westland Road, will know it can be really chock-a-block at most times of the day, particularly in the morning and at about 5.00 pm or 6.00 pm. It is incredible.

It makes the case for a decent bypass like the one in Magherafelt. After many years in gestation, it has been parked indefinitely. I welcome progress where it has been made, but we need to ask again for help with economic and social development in the constituency to make sure that we have a proper road network.

5.30 pm

It has become standard, when Ministers are criticised for what are political decisions, that they complain of cuts to their budgets or to the block grant. It is the responsibility of the Executive to make the case to the Treasury for sufficient funding, and it is the responsibility of individual Ministers to make the case for sufficient funds to the Executive. It has been rumoured that some sort of infrastructural funding is likely to be announced via Westminster. I hope that, if it comes, the Minister will pitch hard for that to happen and for a good slice of the action to come to the North; I have every confidence in your ability to do so. That is what it is to be in government.

For our part, the SDLP has repeatedly proposed alternative sources of funding for necessary investment in infrastructure. We have done so in the past and will do so again. That said, matters will inevitably become more complicated — I am sure that the Minister has done a scoping exercise in his Department — if the Executive allow Northern Ireland to be dragged out of the EU against the will of the overwhelming majority of the people of the North. Last month, I believe, the Minister quoted to the Assembly a loss of infrastructure funding of £300 million to £400 million in the event of a Brexit. It will not be enough for the Minister or his party to throw up their hands in outrage if that loss of funding is allowed to materialise. I have outlined that it will be a challenge, but it is the Executive's responsibility to prevent and, hopefully, argue the case for the North to the Exchequer in Westminster.

Finally, to return to the subject, the Assembly recently debated an SDLP motion on the road structural maintenance budget, which is often neglected but is, in many ways, more important than the headline-grabbing, high-profile schemes. Maintenance of the road network in a rural constituency like Mid Ulster is vital to rural communities and the rural economy. I will not repeat the arguments that the Chamber heard during that debate, but

I am sure that all Members who represent and, indeed, live in those rural communities will realise that, on occasion, you simply cannot go anywhere. One pothole can trigger a series of emails from constituents who have to live on the affected road. They are also entitled to a decent road surface and network in their area, particularly in areas such as ours where there are pretty densely populated rural areas.

The problems created by not addressing the road maintenance budget deficit and by the absence of sufficient yearly funding simply to maintain the existing roads network adequately are most particularly experienced in rural constituencies like Mid Ulster. The rural road network has been starved of investment for a long, long time; I will not for one second lump that at the door of the Minister. There has been historical discrimination in some cases and a subsequent neglect of our rural areas. I know that the Minister has allocated funding for the repair of rural roads this year — Mr Milne mentioned the £10 million — but, from speaking to engineers, I know that it is estimated that £130 million would be required to bring the rural road network up to at least a reasonable standard. Over the past year, the number of claims made by drivers for damage caused by potholes on the roads —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr McGlone: — has more than doubled. I conclude with that. I thank the Member for securing the debate.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I take the opportunity to thank the Member for securing the debate and wish him well in his time as a Member. I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue, which is important to the people of Mid Ulster.

As Minister for Infrastructure, I, along with my Executive colleagues, work hard to support and drive economic recovery across all parts of the North, and I am particularly keen to redress the infrastructure deficit west of the Bann. The debate rightly highlights the importance of transport infrastructure, which, in the North, is very road-oriented, be it bus-based public transport, freight, commuting, leisure travel or cycling.

My Department is taking forward a balanced programme of improvements to the strategic road network that will make a significant difference to all communities in the North and greatly benefit the wider economy. Recent levels of funding have allowed the Department to advance a number of schemes through the various development stages to construction, including a number in the Mid Ulster area.

I am delighted to say that the construction of the £35 million A31 Magherafelt bypass is now substantially complete. The scheme comprises approximately 6 kilometres of two-plus-one carriageway, to facilitate overtaking, and single carriageway extending from the A31 Moneymore Road to the Castledawson roundabout on the A6. I look forward to officially opening this scheme later this week.

The A6 Derry to Belfast corridor is also of strategic economic importance, providing an essential road link between the Belfast metropolitan area and the north-west. My Department is progressing two separate projects on the A6 route to improve connectivity: the Derry to

Dungiven and Randalstown to Castledawson dualling schemes, the latter, of course, being in the Mid Ulster area.

The Randalstown to Castledawson scheme comprises two distinct sections of dual carriageway located either side of the A6 Toome bypass: a 7.3 kilometre section from the end of the M22 to the eastern end of the Toome bypass; and a 7.4 kilometre section from the western end of the Toome bypass to the existing A6 Castledawson roundabout, so linking to the new Magherafelt bypass. In August, I was delighted to announce my decision to proceed with this substantial £160 million scheme. However, on 27 September 2016, papers were lodged with the High Court to apply for leave for a judicial review in relation to the project. While I am disappointed that a scheme set to benefit some 18,000 vehicles and their passengers every day has been challenged, with any project of this scale there is always the possibility of a legal challenge from those who are dissatisfied with the Department's proposals. It is too early to determine the impact on the progression of the scheme and any knock-on delay to the commencement of construction, which had been anticipated to be later this month.

The preferred route for the A29 Cookstown bypass was announced in 2010. The scheme entails the construction of approximately 4 kilometres of new single carriageway from the Dungannon Road roundabout south of Cookstown to a proposed new roundabout on the Moneymore Road at the north of the town. The scheme will also include sections of two-plus-one and differential acceleration lanes to facilitate safe overtaking opportunities. Development of this significant project had been deferred owing to financial constraints, but, as Minister, I am keen for my Department to progress the scheme. I am engaging with officials about progression to the next stage, the publication of the draft statutory orders and environmental statement.

The southern section of the A5 western transport corridor between Ballygawley and the border at Aughnacloy is also in the Mid Ulster area. Following the public consultation on the new draft statutory orders and environmental statement, a public inquiry into the A5 scheme was announced, and this remains on schedule to open on 4 October 2016.

A 3.4km bypass of Fivemiletown identified in the strategic road improvement programme will alleviate congestion in the town. Progression of this scheme is subject to future budgetary settlements.

The upcoming revision of the regional strategic transportation network transport plan and the development of local transport plans in conjunction with councils' local development plans provide a good opportunity to refresh the strategic roads improvement programme in line with the latest technical evidence, local development pressures and the Programme for Government priorities of economic growth and social equality. This may provide my Department with an opportunity to relook at scheme prioritisation and, indeed, at new schemes.

Up to now I have spoken about new and proposed schemes. I now want to turn to maintenance of the existing network. Maintaining our roads and footways is essential to the social and economic well-being of the North and continues to be one of my Department's highest priorities. I am pleased to say that additional capital funding was prioritised by the Executive for road maintenance as part

of June monitoring. As a result, and in recognition of the particular deterioration in rural roads, in June I announced a £10 million rural roads initiative to target maintenance measures at around 1,000 locations. I am pleased to say that work on those schemes is now well under way and that about one third of the identified roads have been dealt with.

The current structural maintenance budget for the Mid Ulster District Council area is some £8 million, including approximately £1.5 million allocated as part of the rural roads initiative. This will see a significant number of smaller schemes delivered on the local road network across the council area.

In addition, in the Mid Ulster District Council area, my Department has delivered an extensive resurfacing programme, including schemes on the A6 Glenshane Road; the A4 Ballagh Road, Clogher; and the A29 Northland Row, Dungannon, as well as surface dressing 1.1 million square metres of road across the area.

Members will be aware that the Department continues to face budgetary pressures on resource funding for day-to-day road maintenance services. Thankfully, an additional £5 million was allocated as part of June monitoring to enhance road maintenance activities, such as pothole repairs and grass cutting.

I now want to briefly provide a more strategic overview of how my previous comments extend into the bigger picture. Members will be aware that Departments have been working on the delivery plans associated with the Programme for Government. My Department is no exception.

A key Programme for Government indicator that I am leading on is:

“to improve transport connections for people, goods and services”.

Over the summer, my officials engaged with other Departments and a wide range of representatives from all sectors to develop an action plan to help to deliver this indicator. The delivery plan contains my initiatives for a generational programme of investment and change over a number of budgetary periods. I have ensured that my delivery plans for this indicator, and my other key indicator:

“to increase the use of public transport”,

are focused on reducing the infrastructure deficit, particularly in the west, in order to mitigate key barriers to balanced regional growth.

Excellent transport infrastructure is a prerequisite for growing the local economy and attracting inward investment; it enables communities to access jobs, education and leisure opportunities and allows businesses to connect to their markets. I am therefore determined to enhance connectivity and to increase transport capacity across the region.

My delivery plans contain a number of new initiatives in addition to the existing flagship road-dualling schemes that will also positively impact on the Mid Ulster region, including looking at the potential for more freestanding bypasses of towns in order to address pinch points on the roads network. In addition, work is ongoing to carry out feasibility studies on improvements to the A29 Dungannon

to Cookstown road and the potential to extend the rail network to Dungannon.

Of course, all this activity depends on the appropriate resources being made available. My Department has a capital budget of some £387 million, the largest of all the Departments. However, as I have explained in previous debates, this is required to provide funding across a wide range of functions for which I have responsibility. These include not only roads but water and waste water, public transport, flood alleviation and waterways, all of which could utilise further funding if it were available. As such, I have to prioritise funding across all my Department's functions in order to achieve a balanced outcome within the available resources.

Given the budget allocation available to me, additional capital for one area, such as roads, means that there is less available for other functions. However, I continue to make the case for increasing my Department's budget, both through the in-year monitoring process for this year and as part of the Executive's Budget 2016 process. The role of roads, public transport and water infrastructure is vital in improving social inclusion and underpinning the region's economic growth.

To conclude, I, as Minister, along with all Members, fully recognise the need to invest in world-class infrastructure if we are to realise our shared ambition of transforming our economy and society. I therefore call on the support of all Members, particularly members of the Committee for Infrastructure, to do all that they can to ensure that my Department receives the resources that it requires to provide a better infrastructure, from which we can all benefit.

Turning specifically to a couple of points that were raised, Mrs Overend raised the issue of slowing traffic as it comes through villages and mentioned Desertmartin specifically. I would be more than happy to meet or correspond with you in future on that issue. There is no doubt that you are well aware of course that the PSNI —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Minister bring his comments to a close?

Mr Hazzard: — takes a lead role with regard to speed. Of course, we need to be more strategic as we go forward.

I am happy to draw my comments to a close with that.

Adjourned at 5.44 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 10 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Aleppo

Mr Speaker: Mr Alex Attwood has been given leave to make a statement on the humanitarian crisis in eastern Aleppo, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If Members wish to be called, they should rise in their places and continue to do so. Each Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I remind Members that I will not take points of order on this or any other matter until the item of business has been completed.

Mr Attwood: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for permitting this matter to be discussed. Whilst it is the case that foreign affairs are not a devolved matter, issues in other places around the world are very much a concern of people in the Chamber, in Northern Ireland and on the island. We know how important it was in our own history that the spotlight was kept on our experience, and it is very important to keep the spotlight on the experience in other places in conflict and where there is humanitarian crisis.

Aleppo was, historically, a place of great commerce and culture. Part of the city was on the UNESCO world heritage list. It is a city with a history going back 9,000 years. Whilst the situation in the city is complex, especially in eastern Aleppo, where no one group is in charge and where the geopolitics are more and more demanding, some things are, nonetheless, straightforward and clear. Whatever the political situation, the humanitarian situation is clear for us all to see. Over the last two weeks, eastern Aleppo has experienced its heaviest bombardment in the last five and a half years of the Syrian war. We now have a situation in which a population of 275,000 in that part of the city has only 30 to 35 doctors, 20 or so ambulances, six hospitals, with two hospitals having been destroyed in recent weeks.

Three doctors and two nurses have been killed. Doctors and hospitals are required to recycle syringes, needles and bandages. Thirty-five thousand people — over 10% of the population — have been internally displaced. Last week, the UN special envoy to the area said in crystal clear words that we now had a situation where we had to divert this from being another Srebrenica or another Rwanda and that by Christmas eastern Aleppo could be destroyed. We are witnessing the slow death of its people. As one citizen put it, and I will conclude with these words:

"This is a city that will die. The entire world is watching a city dying. Aleppo is the third oldest city in the world. It's 9000 years old. It has seen earthquakes and disasters, but now, in the 21st century, the city is being slaughtered and the entire world is watching."

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for West Belfast for bringing this Matter of the Day this afternoon. Sadly, it is a matter not just for this day; it is a matter of gravest concern for hundreds and hundreds of days, as tens of thousands of people have lost their lives as a result of the Syrian and Russian bombing of the city of Aleppo. The misery being endured by the remaining 275,000 people in Aleppo is unimaginable, and 100,000 children are at the forefront of that misery. We need to stop and think about that: 100,000 children are suffering in this way. That is horrific, and we cannot help but be moved with compassion for those who are suffering.

The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, has said that what is happening in Aleppo is worse than "a slaughterhouse". Staffan de Mistura, the UN envoy in Syria, has said that, at the current rate of bombardment, the city will be completely destroyed by the end of this year. That is why it was very sad to see the UN resolutions last week, which called on the bombardment to stop, vetoed. That is shameful, and it only prolongs the suffering of the people there.

The pain and suffering in Aleppo are unquantifiable. However, there are medical professionals who are trying to help the wounded and dying and bring some comfort and relief. They are working in some of the most difficult and dangerous circumstances imaginable, and they should be the focus of aid efforts and relief, which is itself work that is even being hindered.

I thank Mr Attwood for bringing this matter to the Assembly. Although we are, obviously, very limited in what we can do in this place, it is right that our voices are heard, that we speak against this injustice and that we pray for the people of Aleppo and for peace there.

Ms Ruane: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le Alex Attwood. I thank Alex Attwood for bringing this Matter of the Day to the Assembly.

We have heard and all know that what is happening in Syria is an absolute humanitarian disaster. Last week alone, there were 376 people killed, and half of them were children. We had 1,266 injured, hospitals were destroyed and medical personnel were killed. Civilians are besieged; they are under full military encirclement and are without humanitarian supplies or the freedom to leave many different areas. We are talking about Aleppo today and the 275,000 people, but equally, according to the United Nations, there are over 861,000 people in other parts of Syria in similar situations. The UN special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has said that the suspension of bilateral discussions between the two chairs, the United

States and Russia, on a cessation of hostilities was a serious setback.

If we can learn anything about our peace process here in Ireland — I am not for one minute equating the two conflicts; every conflict is different — it is that there should be inclusive dialogue; it is that there should be a cessation of hostilities by all of the combatants. All sides need to bear responsibility for their actions. We need the hostilities to be brought to an immediate end, and all sides need to recognise a new ceasefire.

Urgent humanitarian aid needs to get to the people who are suffering in this terrible, terrible war. I pay tribute to the international aid workers, who are trying to do everything they can to get badly needed supplies into the worst-hit areas and save lives. We need urgent action now, and, while the Assembly does not have responsibility for international affairs, we have responsibility as international citizens to help end the conflict. We also have refugees who have come to all parts of Ireland, and we can say to them, “Tá fáilte romhaibh, you are very welcome in our country, and we will do everything that we can to help you. We are very sorry about what is happening to your loved ones in your country.” The biggest action that we can take is to apply international pressure by supporting the efforts of the UN, and we can support the people who have come to our shores looking for solidarity and support.

Mr Beattie: I thank Mr Attwood for bringing this to the Assembly. I think we have all seen the horrific pictures that are coming out of Aleppo. We have seen the injured, and we have seen the tragedy of the children who are suffering in a city that has been pounded to ruins and is now being pounded into dust. This is more than a tragedy; it is a stain on the international community for taking no action at all in the last four years-plus. What we have in Aleppo is the Al-Nusra Front, which is fighting against the Free Syrian Army, which is, in turn, fighting against Assad's forces, which are underpinned by the Russians. There is absolutely no doubt that we are seeing a proxy war in Aleppo between the United States and the Russians and between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the United Nations is absolutely impotent in trying to bring a cessation to this absolute catastrophe, this near genocide.

In the last few hours, the French have brought forward a motion for a permanent ceasefire, and, yet again, the Russians have vetoed it, which tells you that the system of the five permanent members in the UN Security Council does not work. Therefore, I call on the United Nations to take direct action to put humanitarian corridors into Aleppo to allow the wounded to be brought out, the non-combatants to be brought out and the children to be brought out. Then, the combatants can kill themselves all the more. What you find in any conflict — I am testimony to this — is that the people who suffer most are the innocent people: the men, women and children who live in what must be a hellish place. Again, I thank Mr Attwood for bringing this forward.

Dr Farry: I also thank Mr Attwood for bringing this important Matter of the Day to the Assembly. At the outset, I also make reference to the humanitarian situation in Haiti due to Hurricane Matthew and recognise the hundreds of people who have lost their life there and the thousands who are now homeless.

In some respects, we have a man-made hurricane affecting the people of Aleppo. Given our history and the fact that this year we mark the 100th anniversary of a number of major battles in the First World War, such as the Somme and Verdun, we know the consequences when a long-term stalemate builds up.

The difference between those battles and the situation today is that so many civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict; they are suffering daily, losing their lives, their homes, their livelihoods and their future.

12.15 pm

Aleppo is one of the oldest inhabited settlements in the world, and what is happening there is a tragedy in so many respects. It also reflects the much wider situation in Syria. As an Assembly, it is important that we speak out on what is happening beyond our borders. What is happening today in Syria is, I think, the defining conflict of our age. We should be defined by how we, as the international community, respond to that situation. It is important that we see humanitarian assistance and that we join in recognising the aid workers who risk their lives to bring assistance, and in particular the role played by the white helmets in trying to save and rescue lives.

We also have to recognise that it is not just about humanitarian aid and that we have wider responsibilities as an international community. It is not good enough to see the great powers intervening on different sides of the conflict and it becoming a kind of proxy war. Russia in particular stands out for international condemnation for its activities, namely the military support that it provides to the regime and its bolstering and protecting of Bashar al-Assad. Frankly, if that support was withdrawn, there may be some hope of a solution.

I fear that, at present, we are seeing a rolling stalemate centred around the city of Aleppo, and that is likely to continue unless we see a change in tack from the international community. What is needed is a genuinely united front and a recognition that the international community has a formal responsibility to protect, and to recognise that what happens within national borders is something that concerns us all.

Mr Carroll: I thank Mr Atwood for bringing the matter for discussion. The scenes in Aleppo over the last few weeks have been harrowing: kids being pulled from rubble, nobody knowing if they are alive or dead, 275,000 people cut off from water, food and medicine, and a hospital blown to bits. It is a crisis and a disaster, but one of political making. As the death toll rises day by day, we must remember that it is not just ISIS and Assad who are killing civilians, but Russia. Russia's air forces are carpet-bombing Aleppo; Western forces, so-called allies, and the US are also bombing civilians.

In 2011, the Arab Spring, an uprising from below across the Middle East for democracy and social justice, began in Tunisia, spread to Egypt and across the Middle East. People in Syria also stood up for freedom and social justice, and Bashar al-Assad, who was, no doubt, wined and dined in Westminster, met the protesters with severe repression and brutality on a huge scale. Protesters were gunned down.

At the minute, the war hawks are swarming around Aleppo and Syria. If you live in Aleppo, Damascus or anywhere

else in Syria, it does not really matter if the bombs being dropped were made in Washington, in Moscow or in London because the death, devastation and destruction will be seen for miles around, and the result will be the same. The imperial powers have brought nothing but misery to the people of the Middle East, Syria and Iraq. We should say, "Hands off Syria", and they should cease to engage in this terrorism from the sky.

Haiti has been mentioned. We should also mention what is happening in the Yemen, where, in the last few days, 140 people were killed at a funeral. Saudi Arabia has been engaging in absolute brutality on the people of the Yemen. We have to do two things: we have to stand resolutely against the destruction and the bombs being dropped on the Middle East and say, "Not in our name". We also have to recognise the destruction that is taking place in Syria and how millions of innocent people are being turned into refugees.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Carroll: We have to say no to war, no to racism, and we should open up borders and let the refugees in.

Mr Allister: I do not suppose that anyone in the House is foolish enough to think that the contributions in this debate are going to change very much, but that does not mean that we should not speak up when we see unfolding before us unspeakable horror in different parts of the world. When we see on our television screens what are only snapshots of the terror and horror in Aleppo, you could not be human and not be moved by the horrendous circumstances prevailing. A ceasefire was negotiated and then breached by a grotesque act of war by the Russians in the bombing of, of all things, a food convoy of humanitarian aid. That really underscores the depths of degradation to which that conflict has gone.

Western interventions in the Middle East, where many monsters and tyrants have been in charge, do not have a very good track record, but the situation created in Syria is one, as Mr Beattie said, that is crying out for effective international action. He is right: the UN is being exposed only for its impotence in this situation because, of course, of the Russian veto. If the United Nations is an organisation worth having, this is a moment when it needs to provide the humanitarian lead and the delivery to safety of the ultimate innocents: the children of Aleppo. What sort of human beings are we if the United Nations organisations, which are supposed to protect humanitarian interests in the world, cannot and will not take even that most basic of steps?

Today we join in the condemnation. Although we recognise the limitations of what we say, it is still right that we utterly condemn the carpet-bombing by the Russians and others of Aleppo and think of and pray for the innocents of that city.

Mr E McCann: There has been widespread comment on the supposed fact that there is a big disparity between the reaction of anti-war activists in the West, including in this country and across the water, to the Russian slaughter of people in Aleppo on the one hand and various atrocities perpetrated by the West, particularly by the United States, on the other. "Where are the protesters outside the Russian embassy?", it is asked. In the opinion of People Before Profit, that is a very good question. The suggestion made on the left is that there is no moral balance between the West and the Soviet Union. That is simply the mirror image of those — some are represented in the House —

who are quite happy to protest against Russia; they stand up and denounce the barbarism of Russian bombing, but the same people have never protested against the genocidal slaughter of the Palestinian people by the Israelis using American- and British-supplied arms.

When we look at what is happening in the Middle East today in Syria, we see, of course, that the Russian forces are adopting the same tactics and attitudes as they adopted in relation to Chechnya some years ago.

It is because they got away with the slaughter of the Chechen people that they think they can get away with it in Aleppo and other parts of the world. It is not an accident that Chechnya, per head of population, has supplied more fighters to Islamic State than any other country in the world. That was a direct result of the Soviet Union's and then Russia's suppression of the Chechen people.

What we see now in the Middle East is the use of Western arms, supplied mainly by the United States but also by the United Kingdom to Saudi Arabia to inflict horrendous slaughter. Some 4,000 civilians have been killed in Yemen, a substantial majority of them killed with Western arms supplied by companies such as BAE, Raytheon and the rest of them without any protest. I and People Before Profit call for the most vigorous protests outside Russian embassies and elsewhere against what is happening in Aleppo. We also call for a stepping-up of protests against the supply of arms to the sectarian, extremist state dictatorship of Saudi Arabia, which, incidentally, supplied 15 of the 19 September 11 bombers yet is still supplied with billions of pounds of lethal machinery to slaughter people in the Middle East.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr E McCann: That disparity must end.

I will finish with this sentence, Mr Speaker. In People Before Profit, we believe that the Soviet Union was a state capitalist country, and we protested against the suppression in Czechoslovakia and so on and so forth —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann, your time is up.

Mr E McCann: Today, we should have simultaneous demonstrations against the Russians and the Americans.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Survival of General Practice in Northern Ireland

Mr Speaker: Ms Paula Bradley has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to bring the petition to the House today.

General practice is one of the bedrocks of every community in Northern Ireland and the first point of contact for 90% of health and social care-related needs. However, general practice is now in crisis owing to an excessive workload, a diminishing workforce and inadequate funding. The petition being submitted today has been signed by over 30,000 patients from across Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of Health to ensure the survival of general practice throughout Northern Ireland by investing 10% of the Northern Ireland healthcare budget in a safe, sustainable GP service for patients and funding for general practice, which is significantly reduced despite the growing demand.

Our population is increasing, with a greater proportion of people living longer and patients with more complex and lifelong conditions. Proper investment needs to be made if general practice is to survive. At present, we do not have enough GPs to service the population in Northern Ireland. The petition calls on the Minister to increase training numbers immediately to 111. The increase from 65 to 85 training places this year is very welcome but does not go far enough to meet the demand.

A quarter of Northern Ireland GPs are over 55 and are due to retire in the very near future, with not enough coming through to replace them. Inevitably, we already see practices collapsing. During the summer, we saw practices close not only in our rural communities — there are other reasons for that, as we cannot get GPs to go out as far as rural communities — but in our urban communities. Only in the summer, we saw a large practice in Bangor close as a result of having a lack of GPs. If that is allowed to continue, it will put pressure on surrounding practices and create the real threat that many people will be left without access to a GP.

The petition also calls for reduced bureaucracy and an improved IT system, because GPs want to spend as much time as possible caring and providing for their patients.

The petition comes after the release of BMA Northern Ireland's report on the crisis in primary care, which starkly illustrates the pressures on GPs. The report revealed that 74% of practices here say that they are struggling and nearly 10% are barely coping. Action needs to be taken immediately to address the issues.

Ms P Bradley moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward a copy of the petition to the Minister of Health and the Health Committee.

12.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill.

As Members are aware from the memorandum that was laid in the Assembly on 5 September, I seek the Assembly's approval for a legislative consent motion (LCM) to enable Northern Ireland to be included in the UK Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill. The Bill is being proposed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and was introduced in Westminster on 19 May. It is expected to complete its passage in early 2017, although that is subject to change.

The Bill is designed to enable the UK to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its related protocols. The convention provides for a system of general and special protection of cultural property in situations of international and non-international armed conflict. Under the convention, cultural property designated for protection bears a white and royal blue shield symbol, which carries the same protective status as the red cross and red crescent. Securing a legislative consent motion for the Cultural Property Bill will permit the Westminster Government to confer a power on the local Minister with responsibility for culture and the historic environment in Northern Ireland — currently, me — to grant permission for the use of the protective emblem here. It will also enable me as Minister to designate individuals who are entitled to use the emblem as a means of identification in Northern Ireland.

Cultural property that may be protected is that deemed to be of great importance to cultural heritage generally. In Northern Ireland, it is likely to include historic monuments in state care, high-grade listed buildings, archives, art and other exhibits under the care of, amongst others, National Museums, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and the historic environment division. It can also include works of art, archaeological sites, scientific collections and other significant materials. There is, however, no requirement that the emblem be displayed on all structures associated with the convention. It will be mandatory only in regard to structures given enhanced protection, and those are expected to be very few across the UK.

Criteria for the use of the emblem and the way the scheme operates are intended to be consistent across the United Kingdom. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has started to work through the details of what the exact policy and criteria will be for using the emblem on cultural property, as well as how it will come into operation. DCMS has confirmed that all the devolved Administrations and their relevant agencies and bodies will be fully involved in the development of the policy and related criteria, setting out exactly when the emblem should be used.

As Minister, I am strongly supportive of the scheme. I believe that it will help to provide additional protection for Northern Ireland's important and highly valued cultural and heritage assets, both now and into the future. I also

welcome the wide definition of “cultural property” that forms part of the Hague convention and is recognised in the Bill.

If the Assembly does not approve the legislative consent motion, the Bill will proceed, and the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport in Westminster will retain all powers in relation to the use of the cultural emblem in Northern Ireland. Agreeing to approve the legislative consent motion will ensure that local interests are represented in the operation of the Cultural Property Bill. On that basis, I ask Members to support the proposal.

Mr Eastwood (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities): I thank the Minister for moving the motion. Subsequent to the end of the Second World War and the massive destruction across Europe that resulted, the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted at The Hague in May 1954.

The aim of the convention was to seek to afford protection to immovable and movable cultural heritage. For example, architectural monuments, works of art, books, manuscripts and archaeological sites etc. The convention comprises two protocols. The first protocol, agreed in 1954, details the undertakings for the protection of cultural property in territory occupied during an armed conflict. The second protocol essentially enhances the protection afforded to cultural heritage, establishes offences for violation of the protocol and provides clarification on obligations to the convention.

The British Government signed the convention in 1954, but despite committing to ratify it, successive British Governments have failed to do so. The Committee for Communities welcomes the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill, which is designed to enable the UK to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and accede to its two protocols. The Committee believes the Bill will be a positive development towards the protection of our cultural heritage. The impact of armed conflict on cultural property can be devastating, and the Committee recognises that the marking of cultural property with the distinctive emblem of the convention may afford some protection to these properties. The Committee therefore welcomes the British Government’s decision to ratify the convention through the Bill.

To that extent, the Committee also welcomes the introduction of offences designed to protect cultural property in the event of an armed conflict, as well as those to deter misuse of the blue shield. The Committee notes that the wide definition of cultural property under article 1 of the convention is in the Westminster Bill. The Committee, having sought clarification from the Department, is satisfied with the rationale for using an LCM rather than an Assembly Bill. As well as cultural matters, the Westminster Bill contains provisions that mainly concern the import and export of cultural property to and from the UK. While those apply to Northern Ireland, they are not devolved matters under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and hence are outside the legislative competence of the Assembly. The Committee is content that it would not be possible, therefore, to bring forward the provisions by means of an Assembly Bill.

The Committee notes that the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the Bill will ensure consistency and coherence across the UK, noting that Wales and Scotland have agreed the same approach. Should the Assembly not pass the LCM,

the Bill would need to be amended to allow the British Minister to grant permission and make designations for the use of the emblem in Northern Ireland. The Committee agrees it is preferable that the Bill will confer powers for the Department for Communities here on the use of the emblem in Northern Ireland, and the local Minister will be able to be in a position to influence the operation of the legislation as it relates to the North of Ireland.

The Committee is satisfied that the original consultation undertaken by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2008 is still relevant and applicable and is content with the assessment that the financial impact is expected to be minimal. The Committee is also satisfied with the Department for Communities’s assessment that the extension to Northern Ireland of the relevant provisions in the Bill has no implications for equality of opportunity, nor will it have an impact on the cultural capital of Northern Ireland.

Crucially, the Committee notes that the British Government will need to develop criteria to identify cultural property within the meaning of article 1 of the convention. That is:

“movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people”.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has confirmed that all devolved Administrations will be fully involved in the development of criteria, and the Committee for Communities asks that the Minister keep it apprised of progress in that regard.

The Committee recommends that the Assembly endorse the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Cultural Property Bill.

Mr Allen: In the early 1990s, the Balkan wars in the former Yugoslavia saw events such as the destruction of the iconic Mostar bridge and the shelling of the historic old buildings of Dubrovnik. Those are a terrible reminder that the destruction of cultural heritage is a tactic of war that has not been consigned to history. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was the result, and, as of March 2016, it has been ratified by 127 states.

As somebody who served in the British armed forces and proudly so, I know only too well the duty of care, the professionalism and the training given to members of the armed forces to ensure that a duty of care is afforded to cultural property, and we do all we can to ensure they are not caught up in conflicts or destroyed. However, events throughout history tell us and prove that there are others who do not take such an approach. That is why we support this LCM to afford cultural protection to monuments, art and other items of cultural significance throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Stalford: The Committee Chairman has given a very fair assessment of the position that the Committee has adopted. Earlier today, we talked about Syria. In Palmyra, in Syria, we have all seen a dreadful example of what can happen when significant cultural and architectural property is not afforded protection. Ruins of an ancient civilisation that had survived thousands of years and inspired awe and admiration among all who visited them, were destroyed in seconds by terrorists armed with explosives.

It is in that regard that the failure of successive Governments to implement the 1954 Hague convention should be addressed. I am glad that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has recognised the need for the preservation of our heritage. Whilst I agree with the Minister that there can only be certain circumstances in which the blue and white shield symbol can be deployed, I hope that, in time, when the Bill is passed and the system is rolled out, the possession of the blue and white shield on a facility will become a badge of honour. It says that this is something that the Government recognise as being significant and worthy of preservation.

Ultimately, of course, it is to be hoped that it is highly unlikely that Northern Ireland will ever again be affected by circumstances where our monuments, art and archives etc would be in a position to be threatened. I welcome the fact that, more than 60 years after the Hague convention, the Government at Westminster and our own Government are taking action to ensure its effective implementation. I support the legislative consent motion.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I, too, support this LCM. I declare an interest as one of the four or maybe five Ministers who tried to bring this forward. Many accusations are levelled at this place about things moving slowly, but we have waited since 1954, so this one was not on our watch, in fairness. There were attempts from 2007 through to 2008 to have the convention ratified. That is really important.

To be fair, the Chair summed up exactly what was discussed in Committee and laid out very clearly our understanding and acknowledgement of the need for this LCM to be brought forward. As has been mentioned, the definition of cultural property in article 1 is very wide, but I am delighted that the clarification that we sought has been granted and that all devolved Administrations and institutions will be responsible for its designation.

As the Minister said in his opening remarks, the Bill is passing through Westminster, and if any changes are made, I would anticipate that they will be brought to us. I would also expect — it is not in the Bill in any great detail, although the inference is there — that when cultural property is seized, it is returned. There have been instances where that has happened in the past. Indeed, it has also been a very important part of many conflict resolution processes to have property brought forward and granted.

The designation is really important, as is the symbol. It gives it equal status, as was mentioned previously, with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. I believe that, as it goes through scrutiny, as we anticipate, in this mandate and mandates ahead, that will be brought to the attention of the Department for Communities. We support the LCM.

12.45 pm

Mrs Long: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I welcome the opportunity to speak about the legislative consent motion.

As the Chair set out, the Committee welcomes the British Government's ratification of the 1954 Hague convention earlier this year and supports a legislative consent motion as being the most sensible way for us in Northern Ireland to deal with the matter and to allow some of those powers to be devolved to the Assembly so that our cultural heritage and property can be protected.

The Hague convention is broken into two protocols, the first emphasising the protection of cultural property in the territory occupied during an armed conflict; and the second strengthening the first by establishing offences for violations of the first protocol and clarifying obligations.

Cultural property is a very wide-ranging term. However, the Bill is not controversial in its aims or definitions of cultural items. It seeks to protect "immovable" and "movable" items that possess significant cultural heritage to an area and outlines that removing such items will be an offence. That can include architectural monuments, works of art, books, manuscripts and also the damage committed to archaeological sites, all of which can add value to a region and enrich it.

In a globalised world that is experiencing significant civil unrest and cultural violence, it is important that we are strong against the theft of cultural property from other nations. As others have reflected, having talked about Aleppo and Syria today, we also think of Palmyra and the destruction of the relics of an ancient civilisation that have been there for many thousands of years. They were destroyed in the most wanton display of cultural destruction that we have seen in some considerable time.

It is good that, whilst we in the Chamber will be largely powerless in preventing such actions during a war, the Bill is a positive step in reducing the potential for items pillaged from places such as Palmyra being sold on the black market for profit. That is hugely important. It is also good in that it allows our local cultural heritage to be protected and recognised. Whilst we hope that Northern Ireland will never become a war zone under the Hague convention, it is a sensible precaution to identify those matters that are of cultural significance, not just for us regionally but internationally, and give them due protection, and not just from war, by giving them status on an international footing. The opportunity to do that is hugely important.

We are happy to support the Bill as a way of protecting artefacts and monuments that have special importance in the preservation of cultures, locally and globally. We live in an increasingly interconnected and globalised world, and, by supporting the Bill, we can support and develop a global community of different cultures for all people at a time when there is increasing instability around the world.

Mr Givan: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for Communities, its members and Members for their contributions this afternoon. A couple of points were raised. One was whether I would continue to keep the Committee apprised of developments, and I am happy to do that. The exact criteria for how this will apply in Northern Ireland are being developed by the DCMS. My Department has a role in that, and I am happy to keep Members informed as developments progress.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill.

Private Members' Business

Housing Associations: Reclassification

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. An amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The amendment has been tabled by those who tabled the motion. The motion and the amendment will be proposed together and wound up on together, with 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech.

Mr Allen: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the likelihood that the Office for National Statistics will reclassify Northern Ireland's 22 housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies; that this may limit their ability to access private finance to build new homes; that the £1 billion of private debt already on their books could be added to the Executive's balance sheet, taking the Executive's total borrowing to levels that would reduce drastically their ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities to prepare to bring forward urgent legislation to reverse the reclassification of Northern Ireland housing associations so that they can remain classified as independent social businesses.

I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "notes" and insert

"the decision by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Northern Ireland's 22 housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies; recognises that this will have a significant impact on housing associations and their ability to provide new social and shared ownership homes; further notes that this decision will add nearly £1 billion of housing association debt to the Northern Ireland Executive's balance sheet, seriously impacting on the Executive's ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities and Minister of Finance to expedite the steps necessary to reverse this reclassification; and agree quickly an interim derogation arrangement with HM Treasury to enable the sector to continue to function normally, to engage closely with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to agree a joined-up approach, and to outline a clear and detailed timeline for specific action, including bringing forward legislation, within the time frame that any HM Treasury derogation allows, to ensure that Northern Ireland's housing associations can remain classified as independent social businesses."

As Members will be aware, events have moved on somewhat since the motion was originally tabled, so an amendment is necessary to take account of the changed circumstances. The original motion was tabled in advance of the decision by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify Northern Ireland's housing associations as public bodies, which was announced on Thursday 29 September. What, on the face of it, might appear to be a relatively unimportant and technical change in accounting rules would actually have very serious implications indeed.

This is a problem that needs to be rectified quickly, and we will give our help and support to the Executive, within reason, to help with the solution. We welcome the fact that the Executive have vowed to seek a reversal of the ONS decision to reclassify NI housing associations, including amending legislation where appropriate.

Our motion and amendment were tabled because we have two main areas of concern. The first is that housing associations could find it difficult to raise funding and, as a result, there would be a serious effect on their ability to build badly-needed social housing. Given that we are already in the midst of a housing crisis, anything that might contribute to uncertainty and jeopardise the social housing building programme should be avoided at all costs. Approximately 8,000 social housing starts are planned in the next four years, and these would obviously be under threat if there was any question over whether or not local housing associations were able to continue to borrow in the same manner as they can at present and raise much-needed private finances. There would also be major implications for the co-ownership scheme affecting roughly 700 to 800 homes each year. This scheme is funded via the financial transactions capital (FTC) money from the Treasury, and one of the primary conditions is that it can be lent only to private bodies.

The second concern is that, as a result of this reclassification, the approximately £1 billion worth of borrowing currently on local housing associations' books would be transferred to the Executive's balance sheet. This would obviously have a potentially devastating effect on the Executive's finances.

As I stated, our original motion was tabled prior to both the ONS announcement that Northern Ireland housing associations would be reclassified as public bodies and the statements by the Minister for Communities and the Minister of Finance. As a result, my party, working with its SDLP Opposition colleagues, has brought forward the amendment. The amendment takes account of the changed circumstances, and we are confident that it will command support across the House.

The ONS did not just pronounce on the reclassification of Northern Ireland housing associations as public bodies. It also reclassified their counterparts in Scotland and Wales. We are of the view that, as Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have all been set exactly the same challenge at exactly the same time, if the Executive are serious about being focused on delivery, we need to act at least as swiftly as the Scottish and the Welsh. Stormont has often been accused of inertia and being slow to act. This simply cannot be allowed to happen here. ONS has said:

"We will assess at the impact of these classification decisions and will update the affected statistics at the earliest opportunity."

We have concerns as to what the implications might be for Northern Ireland should there be any delay. We need to see a coordinated approach by the Minister for Communities and the Minister of Finance to the very real dangers that we face. We need to get an appropriate derogation agreed with the Treasury, and then we need to ensure that the derogation is of a sufficient length of time. The legislative process in the House can seem rather torturous. It should go without saying that we need to ensure that we get the relevant legislation through the

House without delay and certainly well within the time frame of the derogation.

Even if legislation were being drafted today, we could face a very tight timetable to get a Treasury derogation, given that it can take 18 to 24 months for legislation to pass through the House so that all the required stages receive full scrutiny. We want to see joined-up, concerted action between the devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The three devolved Administrations need to agree a joint endeavour on the matter to deal with the Treasury on the derogation and to get a deal on the interim arrangements. In short, we need an appropriate derogation with a realistic time frame.

We therefore need a commitment from the Minister for Communities and the Minister of Finance that we will get the legislation through the House not just in a timely manner but at least as quickly as the Administrations in Edinburgh and Cardiff. That is a very important point, because, as the ONS has ruled on housing associations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland at the same time, it is more than logical to assume that it will reconsider their status at the same time. As stated earlier, it said that it would assess the impact of the classification decisions and update the affected statistics at the earliest opportunity. There is a real danger that Northern Ireland could get left behind and the derogation could run out. We want to avoid that at all costs, given the serious difficulties that it would cause for housing associations' ability to deliver new-build housing and for the borrowing ability of the Executive.

Given the most recent figures, from June 2016, of 37,347 households on the housing waiting list, 22,986 deemed to be in housing stress and 15,747 deemed to be statutorily homeless, it is imperative that we act swiftly. I therefore call on either the Minister for Communities or the Minister of Finance to set out a clear timeline for what action they intend to take. The Opposition are ready and willing to work with the relevant Ministers to the benefit of Northern Ireland.

Mr Stalford: As someone who represents South Belfast, I am painfully aware of the shortages in social housing. All Members who represent Belfast constituencies — not only Belfast, of course, but beyond — have found that there is a need for more social housing. The previous Executive met their target on social housing, and this Executive have set an ambitious target of 8,000 houses, as the Member for East Belfast Mr Allen said.

I think that Members can be assured of the commitment of the Government to achieving a reversal in the Office for National Statistics' decision, not only because of the statements from the Minister on the issue but because of the statements from the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance and the Minister for Communities took the issue to the Northern Ireland Executive on the very afternoon that the decision was announced, in order to secure the agreement of the Executive to address it. There is a recognition at the heart of government of the need to secure the derogation. That has been evidenced by my colleague the Minister for Communities and by the Minister of Finance. Officials in the Department for Communities and the Department of Finance are working together to achieve an effective derogation that will allow the time that is needed for all the actions to ensure a successful reversal of the Office for National Statistics' decision.

It is important in the debate to note that Ministers in a devolved Government have no control over the Office for National Statistics. The ONS is the United Kingdom's largest independent producer of official statistics and is the recognised national statistical institution for the United Kingdom. Its responsibilities, as Members will know, include collecting and publishing statistics related to the economy, population and society at national, regional and local level. The Office for National Statistics independently determines classification decisions strictly in accordance with agreed rules set out in established systems. It is important to remember that when we approach the issue.

1.00 pm

The Northern Ireland Executive are committed to delivering on their housing target, and we are committed to dealing with the issues that have been raised here. The one thing I would say, having read the motion, is that I welcome the fact that it has been acknowledged that the Executive are doing what has been called for. The motion calls for actions that are already being undertaken by the Executive. In an ordinary system — perhaps in a more parliamentary system — it is supposed to be the Opposition who lead the Government, but, in this instance, the Government are leading the Opposition. Read the content of what has been presented to the House: it calls on the Government to undertake actions that are already being undertaken. I do not want to add further discomfort for our friends at the bottom of the Chamber, but it might be worth considering more detailed discussions with Ministers before rushing in motions that demand actions that are already being carried out by those in positions of —

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. He, of course, makes a valid point. Government ought to be ahead of the curve on the issue because it was predictable. Do you not agree that it might have been an opportunity for the Minister to make a statement to the House and clarify what exactly he was doing in the last 11 days so that Members could be fully informed?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: I thank the lady for her point. There are few better informed in the House than her, and she makes her point well. It is important, however, to note that the actions that are being called for are being undertaken.

One issue that has been raised is, of course, the implications that the determination has on public spending and our capacity to borrow money. That has implications that go way beyond matters of housing, and I suspect that the universities in my constituency, in particular, will look closely at the content of the debate and the subsequent resolution of the issues that have been raised.

I think that we can be confident that the changes that the Department will bring forward will allow us to achieve a reversal of the ONS position. There are, of course, no certainties, but I believe that that is the reason why officials in the Department will closely examine the issue with the Office for National Statistics. We can be as sure as anything can be in life and confident that every effort will be made to ensure that the decision is reversed, and I believe that that is what everyone — Government and Opposition — wants to happen.

Mr F McCann: I will speak to the motion tabled in the name of the Ulster Unionists and to the amendment in the name of the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP. When I first read the motion, it seemed that the Ulster Unionists had not only jumped the gun in tabling the motion, which is rushed and out of date, but had asked for steps to be taken that the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Communities had been working towards. In fact, I have raised those issues with both Ministers and have been assured that all that could be done was being done in the run-up to the decision of the Office for National Statistics to reclassify housing associations across the North from independent social enterprises to public finance bodies.

The amendment is also now redundant, given the decision of the Executive last Thursday when they approved a joint paper from Ministers Ó Muilleoir and Givan to seek a reversal of the ONS decision to reclassify housing associations in the North, including amending legislation where appropriate. They said:

"The Executive is committed to providing suitable homes for all and we will now work together to find the best way forward to allow investment to continue."

The Minister of Finance added:

"Having a secure and stable social housing sector is a ... cornerstone of our civic society."

He went on to say:

"We need to take all measures necessary to ensure that the sector has [the ability] to invest and grow."

The decision by the Office for National Statistics, if left unaddressed by the Executive, would have changed the budgeting rules and could have resulted in an annual shortfall of £100 million for social and affordable housing.

That is why, he said:

"we plan to seek a derogation to prevent this".

That clearly shows that the Ministers and the Executive, who are clued-in to the difficulties —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr F McCann: No. I have only a couple of minutes.

That clearly shows that the Ministers and the Executive, who are clued-in to the difficulties of the decision the ONS has made, have been proactive in putting out the message that they will seek a derogation. It is also my understanding that the Minister of Finance has been in touch with his equivalents in Scotland and Wales to ensure there is joined-up thinking and that a solution to reclassification can be found. In a statement, the chief executive of NIFHA, Cameron Watt, in response to the Office for National Statistics' reclassification of housing associations, said that he "warmly welcomes" the decision of the Executive to seek a reversal of the decision and their commitment to amend legislation if appropriate. He went on to say that he was:

"delighted that the NI Executive has acted ... decisively to seek a reversal of the ONS decision",

saying that it:

"is vitally important in sustaining this successful partnership."

He went on to say:

"We are grateful to Communities Minister ... and Finance Minister Máirtín Ó Muilleoir ... for their immediate and effective response to the ONS decision. Both Ministers have recognised the crucial role of housing associations in delivering much-needed homes."

The decision in October 2015 by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify housing associations in England from private financial corporations to public non-financial corporations sent shock waves through housing circles across the North, not least because of the impact of reclassification on housing associations here. Now that it has happened, it is crucial that we leave nothing to chance. It is important also to build the partnership Cameron Watt spoke of not only to move to obtain derogation but to plot out a strategy for housebuilding in the social housing sector. I understand what my colleague across the Chamber said about the commitment to 8,000 houses, but we should take that as a minimum rather than a maximum target. It needs to include developing ways to give the power of new build back to the Housing Executive. The fact that a housing provider is sitting on stock of 88,000 houses it cannot use to lever in much-needed finance is madness. Just imagine what a game changer that could be for new build as we work towards a solution to the reclassification problems. We also need to work to make the changes necessary to bring the Housing Executive back into play. We need to look at how we bring the thousands of empty homes back into use —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr F McCann: Chair, I would like to mention, because this has not been taken up, the significance of today being World Homeless Day and World Mental Health Day, which are two issues that cross paths and need our urgent attention.

Ms Mallon: It is not only important but essential that the motion was brought to the House today. It is essential because of the profound financial, economic and societal impact of the reclassification by the Office for National Statistics of Northern Ireland's 22 housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies on housing associations' ability to access finance to build critical and much-needed new homes and the potential to add £1 billion debt to the Executive's balance sheet, as the motion points out, with all the serious implications and consequences that will have for Executive investment in education, health and economic initiatives, among other things.

Yet, despite the significant ramifications of the reclassification, there has been little to no detail of what plans the Communities Minister and Finance Minister had in place in preparation for it — we knew in all likelihood it was coming down the track — and nothing, beyond headlines, of what actions the Ministers had actually taken since the reclassification was announced. In truth, the motion contains more detail than anything forthcoming to date from the Executive or either Minister. In fact, the Minister for Communities and his counterpart in the Department of Finance clearly did not deem the issue important enough to come before this democratic Chamber to make a statement on the matter, give some reassurance to the House and to the people who elected us, give reassurance to each of the 22 housing associations

affected and, most importantly, give reassurance to the 37,000 people on the social housing waiting list and the 15,474 deemed homeless and desperately waiting and waiting for a home. Perhaps the Minister will share with us today the rationale for taking this approach. In fact, apart from a joint press release that talked in vague terms of an approved Executive paper seeking a non-detailed reversal of the ONS decision, including amending unspecified legislation and plans to seek a derogation, the House has been provided with no concrete detail of what both Ministers are doing. The Member for South Belfast referred to multiple statements from each Minister: I do not know where those statements are.

This leaves questions to which we seek answers. What level of deregulation will be implemented? Will it have empowerment of the tenant at its core? What consultation has taken place and will take place to ensure that Northern Ireland gets the right response? What discussions have both Ministers had with their counterparts in Scotland and Wales to deliver a joined-up approach and ensure that Northern Ireland is not left behind? What is the Minister's clear and detailed timeline for specific action? What amended legislation is being proposed? At what stage is that legislation? When will it be enacted? Will it be within the time frame that any Treasury derogation allows? If it falls outside the derogation period granted, what safeguards will both Ministers provide? How advanced are derogation negotiations with the Treasury?

I tried to obtain some of that information through a question for written answer tabled on 26 September, but, interestingly, the answer has been embargoed until today. Perhaps the Minister can explain why the embargo was put in place. Hopefully, today, the Minister will provide answers to these questions and others posed by Members across the Chamber or, at least, follow them up in writing if it is not possible to provide definitive answers today.

Before I conclude, I would like to touch on another point. I firmly believe that with change comes great opportunity. We have here a real opportunity not to freely deregulate but to ensure that we deliver sensible, modernised regulation with empowerment of the tenant at its core. Within this, there is also the opportunity, I would argue, to revisit the recommendation of the PricewaterhouseCoopers strategic review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which was supported by the Housing Executive and widely across the housing sector, to establish an independent regulator of social housing.

Prior to the move to reclassify housing associations by the Office for National Statistics, good regulation and effective regulatory infrastructures have been a popular theme in policy development over the last two decades. We are often asked to look —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member conclude her remarks?

Ms Mallon: — to Scotland for best practice. On this, I urge the Minister to look to Scotland with regard to the independence of the regulator and to ensure that, in moving swiftly to address budgetary pressures, he does not store up a series of problems for the longer term.

Mrs Long: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and the amendment. Obviously, as others have said, the context has now moved on because the expected decision by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify

the housing associations as public bodies has now been announced.

Mr Speaker, you know that, last week, I raised this matter as a point of order because I am of the belief that the announcement is so significant that it required a ministerial statement to the House rather than simply a press release. Whilst the move was expected, its impact and the Executive's response and preparedness to address it are matters of public and political importance and ones that should have been brought to the Chamber. It is all very well to criticise people for tabling motions to bring Ministers to the House on this: Ministers could opt to come to the House of their own volition and give the information to reassure the public. I therefore welcome the opportunity that has been provided by the motion to seek that clarity, but I would like Ministers to make the effort to do that of their own volition rather than deliver lectures to the rest of us about how we should go about our work.

A highly significant change, it will not only have ramifications for important economic and social rights to housing but will impact on the wider financial situation in Departments. Housing associations have always been somewhat different from the Housing Executive in how they have approached these matters. Until now, they have been able to operate as industrial and provident societies. That means that they could benefit from both government funding and private finance to allow them to build more homes and perform essential upkeep of their current stock, should they so wish.

It is commonly through commercial banks, the Housing Finance Corporation and, more recently, the European Investment Bank.

1.15 pm

The Housing Executive provides around 90,000 homes, and housing associations make up around 40,000 properties, so, all in all, we are talking about 100,000 individuals and families across Northern Ireland. It is also important to remember that many of those are families that are vulnerable, facing hardship and struggling to find employment. The ONS decision impacts on all of them in terms of access to funding for maintenance and upgrades available for their properties. In addition, it also impacts directly on the 40,000 people on the waiting lists for suitable housing and who are in housing stress, as the ability to leverage private funds is crucial in allowing housing associations to develop new stock. It is inconceivable that the Executive could afford to make up the shortfall, even in the interim, without a serious negative impact on the plans and budgets of other Departments.

In June, for example, the European Investment Bank gave £280 million towards social housing in Northern Ireland; that amount of money could not have been sourced if these rules had been in place. It was rightly welcomed at the time, but it is important, if we are to get the construction of 4,700 new social homes over the next five years, alongside the improvement of existing stock, that further opportunities like that are not now put at risk. Therefore, it is important that housing associations are clearly advised about certainty in their funding opportunities. The Minister briefed the Committee and advised that he reckons that, over the next 30 years, about £6.5 billion will need to be injected into housing if accommodation is to meet the significant demand for

both social and affordable housing. However, without the additional leverage that we get from housing associations, that simply will not be possible.

In addition, the existing borrowing of housing associations has now essentially been converted into public borrowing — a move that has wide-ranging implications for the cost and accessibility of borrowing for the Executive. During his briefing with the Committee, the Minister indicated that the Department was alert to the possibility of reclassification and that Ministers were ready for the challenge, which we welcome. When similar ONS rulings were made in regard to England, Scotland and Wales, Ministers had a case to present to the Treasury regarding emergency legislation to restructure housing associations in light of the judgement and to meet the requirements for their governance arrangements and allow them to be revisited in due course.

That allowed a temporary derogation to be offered by the Treasury. I ask the Minister whether such emergency legislation has been developed by his Department and what the time frame for tabling it in the Assembly will be. What, if any, reassurance has he had from Treasury that such legislation that he has proposed, and other proposals that he has developed, will meet its requirements for a temporary derogation? Within what time frame does he expect such a derogation to be secured, and how long does he expect it to last? In respect of seeking a reversal of the ONS decision —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Mrs Long: — what clarity can the Minister provide with respect to the likely effectiveness of the measures proposed in meeting those requirements?

I support the motion and the amendment, and I look forward to supporting the Ministers in what they do to ensure that the issues are adequately addressed.

Mr Girvan: I too support both the motion and the amendment, although I see this as people trying to make themselves seem relevant by putting down a motion on something that the Executive have already made a move to address.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Girvan: No, I will not; I have only started. To be honest, the attitude is that the Opposition are just jumping over issues. We are wasting another hour and a half today discussing something that we have already dealt with.

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Girvan: I have already said that I am not giving way, OK? The point of the matter is —

Mrs Long: Do the Executive have legislation for us?

Mr Girvan: We have — Members — Mr Speaker —

Mr Speaker: I ask Members not to speak from sedentary positions.

Mr Girvan: Thank you.

I support the motion in the way that it is coming forward. I think that the Executive have made a sensible decision in asking for a derogation in relation to this matter. The ONS report that was submitted, on the back of what it is bringing forward, will create and would have created a

major problem, both financially for the Executive and in the opportunity for further borrowing for capital projects that could be of great benefit. I do think that some of the housing associations are not without blame, because I do not believe that they have necessarily delivered in the past. I do not think that they have always been successful in delivering everything that was supposed to have been done by them. There has been a certain amount of — I will not use the word “culling” — consolidation of housing associations in that a number of them have come together and pooled resources.

I appreciate that we are talking about £1 billion of debt associated with these housing associations. There is a massive asset and they are quite asset rich, so, on the back of that, we have to realise that the days of the Housing Executive as it stands are probably numbered. There is the difficulty of onward maintenance and delivery of that maintenance within the housing stock.

I, too, representing the south Antrim area, know those people who come to my door. Quite a heavy load of the office work —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Girvan: I will indeed, yes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He is, obviously, very selective and wise in who he gives way to.

The Member will have heard from various sources a demand for more information in terms of the detail. The Office for National Statistics has not even published the detail of its ruling yet.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Girvan: Thank you. I appreciate the Member's intervention and the information that we do not have the detail in that report.

The Housing Executive is having some difficulty. In fact, it is wanting to engage in a transfer of assets to housing associations over the next number of years of properties requiring investment, upgrade and improvement. The Housing Executive says that the mechanism is no longer there for it to be able to fund that through the current process, and, as a consequence, it has no alternative but to allow housing associations to do that.

On the back of that, they do have the model —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he not accept that the inability of the Housing Executive to make those improvements was a political decision made by DUP Ministers?

Mr Girvan: If you go back historically, it was long before the DUP took control of those Departments when such a rule existed in relation to the funding mechanism for the Housing Executive and how it has accessed the funding. So, putting that message forward is a ruse. It is totally wrong and that does not tie in with any decision by a DUP Minister.

As it stands, the housing associations do have the mechanism to draw down the money to deliver the social housing in the areas that we need it. I appreciate and welcome the Executive's early intervention — within hours of receiving the ONS report — in dealing with this matter,

and not waiting until they could just get a sound bite and try to make themselves seem relevant.

This is one of the areas where in opposition is where you will be, and that is exactly where you should stay.

Ms Gildernew: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. Other Members have pointed out that this motion is retrospectively debating an issue that has already happened and that, when the ONS acted to reclassify housing associations, the Minister for Communities and the Minister of Finance brought a paper to the Executive immediately seeking that derogation.

The point has already been made here as well that the difficulty we have is that there is a shortage in social housing, not just in Belfast or Derry but right across the North. I am currently representing a wide range of applicants, from families to single men, to access a home in my constituency. The big issue is that there are not enough units — enough homes — and there is not enough social housing. The nub of the issue is that the body charged with the provision of housing — the Housing Executive — is no longer in a position to build units. My colleague Fra McCann has covered that. I believe that this is something that we will want to rectify during this mandate. Until this situation is rectified, we will still be playing catch-up.

There are differences of opinion on how many units of social housing we need across the mandate. We have not taken into consideration that there are hundreds of adults living at home with ageing parents because there is not enough supported housing or independent living for them. I am talking about adults who are learning-disabled or have more complex needs, and we do not have adequate housing for them.

As a result, there are ageing parents who are deeply concerned about how their child is going to manage when they are no longer able to look after them. We have to take a proper look at the figures and ensure that those people are dealt with when we are considering the number of housing units needed. While today's debate has been lively enough, there is a fairly high level of consensus around the Chamber. The SDLP amendment is something that we can support, and we will be seeking to do that. I make the point, however, that what is laid out in the amendment is work that is already happening. We are talking about something that has happened, that is happening and that the Minister —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Ms Gildernew: I notice that Mr Beggs has tried to interrupt a number of Members. Maybe he should put his name down to make a speech rather than continually interrupt.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Gildernew: This is an important issue. Housing is at the very heart of what I got involved in politics for. As Fra said, today is World Mental Health Day and World Homeless Day. A proper home and a roof over your head is not a privilege but a human right, and everybody should be able to enjoy that right. We should do more to build more houses, and I will support the Minister in his endeavours to do that. It is essential, however, that we establish new housing units right across the North, as this is not just a Belfast problem.

Lord Morrow: This is a debate that never needed to take place. When we look at the Opposition Benches today, we can see that the Opposition now agree that it should never have taken place. Of the parties that are co-signatories to the amendment, the Ulster Unionists can manage five Members and the SDLP one. Even they realise that this is a bit of a non-event.

Mrs Long: More than you managed last week.

Lord Morrow: Mrs Long continually fires from a sedentary position, but whenever she is up talking, she has not that much to say, at least not that much that is worth —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Hold on a moment. *[Laughter.]* We have heard you parroting off all afternoon. What you want to say must be very important. Well, there is the Speaker up there, so go up and get your name down. For goodness' sake, you are up and down there like a jack-in-the-box. Some of your colleagues will give way. They will be up in a few minutes telling a great story about a non-event.

It is unfortunate that the Opposition on the first occasion that they decide that maybe there is something we can unite on here then unite around nothing. What they are asking to be done is already being done. I found it absolutely amazing that Mrs Long said that the Minister should have been telling us all. I suspect that Mrs Long is not much different from me, in that she walks past the Minister's door maybe a dozen times a day. It would not be hard for her to call in and ask, "Can you tell me about this? I am so anxious about this particular issue".

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. To be clear, it is not that I should personally be told. That is largely irrelevant. It is that the House should be told, as statements were made in the Chamber in Scotland, Wales and England when similar measures were taken.

Lord Morrow: I knew that it was a mistake to give way, but there you go.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Lord Morrow: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

There is no one in the House, particularly among those of us who have served for some years on councils and elsewhere, who is not very aware of the importance of social-sector housing. We are also very aware of the waiting lists that exist, but we are also waiting for some blue-sky thinking from those who seem to have all the answers on how to deal with a chronic waiting list in Northern Ireland. It is not a simple one. There is not one Member in the House — not one going right around — who is not anxious about this particular issue. Those who brought the motion to the House today have not done anything to push the issue forward. Maybe what they are really doing is endorsing what the Executive and the Minister are already doing. If there is something positive to take from it, I suppose that we can take that.

Ms Mallon: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes. Come on.

1.30 pm

Ms Mallon: The Member will be aware that I posed a series of questions about what the Ministers and Executive

were doing. Is the Member in a position to answer those? Is all of that information in the public domain?

Lord Morrow: Yes. From statements made by the Minister, I know that much, if not all, of the information, is already available. I know that you would be a good researcher, and you or your staff could research all of that information; or, I suspect that, if you contact the Department, it might be able to assist you and send you all the information that you want. As one who has gone through it, I can tell you that the Department's research department is very effective and will assist you. I do not say that to you belligerently; I hope that my tone comes across.

The Opposition need to realise that, if they stopped setting up straw men and knocking them down, maybe we could get things done in this place. Someone mentioned the amount of time that it takes for legislation to go through. I know, as someone who pioneered private legislation in the past, that it took something in the region of three years from start to finish. I do not underestimate the journey that legislation has to take, but the Opposition could have done a greater service by not pushing a motion such as the one that is before us today. It is a motion on something that the Executive have already applied themselves to and the Minister is already working on. He has pushed it down the road, and he, too, sees it as important. If anything good has come out of today's debate, it is that the decision that the Minister took some time ago has been reinforced. What we are saying to you, Minister, is, "You are doing the right thing. Just get on with it".

Mr Beggs: It is a rather sad event in a debating chamber when none of the Government Back-Benchers are prepared to give way to allow debate. I am lucky that I had my name down to speak, but I could have interacted and, hopefully, contributed to the discussion and debate had those Members allowed it, but, obviously, they did not feel confident enough in themselves to do so.

I support the motion tabled by my colleagues Andy Allen, Jenny Palmer and Philip Smith, and, indeed, the amendment in the name of my colleagues and the SDLP, which has supported the motion as well. It is important that this area is urgently addressed, and I will highlight why I have a degree of concern because of past inaction. It needs to be in the public domain, and there needs to be pressure on movement in this area because there are concerns from the past.

The decision by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Northern Ireland's housing associations should not have been a problem. A year ago, when it did so in England, what happened? Earlier this year, the Housing and Planning Act 2016 addressed the issue so that English housing associations could be reclassified again as private bodies. Nobody should be surprised by what has happened. Given that knowledge, I am concerned by the cost that might fall to the Executive or our housing associations as a result of the reclassification. Will there be delays? I have not yet heard when the legislation will come forward, so I hope that the Minister will address that when he gets to his feet later. The Finance Minister has indicated that this will cost an ongoing £100 million a year. Is there a charge this year? On top of that, of course, is the issue that my colleague Andy Allen highlighted, of access to the financial transaction capital, which is also very important for housing associations, particularly for the co-ownership scheme that allows many people who might

otherwise be homeless and in need of social housing, to find a home of their own.

We need to address this with a degree of urgency. It was quickly addressed in England, and Scotland's First Minister has already said that a Bill will be introduced. When I listen to the Government Back-Benchers in the Chamber, I am confused: are they all supporting the motion as amended? I picked up a degree of discontent.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Yes, unlike you and your colleagues, I will give way.

Mr Givan: I thought this would be an appropriate time to indicate this to the House: given that your amendment is doing exactly what I want to do and the Executive have already agreed, let me reassure you that I will be supporting the amendment.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: The issue is that new legislation will be required. That is very obvious when you see what had to happen in England and what has been planned elsewhere. That has been not coming out very clearly in what has been said to date. To think that you can just ask for derogation is living in cloud cuckoo land. It had to be amended in other parts of the UK and therefore would likely have to be amended here as well.

The other area of concern I had was when I heard Mr McCann speak. His solution was to give the powers back to the Housing Executive. Can the Minister advise, when he gets to his feet, whether that would solve our problem, or would it have additional costs still being incurred where we would not be able to build as many social houses? I would like to see clarity from the Government Benches — the DUP and Sinn Féin Benches — about that. Is that what the plan is? Are we going to simply put the ability to build houses back into the Housing Executive and suffer huge financial costs and be able to build fewer homes? It would be helpful if the Minister would clarify that.

The other area I have a degree of concern about is other aspects of our public sector in Northern Ireland. While researching this issue for the debate, I looked at the FE colleges. There was a similar assessment done in 2010 for FE colleges that is applicable to Northern Ireland as well. In England, they brought the Education Act 2011 to address the issue so that they could remain independent, avoid costs and be included in public-sector expenditure. My understanding is that that is not the case in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, our FE colleges continue to be included, and that limits what they can do. It limits what the Executive can do with their limited borrowing. Bear in mind that that is some five years ago, so I do not want this issue to be still trundling on for five years. As I indicated, very obvious delays happened in the past, and I seek reassurance from the Minister that we will not face similar delays with this issue. When we delay the ability to build new houses, disadvantaged members of our community do not get homes. Families in need do not get a roof over their head. It is vital that there are not undue delays. It is also vital that we do not incur financial penalties as a result of indecision from our Government.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member conclude his remarks?

Mr Beggs: I only hope that, in future, debate will be allowed in the House.

Dr Farry: I will pick up from Mr Beggs on further education to say that there is no clamour in the FE sector for a reclassification away from being a non-departmental public body. The situation for FE in Northern Ireland is much healthier than in England where there have been quite significant funding cuts, which have been cut out from a lot of the narrative on investment in skills and education. Consideration was given to a potential public consultation on changing the governance for FE to allow ONS to reclassify it away from NDPBs. In light of our own difficulties with budgets and the fact that the Executive put in place end-year flexibility that allowed surpluses to be transferred from one year to another, there is now consensus that the status quo is the best way forward. So that is not an appropriate line to go down.

I want to make a number of brief comments on this situation. The key issue of debate that has emerged in the Chamber today is on process and how the Opposition are somehow out of order in bringing up something that the Executive, in their infinite wisdom, are on top of. Almost building upon the theme of last week's business, we are again seeing the problems in openness and transparency in what the Executive are doing. It is almost as though we have a privilege in sometimes being told what the Executive are actually up to. We should have open and transparent government where decisions are explained, questions are answered on time and Ministers are proactive in bringing information to the Assembly rather than putting the onus on everyone else to go around and find out.

It is not just a matter of us receiving the information as poor MLAs in the Opposition parties; this is something that actually affects the public of Northern Ireland, who have an interest in hearing what is being said as well. That is the case in particular for the housing associations and our wider policy objectives of being able to make sure the resources available in Northern Ireland can be stretched to their maximum outcome. Obviously, the reclassification potential will severely curtail that in many respects.

A lot of this could have been avoided if the Minister had been proactive in bringing a statement to the Assembly. That, in turn, allows MLAs, on behalf of their constituents, to pose questions to the Minister. I hope that we can avoid this situation in future. It is an important issue that goes to the heart of the resources available to us and what we can do to make a difference.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Dr Farry: Yes.

Mr Stalford: Does the Member not agree that it sounds a tad silly to stand up and say that it is the Minister's fault that you have brought forward a motion about an issue that the Minister has dealt with?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Dr Farry: Thank you. It is not silly in the slightest. It goes to the heart of the debate. There is, as there should be, a duty on Ministers in the ministerial code — they should follow through on it — to be open around decisions. There is clearly precedent in other jurisdictions that, where there are matters of major public interest, a Minister is proactive in bringing information forward and having scrutiny. When I was the Minister, I did it routinely, as did others.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. There seems to be much kerfuffle in the corner because people dared to amend the motion. Does the Member agree that that is largely to do with timing and when the wording of motions has to be set down, which is much further in advance of what would be expected in any other Chamber in these islands?

Dr Farry: In concurring with my colleague, I also recall many instances on which the DUP and Sinn Féin, as the two parties of government, did exactly the same thing with motions that had to be tabled where the circumstances had moved on after the original tabling of the motion. It also shows that —

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. Mrs Long should get it into her head that it was not so much about amending the motion; the motion should have been withdrawn altogether.

Dr Farry: For better or worse, this is the only opportunity that the Assembly has had to discuss the issues. If we had what should have been the process in the Chamber of a ministerial statement, we could have done this in a much more structured way, akin to what is happening in Cardiff and Edinburgh, which have shown the way forward in that regard. Lest the current Minister thinks that we are picking on him, although this is the current example, it is a trend across the board. He is not the only one who is falling into the situation of not having the proper mechanisms of accountability. We are having the debate today, and we are able to raise the issues of process and the substance.

My final point is that there are issues in other parts of government where the way that ONS works and how we treat parts of the public sector allow or constrain the ability to borrow and raise money. I encourage the Executive to have a wider look across the piece in that regard. In doing so, we may find, particularly in these very straitened economic times, that there are resources available to us without having to raise revenue directly from the hard-pressed householders across Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Dr Farry: We can make our resources stretch that bit further in investing in public services and our infrastructure.

Mr Agnew: When I looked ahead to the debate, I anticipated quite a boring debate. This is a crucial issue that speaks to millions of pounds of public spending and potentially having to rewrite budgets if we do not get the derogation that has been talked about. It is a vital issue but a fairly technical one. It is a fairly dull issue on which, as is clear from the fact that the Executive parties are supporting a motion and amendment from the official Opposition, there is consensus. We are having a row about something that we agree on. It speaks to an Executive who are insecure about the idea of an Opposition — *[Interruption.]* — and debate.

It is not unreasonable that we should seek to speak on something whose impact would be, as I say, over £100 million on our annual block grant.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members not to speak from a sedentary position. The Member needs to be heard.

1.45 pm

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The issue has not come to the Assembly Floor except through questions for oral answer, which I have raised, and we ran out of time before one was even discussed. So, to the best of my knowledge, and apologies if others have asked questions, one response and supplementary from the Finance Minister is all that we have had to debate an issue that massively impacts on public spending. Today should be boring, it should be informative, but it has got caught up in heat, and that heat has been generated by an Executive that seem to be playing opposition for opposition's sake.

To get to the issue —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Stalford: The Member accuses the Executive of playing opposition for opposition's sake. Is he playing government for government's sake by supporting what the Government are doing today?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his question. The point is this: how can we know what the Government are doing if no statement has been made to the House? As Ms Mallon pointed out, there has been one public statement on the issue that lacked detail. This is a very complex issue; we are talking about the deregulation of our housing associations; we are talking about a derogation from Treasury and negotiations for such; and we are talking about an ONS reclassification. As I said, it is all very technical and should be all very boring, but we need detail. That is why the debate is taking place today. I do not think that that is unreasonable. Had there not been a motion, we would have been told that we were not on top of our brief. It is one of the biggest things that is happening in governance in Northern Ireland, and we are not even raising it. So, I think that this is an Executive playing opposition for opposition's sake.

To get to the issue, if we can take it as read — I am yet to be completely assured that we will get our derogation and that we will have a deregulation Bill of housing associations — I would like to know the specifics of that because I think that there is both fear and opportunity in this, and what I look for from the Minister is to allay the fears and to ask him to seize the opportunities. Will he outline in any legislation that may come forward to the House, what impact it may have on strategic planning for house building programmes and how much control we can realistically expect to retain regarding stock levels? Will he also give detail, as we seek a reversal of the decision and a derogation, on the status of public finances and what discussions he has had with the Treasury on that point?

I said that there was opportunity because I think that there is. One of the consequences of the deregulation of housing associations is that they would be brought out of the right-to-buy scheme. That is something that I would welcome, and I would like the Minister's views on that. We have a significantly reduced social housing stock. If we go back to the 70s, we had 155,000 Housing Executive houses; we are now down to 88,000, plus the 40,000 housing association houses. That is not all down to the right to buy, but it has been one aspect of it. Given the figures that have been outlined by others in the debate about stress on

our housing waiting lists, that is one thing that should be looked at.

There is further opportunity because, as we look to the governance of our housing associations, we can look again at the governance of the Housing Executive. I am one of those who would like to see an amendment of the rules to allow the Housing Executive to build social homes again —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Agnew: — and to make capital investments. My final point is that, whilst Mr Girvan pointed out that it was not the DUP's decision to change the rules about Housing Executive capital spend, every DUP Minister has upheld that decision.

Mr Carroll: It is clear from the comments made in the Chamber and from the statistics that we have a housing crisis. Some 43,000 people are on the housing waiting list. That includes our homeless, people with disabilities who need tailored accommodation, people who are being intimidated, people who need to move elsewhere to be closer to family, and people who have been stuck in hostels for years.

The issue of housing waiting lists, in my constituency and across the North, is fundamentally linked to economic class. Working-class people do not have the ability to get an extra few thousand pounds to purchase a house. Some, who have been able to save over the years, are able to get a mortgage, but it is only through strict saving that they are able to do that, and this is not an option for everyone. Public housing should exist as a right for everyone.

As has been mentioned, there are 87,107 housing units managed by the Housing Executive. A number almost double that is managed by housing associations. In the motion and the amendment, there is no mention of the Housing Executive. I think that it is essential that the Housing Executive be mentioned in this debate.

For years, there have been calls to allow the Housing Executive to borrow. It has more than enough assets to borrow, and this is something that needs to be addressed and looked at seriously. The Executive have continually lobbied Westminster for corporation tax to be lowered. I ask whether they have once put pressure on the Treasury to allow the Housing Executive to borrow so that it can build.

The main issue in the motion is that the housing associations should be allowed to borrow and that this ONS reclassification will not allow them to do so. It is our view that housing associations — public bodies — should be allowed to borrow, and the Housing Executive needs to address that. If we could take action to allow the Housing Executive to borrow, we could fund a crash course of housebuilding. We could alleviate problems, get rid of the issue of housing waiting lists and get rid of the housing crisis.

Mr Speaker: Members, as Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the Minister will reply to the debate.

The debate stood suspended.

(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we start, I remind Members to continue to rise in their place if they wish to ask a supplementary question. Otherwise, I will assume that they no longer wish to ask their question.

Dental Treatment: Waiting Lists

1. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Health how she plans to reduce dental waiting lists. (AQO 409/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): My Department is working closely with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) in developing an elective care plan to arrest the decline in elective waiting times and deliver sustainable improvements in the medium to longer term across all specialities. As well as maximising the number of patients who can be treated in the community, the plan will ensure that existing funded capacity in the health service is fully maximised and targets new and recurrent investment to expand the health service's capacity to meet patient demand. However, it will require significant additional funding to deliver this. I will continue to engage with my Executive colleagues to secure the additional investment necessary to transform the delivery of services.

As with all specialities, trusts are continuing to work with the Health and Social Care Board to minimise dental waiting times within the resources available. Patients are treated on the basis of clinical urgency, with patients of equal clinical priority being seen in chronological order. The board is also working with trusts and referring practitioners to finalise the roll-out of referral guidelines that aim to reduce the number of unnecessary referrals for consultant-led dental treatment and thereby allow clinicians to focus on patients who require treatment.

Mr Stalford: I thank the Minister for her response. In the vein that prevention is better than cure, will she outline what collaborative efforts are being made between her Department and, perhaps, the Department of Education or other Departments to educate our young people in particular about the need to protect their teeth in order that, hopefully, they do not have to avail themselves of dentistry as much as is the case at present?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree with the Member that prevention is better than cure. We need to do more to prevent tooth decay from happening in the first place, because that would be the ideal scenario. We have a regional preschool prevention programme called "Happy Smiles" for children in nurseries. All trusts deliver programmes similar to the tooth-brushing challenge, which is delivered in the Belfast Trust from primary 4 onwards. Evidence is growing that, where prevention programmes are targeted on young children, a reduction of up to 30% in disease levels can be reached. I want our children to

be the beneficiaries of all these successful prevention programmes.

My Department has also provided funding for tooth decay prevention campaigns over the years — for example, since 2005, £100,000 has been provided to trusts to target children in deprived areas. It is important that we continue to do more of that preventative work. Looking to the future, I want to focus on prevention, not just for tooth decay but right across the piece. It is important that we prevent people from getting to the point at which they need to use hospital services. Prevention is one of my key priorities.

Mr Mullan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. The case of young Connla Quinn is very distressing and has been widely reported in the media recently. Has the Minister considered providing undergraduate training in dental studies at Ulster University in Coleraine to alleviate the problem of staff shortages in the Western Trust and reduce ever-increasing locum costs on dentists?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have any information about the Western Trust specifically; I am happy to provide that to the Member in writing. Obviously, there are challenges for the Western Trust, but there are challenges for many trusts with workforce issues and being able to recruit people. We have an over-reliance on locums, and that is not the place that we want to be. We need to transform Health and Social Care, and we need a real and meaningful workforce plan that allows us to recruit staff. It is difficult to recruit staff. Quite often, trusts go out to recruitment but cannot fill posts. We need to do more to change that picture. I do not have specific information about the Western Trust, but I will write to the Member.

Mr Butler: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. The current problems in dental waiting lists would, of course, be significantly worse were it not for the pre-emptive actions of Michael McGimpsey in 2009. It is just unfortunate that similar attention was not shown by his successors. Will the Minister confirm how many of the dentistry graduates who applied for work in Northern Ireland last year were able to find training posts here?

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure Michael will be glad to hear you are still singing his praises after he has left the House. I do not have the figures with me, but I am happy to respond to the Member in writing with the stats on the number of people who were successful in the recruitment.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for the answers to your questions thus far. Given the evidence that fluoride is one of the major contributors to improvements in dental health and hygiene, what action are you taking to ensure that it could be placed in our public water supply?

Mrs O'Neill: It is one of those issues that are quite emotive and topical. Some people do not want to be forced to have fluoride in their water, and I think that is a legitimate and genuine concern. It is something we keep under review. Any decisions I take will be based on a clinical assessment of whether something is the right thing to do for people's outcomes. I will always be guided by that, and it is the same scenario for fluoride in water.

Desertcreat: Update

2. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on progress at the Desertcreat site. (AQO 410/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: On 28 September, I announced the appointment of the design team for the early works at Desertcreat. That is a positive step forward in the development of a much-needed new Fire and Rescue Service training facility. Early works on the ground at Desertcreat are expected to commence in spring 2017. The total forecast capital investment is approximately £45 million, and the main design includes a fire station, teaching accommodation, a multipurpose training warehouse, a hothouse and swift-water and skidpan facilities at Desertcreat. The main capital works are expected to commence by late 2018.

The training centre, once completed and operational, will provide a facility in which our firefighters can learn the skills they need to keep the public and themselves safe. Training opportunities will include addressing fires in confined spaces and intense smoke, working with rapid water, as in flood rescues, and dealing with the outcome of road traffic accidents.

The local community in mid-Ulster will be fully engaged during the development of Desertcreat, and I have written to the chief executive of Mid Ulster council offering to meet him and all elected members regarding this important investment.

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer. Will she give us a timeline for the completion of Desertcreat?

Mrs O'Neill: With the design team in place since last month, it has been tasked with undertaking necessary design work to progress the approved works. We hope that early works will start in spring 2017, and the approval of the main works, through the approval of an outline business case, is planned for the first half of 2018. Main construction works are planned to commence in late 2018, and it is estimated they will take just over two years to complete, in 2020-21.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that information. The so-called Community Safety College that was to be built at Desertcreat was to be finished last year. It was supposed to bring between 1,500 and 2,000 jobs in construction. Unfortunately, that all fell through, and mid-Ulster has been left very sore about the Desertcreat project. Can the Minister provide similar figures for this project in terms of construction? How does she feel it will benefit mid-Ulster?

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that it will be an investment in mid-Ulster of £45 million. I am very aware, as the Member is, of the concerns over the years about the project and whether it was going to come to mid-Ulster at all. We have finalised the case, and I can say categorically, without any doubt, that the project will go ahead. We have appointed the design team, the works will be delivered, and we hope to have staff training and working there from the 2020-21 financial year.

It is a £45 million investment for mid-Ulster, and it is something I know the council has been lobbying very strongly on. As I said, I will talk to the council to give assurances that the project will go ahead. The people of mid-Ulster deserve, want and crave confirmation that the project will go ahead, and I am certainly committed to delivering it in this mandate.

askmyGP Pilot Scheme

3. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the askmyGP pilot at the Abbey and Aberfoyle GP practices. (AQO 411/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: AskmyGP is a telephone- and web-based patient triage system, and it is being piloted in four GP practices here, including Abbey and Aberfoyle. Patients contacting their GP practice for an appointment are asked to provide responses to a series of questions about their condition either over the telephone or online. The responses are then passed to the GP, who makes a decision about the most appropriate course of action to respond to that patient's needs. For some patients, that might mean referral to another healthcare professional for advice or treatment, ensuring that patients who do not need to be seen by a GP can be seen quickly.

The initial results from the pilot exercise are extremely positive. Patients using the askmyGP app have received a callback from their GP or other care professional in around 30 to 40 minutes and often much sooner. In cases where a patient needs to be seen, they are being seen on the same day. Across the GP pilot practices, 94% of patients using askmyGP were satisfied or very satisfied with the service. GPs have also been extremely positive about the impact of the new service on their ability to meet patient demand and the reduced pressure on their working day. Work has now commenced to extend the pilot to a further 30 GP practices.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome this initiative and the positivity that surrounds it. Can the Minister outline what other investment there will be in general practice alongside this initiative?

Mrs O'Neill: In 2015-16, an investment package of up to £5.1 million was agreed for general medical services (GMS), including additional funding of £3.1 million to build capacity in GP out of hours services, up to £1.2 million to increase the skills mix in general practice and help meet the demand for blood tests and other diagnostic work, and up to £300,000 to recruit and retain GPs. Further non-recurrent funding was also provided last year to pilot a phone and online triage system, which we have just discussed.

In December last year, a five-year initiative was launched to place up to 300 pharmacists in GP practices by 2021, with an associated total investment rising up to £14 million per year. This will mean that, where appropriate, patients can be given advice and assistance directly by a pharmacist, with GP time freed up for the patients who most need to see them. The first wave of pharmacists has been recruited. Over 35 whole-time equivalent posts have been filled, with staff starting to take up posts from mid-September. The second wave of recruitment is under way, with wave 3 being planned.

In January, investment of £1.2 million per year was secured to increase the number of GP training places each year from 65 to 85. As part of the GMS contract settlement for 2016-17, up to a further £7 million will be invested in general practice, including £2 million to meet the additional demand for GP services, £1.7 million to continue to roll out the practice-based pharmacists programme and £160,000 to develop online booking and repeat prescribing systems. These systems will be available to every GP practice that

wishes to adopt them and will mean that people can access their GP surgery online at a time that is convenient for them.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. I also very much welcome this scheme and many of the Minister's initiatives, as outlined, that will alleviate pressure on our GPs. On the issue of recruitment and retention of GPs, does the Minister see that a new medical school in the north-west could go some way to increasing the number of people coming into and remaining in general practice?

Mrs O'Neill: There are obvious challenges in recruiting GPs, and rural GP practices are having particular challenges. The GP-led care working group has reported back to me, and I am very keen to take forward a number of that group's recommendations, particularly those looking at the recruitment and retention of GPs. There are particular challenges in the north-west. In answer to a previous question, I talked about the challenges in relation to dental services and recruiting dentists. However, it is the same right across the piece. Recruitment is difficult in the Western Trust area. Would a medical school in that area help? I think that it would, and I am very keen to progress that. I have had some discussions with the university about taking that forward. I am very keen that that happens. It would really help with the workforce challenges that we have in that area.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for the schemes that she has announced. They will be very welcome, particularly the askmyGP scheme. You mentioned that it will be extended to 30 other practices. How long do you foresee the pilots lasting? When will a roll-out right across the Province be possible?

Mrs O'Neill: The feedback has been so positive. As I said, 94% of people said that they were satisfied or very satisfied. The pilot is available to any GP practice that wants to avail itself of it. We have actually put some funding in place to support that. That funding allows GPs to adapt and bring in something that could be difficult to bed in at the start. I am very keen that we roll it out right across the piece if we can. GPs are very keen to do that. They want to see the people who need to be seen and they want to see them on the same day, if necessary. The askmyGP scheme has shown that it does work and that it allows GPs to free up their time to see people. I am very keen to roll it out across the board, and GPs are keen for that to happen, too.

2.15 pm

Ms Bradshaw: I want to continue on that last point. You said that you have put out a call for the roll-out to the next 30 GP practices. If you are oversubscribed, how do you plan to decide which ones will get the roll-out at the next stage?

Mrs O'Neill: GPs are asking for this; they are asking for support to allow them to see people in a more timely fashion. GPs are distraught and distressed if they cannot see people on the day and if people are having to wait for a number of days to get appointments. This is about real transformation; it is about doing things differently and allowing GPs to free up their time. I do not think that we will get to a point where we cannot support GPs to do this. This will deliver better outcomes for people. In the scheme of things, the financial investment is not massive,

but it makes a real difference. I do not think that there will be an issue with competition and who gets the service; it will be an issue of how quickly we can roll it out and how everybody embraces it.

Homelessness Strategy 2012-17

4. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health how she has taken the homelessness strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-17 into account in the exercise of her Department's functions. (AQO 412/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: One of the objectives of the homelessness strategy is to improve services to vulnerable homeless households and individuals. This objective impacts on the health and social care service in a number of ways, particularly in relation to mental health, domestic and sexual violence and substance misuse.

Officials from my Department and the Public Health Agency participate in the homelessness strategy steering group and contribute to addressing policy and service delivery issues in partnership with the Department for Communities, the Housing Executive and the range of voluntary and community sector organisations that provide assistance and outreach to homeless people. In addition, I am a member of the inter-ministerial group on rough sleeping and homelessness, and Minister Givan will shortly convene a meeting of that group that I will attend.

Health and social care must be available on the basis of clinical need to everyone equally, including homeless people and rough sleepers, and care and treatment must be delivered in the appropriate primary, community and secondary settings when required. While services are available, it is accepted that there may be increased difficulties in homeless people and rough sleepers accessing those services, and that is a key area that the Department is considering in conjunction with the Public Health Agency.

We are all aware of the tragic deaths of five homeless people in Belfast last winter. Concerns were raised about a possible lack of communication between health services and homeless people; problems with access to mental health and addiction treatment; and a lack of arrangements with social services when homeless patients are discharged from emergency departments or inpatient care. Those concerns are being addressed.

The Department for Communities is leading on an interdepartmental action plan to address some of the problems that are specific to Belfast, and my Department, the Public Health Agency and the Belfast Trust are responsible for addressing two key actions, namely developing arrangements to ensure that people discharged from hospital who do not have access to accommodation are signposted effectively to existing services and assessing the services available in relation to alcohol and drug early intervention, harm reduction and treatment and support services —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister bring her remarks to a close?

Mrs O'Neill: Thank you.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for her thorough answer. She referred to mental health issues and substance misuse. Obviously, the best solution to homelessness is to

prevent it in the first place. Will she give a commitment that she will send sufficiently senior officials to the homeless strategy steering group to ensure that decisions can be made and to ensure that they can look at addressing issues such as detox facilities?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I can make sure that that happens. It is not just a nod to the issue; it is about real and meaningful engagement. I will certainly make sure that the relevant officials attend, and I will also show leadership at the ministerial group, which is important in showing the significance of the issue and the priority that we give to it.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. We all know about health inequalities, and we discuss that constantly in the Health Committee and in the Chamber. One of the biggest health inequalities is amongst our homeless community. In my area of Belfast, innovative work is being done by health and social care staff. Will the Minister look at that innovative work and maybe roll it out across our other cities in Northern Ireland? I know that some of our nursing staff in Belfast are doing great work.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I obviously concur with you about the work that staff do on the front line in engaging with people, trying to make a difference and trying to support them. It is my job to support those staff to enable them to do what they do well. We should be innovative, and I am always open to looking at new ideas and at good practice and rolling it out where it is proven to work. If there are any initiatives that work, we should replicate those across the North to ensure that we deliver the best support we possibly can for those who find themselves homeless.

Mr Boylan: I want to follow on from some of the answers that have been given. The Minister outlined issues associated with mental health and substance misuse. Will she inform the House of what services are available to assist homeless people who suffer from mental health and substance misuse issues?

Mrs O'Neill: There is substantial demand for addiction and mental health services for young people throughout the region, and services are under constant pressure. In Belfast, the demand for drug and alcohol mental health services has resulted in those services being provided by a very specialist team with a largely consultative role that only directly deals with very high-risk individuals. Step 3 child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) community services continue to see and treat young people who have a significant mental health issue as a result of their substance misuse, for example, psychotic presentation, or have co-morbid mental health and substance misuse issues. Regionally, the Public Health Agency (PHA) has confirmed recurrent investment in the Drug and Alcohol Mental Health Service (DAMHS), and trusts are in the process of recruiting to those teams.

In addition, a range of alcohol and drug education, early intervention, treatment and support services was launched in July 2015 across all five health and social care trust areas. A number of those services are targeted specifically at children and young people and their families, and work is ongoing to improve awareness of the services. It will, of course, require time for those relatively new services to bed in properly and to allow for meaningful assessment of their effectiveness. In the meantime, the need of any additional support will continue to be monitored and kept under review.

Mrs Dobson: Does the Minister agree with me that a key tool to ending scenes of people sleeping rough on the streets of Northern Ireland would be to place a statutory duty to prevent homelessness on public services such as the NHS? Will she consider that?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not think that it is just the responsibility of the health service; it requires a holistic response. It should obviously be cross-departmental. It relates to a home or a house and to people's mental health and physical well-being; it is right across the piece. If we were to legislate for that, it would obviously be cross-departmental, but I would certainly be open to looking at all that. We should do absolutely everything we can to prevent anyone from becoming homeless and should provide whatever supports we can. I am very open to working with Executive colleagues to make sure that we deliver the best possible outcomes.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister for her commitment to showing leadership on homelessness. Is she satisfied that her Department is doing all that it can in working with other Departments and partners outside government to prevent and tackle homelessness?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes; I have no reason to believe otherwise. As I said earlier, we have some fantastic and amazing healthcare workers engaging with people on the front line and trying to prevent homelessness and who are worried about the patients they deal with. They do an excellent job, and I have no reason to doubt that my Department is in any way found wanting in working cross-departmentally, with other agencies and with the community and voluntary sector. If the Member has any particular issues that she wants to raise, I would be very happy to receive that information.

Pharmacy Relocation Proposals

5. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Health whether she will review the current regulations governing proposals by pharmacies to relocate their premises. (AQO 413/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no current plans to review the regulations relating to applications by community pharmacies to relocate their premises. The Health and Social Care Board is required to make arrangements for the provision of community pharmacy services, which includes dispensing drugs that are prescribed by prescribers. It does that by contracting out those services to independent retail pharmacies, and a community pharmacy contractor can only dispense health service prescriptions if they are included in the pharmaceutical list that is maintained by the board.

If a community pharmacy contractor wishes to relocate within the neighbourhood in which they already provide services and to provide the same pharmaceutical services without interruption, they can make an application to the Health and Social Care Board. The change of premises must be within the neighbourhood of the premises currently occupied, and the same services must be provided to essentially the same population. If the board agrees that the relocation is minor and is satisfied that the pharmaceutical services that are provided from the existing premises will be provided from the new premises and that there will be no interruption in the provision of those services except as allowed by the board, it must grant the application. In reaching its decision, the board must take account of the views of Community Pharmacy NI.

A minor relocation is one in which there will be no significant change in the population served and in which other circumstances are such that there will be no appreciable effect on the pharmaceutical services provided by the applicant or by any other community pharmacy in the neighbourhood. If the board decides that a relocation is not minor, the application is treated as if it were a new application to join the pharmaceutical list.

Mr McCausland: The reason that I raised the question is that, whilst it seems logical to have some form of collocation or near location of a pharmacy and GP surgery, on occasion there are objections from other pharmacies. I encourage the Minister to look at outcomes in view of the fact that sometimes the decisions can be disadvantageous to local communities where a change of location may have been beneficial. I ask her to look at past decisions and, in that light, consider whether there is merit in reviewing the regulations.

Mrs O'Neill: OK. I will take on board what the Member says. The issue has not been highlighted to me as one of concern, but I will ask officials to look into it.

Mr Milne: Buíochas fosta don Aire. What is the Minister's assessment of the role of Community Pharmacy in supporting the reform of the health and social care system?

Mrs O'Neill: Community pharmacies have a strong role to play in supporting the reform of the health and social care system. They help people to get well and to stay well. They dispense approximately 40 million prescription items a year, provide advice and information about medicines and a healthy lifestyle, offer services to improve the safe and effective use of medicines, and support self-care and prevention. There are currently 533 community pharmacies, employing highly qualified pharmacists supported by dedicated healthcare teams. Community pharmacies are therefore an important resource in local communities, and it is estimated that approximately 9% of the population visit a community pharmacy daily.

My Department's vision for Community Pharmacy's contribution to the reform of the health and social care system is set out in a number of strategic documents currently being implemented, including 'Transforming Your Care', 'Making It Better Through Pharmacy in the Community' and the medicines optimisation quality framework. Optimising the benefits of medicine is an important enabler of reform, and the skilled Community Pharmacy workforce are applying their clinical skills to help achieve better outcomes for patients and promote healthy lifestyles. Community pharmacies also support reform by helping to reduce demand on GP and other acute services through provision of advice and treatment of common complaints without the need for a doctor's appointment.

Mr McKee: It is unfortunate that a major high street pharmacy is offering free flights and accommodation to entice pharmacists, specifically to relocate from Northern Ireland to England. Can the Minister give a commitment that, under the current regulations, approval for such relocations is granted only when it is determined that such a move would not disproportionately affect existing patient groups using the pharmacy?

Mrs O'Neill: I tried to set that out in my initial answer on the factors that the board takes into account when deciding whether someone can relocate. It has to be about serving

the population. Community Pharmacy is an excellent resource, which can do, and wants to do, so much more to support people. I read somewhere that, particularly in deprived areas, people are more likely to seek the advice of their pharmacist than that of their GP. We need to use that resource more, and I want to work with Community Pharmacy. The board takes all the factors that I outlined into account when deciding whether a relocation is allowed to go ahead.

Mrs S Bradley: I welcome the Minister's comments that she values the work of Community Pharmacy and sees an enhanced role for it in the future. Can she give an assurance that, in packaging up that enhanced role, there will be sufficient budget to run alongside it?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. As I said, I very much value the work of Community Pharmacy. We are currently in the process of agreeing new contractual arrangements with it, and that will form part of discussions for the contract. Pharmacies want to do so much more, and I want to work with them to allow that. They deliver really high patient outcomes and maximise front-line engagement with individuals who come in to ask for advice. There is an appetite in Community Pharmacy to do more, and I want to work with it to make sure that we support it in delivering more.

2.30 pm

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Sin deireadh an ama do cheisteanna liostaithe. That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Waiting Lists

T1. **Mr Chambers** asked the Minister of Health what advice or hope she can offer to those people, and their families, who are in pain and enduring major disruption to their quality of life, given that, today, one in five people is on a waiting list, including 33,600 outpatients waiting longer than a year; 93% of red-flagged breast cancer patients in the Southern Trust area are not being seen within 14 days; and thousands are waiting for non-elective surgery in the Ulster Hospital, including many of my constituents. (AQT 296/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I share the Member's concern about waiting times. Since I took up office, I have said that some of the waiting times are totally unacceptable. We need to transform how we deliver health and social care so that people are not sitting on waiting lists. I have inherited what I think is an outdated system that is trying to deliver 21st-century health and social care. We have to transform how we deliver care in order to bring down waiting lists. I am certainly committed to that. I have told the House that I intend to announce my way forward on how we will transform health and social care, and I will do that over the next number of weeks. The situation with waiting lists, whether they be for breast cancer referrals, which we discussed last week, or autism assessments — no matter what it is — cannot continue the way it is. We have to address it, and I have said that doing that is a priority for me.

Mr Chambers: Many people await the much-delayed publication of the Bengoa report. Will the Minister, first, give an account for the delay and, secondly, give a commitment that it will be published in its totality and nothing in the original report will be withheld?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister can choose which of those questions to answer.

Mrs O'Neill: I have already said publicly that I intend to publish the document, and I will do so on 25 October, so you can get your reading ready for that day. I have told the Committee for Health that that is what I will do. Nothing will be held back. I will publish the report by Professor Bengoa and the panel, but, more importantly, alongside that I will publish how I intend to take things forward, transform health and social care, deliver better outcomes and bring down waiting lists. I think that that is the piece of work that we all want. I look forward to engaging with everybody on that because, at this time, we have an opportunity to show political leadership and work with clinicians to ensure that we have clear patient pathways and a better system that delivers 21st-century care for all those who need health and social care services.

Nivolumab

T2. **Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health whether she intends to instruct her Department to authorise the commissioning of nivolumab, which is part of a combined immunotherapy life-extending cancer treatment that has recently been authorised in England because of its effectiveness. (AQT 297/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have details on that specific drug. I will always be led by clinical guidance and professionals. I am happy to take a look at it, but I do not have information with me on that drug.

Ms Bradshaw: I will certainly provide that to you. I will carry on with access to cancer drug treatments: where are we with the task and finish group's review of individual funding requests? When will we get information on how that will change in the future?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have a particular time frame, but I believe that I will get the report over the next number of weeks. I will then make decisions on the way forward. It is important that we have and provide clear information for people who may need specialist drugs, whether for cancer or anything else. The work has been really useful. I think that I will take receipt of that over the next number of weeks. I am then happy to provide the House with information on how we take it forward.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Alex Maskey is not in his place. Caoimhe Archibald is not in her place.

Fatal Foetal Abnormality

T5. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health to provide an update on the ministerial working group on fatal foetal abnormality (FFA) and the timescale for publication of the group's recommendations. (AQT 300/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Minister of Justice and I agreed the membership and terms of reference of the fatal foetal abnormality working group on 5 July. That group has been working over the summer and the last number of months to consider the care and support provided to women and their families when a fatal foetal abnormality diagnosis has been given. That includes consideration of legislative changes. The group has met on several occasions, and I expect to receive its report in the coming days. Along with the Minister of Justice, I will then bring it to the Executive.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for her replies thus far. Prior to the publication of the working group's recommendations, what actions are being taken, Minister, by your Department to provide care and support services for women who find themselves carrying an unborn child with a life-limiting disability?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, clear guidance has been published and is with all trusts. Any woman or any family who find themselves in the scenario of having a diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality is in a desperate situation. It requires the health service to be responsive by being supportive of that individual, no matter what their choice is for the future. The work of the working group has been vital in how we go forward and change things. Women who find themselves in this scenario need every possible support we can offer. It is a really difficult scenario, so it is important we make sure that the systems, processes and practices within the health and social care trusts are fit for purpose and are responsive to the needs of those individuals. I am grateful for the work of the working group, and I look forward to bringing forward how we will implement the changes that the group will recommend.

Fatal Foetal Abnormality: Legislation

T6. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health, following on from Mr Kennedy's question, what will happen if that panel recommends legislation and how that will be taken forward in a timely manner, given that the Justice Minister has already indicated that her intention is not to bring forward legislation this year. (AQT 301/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I will obviously continue to discuss the issue with the Justice Minister. We have to be guided by the working group we put in place to do a job and bring back recommendations on how we need to do things differently. I suppose it will be for the Executive to decide how we take it forward, but I will bring the report that the working group produces over the next days to the Executive in its entirety. If there is a recommendation for legislative change, I will certainly be up for making that legislative change.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for the openness of her response on the issue. She will be aware that it is three years since Sarah Ewart was diagnosed and Ella Ewart very sadly passed away. She will be aware that women who are faced with that diagnosis do not have time on their side in making their decisions. Can she confirm that she will treat this as a matter of urgency to ensure that the decisions they have to make are treated with the respect and dignity they need to be in terms of the courts and the law?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. I can without reservation say that that is the case. This is a priority. This is an issue that has been left in the ether for too long. No matter what their choice is, we need to support these women. The working group was established as soon as I came into office; I made sure that it set about its task. As I said, I will receive that report in the next number of days, and I intend to bring it to the Executive for full consideration.

Rural GPs

T7. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to provide an update on what contingency measures her Department is taking to tackle the issue of a shortage of GPs in rural areas, given that she will aware that, in the west, a

quarter of GPs are over the age of 55, many will soon be approaching retirement and no new doctors are coming forward to replace them, including in Ederney and Rosslea where no replacement GP is available. (AQT 302/16-21)

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr McPhillips: Pardon?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr McPhillips: We have already seen the shortage in Ederney and Rosslea, and there is no replacement GP available for the local population.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member come to his question, please?

Mr McPhillips: Can the Minister provide an update on what contingency measures her Department is taking to tackle this impending rural GP issue?

Mrs O'Neill: I fully appreciate the challenges in GP-led services, and I am committed to developing a plan that will ensure long-term sustainability for GP services. There are particular challenges in rural areas. You have pointed to Fermanagh as an example, and that has been an extremely difficult issue. I assure the Member that the board and the trust are working hard to make sure that we have GP services on the ground delivering for patients. I have met local representatives from the Royal College of GPs and the BMA GP committee to listen to their concerns, and I am considering the findings of the GP-led working group, which has made a number of recommendations on identifying future funding priorities for health and social care services here. I am certainly committed to making sure we address the issues and the challenges for GP surgeries.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she update us on increasing GP places and how newly qualified GPs will be incentivised to work in rural areas?

Mrs O'Neill: Recently — I think it was last year — the number of places went up from 65 to 85. There is a recommendation from the GP-led working group that we should look towards raising that number even further, so I am certainly giving consideration to that to make sure that we have the proper workforce and staffing levels to make sure that we have first-class GP services. I will continue to work with the Royal College of General Practitioners and the BMA to address the challenges that are identified by GPs.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Conor Murphy is not in his place.

Flu Vaccinations

T9. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the seasonal flu vaccination programme. (AQT 304/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In the North, the annual seasonal flu vaccination programme is delivered through GP practices and school health teams. The vaccine is offered free to those considered to be at most risk of developing serious complications if they are infected with an influenza virus, ie anyone over 65 years old, anyone under 65 with certain medical conditions and all pregnant women. In addition, all preschool children aged two or older can now receive

the vaccine via their GPs. The vaccine is also offered to all primary-school children via the school health service. The annual flu vaccination programme is well established and achieves really good rates of uptake.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. What is the duration of the programme?

Mrs O'Neill: The annual flu programme began on 3 October. It runs from October until the end of March. The vast majority of vaccinations should be completed by early December in advance of when the flu season normally reaches its peak.

Huntington's Disease

T10. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health what her Department is doing to create a strategy to help those with Huntington's disease, given that a group recently made representations at Stormont. (AQT 305/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have details with me in relation to Huntington's disease, but I am very happy to provide to the Member in writing what strategy we have around that disease. I think it falls into the category of rare diseases. We are working closely with the rare disease group to be able to make sure that we have a proper strategy in place. I think it kicks in by 2020, but I will give the Member more details on Huntington's disease in writing.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for her answer. I look forward to receiving that information. The concerns raised were very much that this disease normally manifests in children, and you can be a carrier of it. So, a lot of concern was raised about the fact that early testing and —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Ms Lockhart: — I want just to impress upon you the need for early testing.

Mrs O'Neill: I take that on board. I did meet the group when it was here in Stormont. I had an opportunity to talk to them, and one of the things that they raised with me was that awareness needed to be raised, because the disease travels through families, so it is important that we do that. It is like everything in health and social care: early intervention and prevention are key.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: As the next period of questions does not begin until 2.45 pm, I suggest the House takes its ease until then.

Ms Archibald: On a point of order.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Sorry, we do not take points of order between questions. You can make it after.

2.45 pm

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their places. We must move on to questions to the Minister for Communities. Questions 4, 6 and 9 have been withdrawn.

Communities

Housing: 2017-18 New-build Target

1. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister for Communities to outline his Department's target for new-build affordable housing in the 2017-18 financial year. (AQO 421/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): My Department is still working on setting the affordable homes target for the 2017-18 financial year. However, it is likely to be similar to the current year's target. The target for affordable housing this year is 750 homes; that target includes a mix of new-build and existing market homes.

Mr Attwood: What is the likely target, for the 2017-18 financial year, of new-build social housing; and has there been any indication from London Treasury of any consequential arisings from the announcement at the Tory Party conference last week, where there were indications that new funding would be made available for social and affordable housing?

Mr Givan: Next year, we aim to build 1,600 social homes. With regard to the announcements from the Conservative Party conference, it is not a conference that I follow extensively. I am not aware of anything that will be consequential with regard to the outworkings of that. However, I will be happy to look into that issue.

Mr Allen: Does the Minister have the figures for how many of those new builds will be for east Belfast; and is he content that the level of new builds will help to alleviate the housing crisis that we are embarking on?

Mr Givan: I do not have the figures, specific to east Belfast, on the current target for those 750 homes this year and how it is being rolled out, but I am happy to try to provide the specific answers to the Member. Obviously, it is critical that we try to afford people an opportunity to get on the housing market. The Executive have been able to allocate funding with regard to the financial capital transaction moneys, and that has allowed us to put in £130 million to be used to support the provision of over 3,500 new homes over coming years. That is something that this House can welcome.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister advise us on any initiatives that his Department has taken to help people, especially young people, get on the property ladder and get access to a new home?

Mr Givan: This is an important scheme for us, with regard to affordable homes, so that we can secure more people the opportunity to get on the housing ladder. Beyond the moneys allocated around co-ownership, we are also developing a scheme around the affordable homes loan fund that was launched in March 2014. Initially, there had been some reticence from financial institutes to support what was called "the fairshare product". However, three major lenders — the Nationwide, Lloyds and Santander — have now all signed up to support that product, and housing associations are finalising the administration arrangements for it. That will be another scheme that should help people with an opportunity to get a home that they need.

Mr F McCann: Has the Minister taken into consideration the many adults with a learning disability living with ageing parents who need appropriate supported or independent housing?

Mr Givan: This is a vitally important issue that I have met a number of people on. We can all bear testimony to, in our own constituencies, people who come to us with needs around housing, related to disabilities. That is something that I have a particular interest in. With regard to people who are in homes with parents providing care, it

is something that I want to take forward regarding the way in which the processes are operating, or, in my view, in some cases have failed. I want to ensure that we have fit-for-purpose processes so that people who are faced with difficult circumstances with housing get the support that they need in a timely manner.

Ms Bradshaw: With regard to the new social build that you referred to, how many are in shared housing schemes?

Mr Givan: There are shared housing programmes that have been identified by the Executive to be taken forward, but let me be clear: housing is allocated on the basis of need. When people are allocated housing, it should be on the basis not of their religion but of the need that has to be met. In some constituencies, you get housing developments where you are able to provide a shared housing model because of the nature of the housing waiting list that you are drawing from. That is not always available, and it is not always possible to achieve that. Indeed, I do not believe that you should be artificially trying to manufacture circumstances where people are denied a house on the basis of their religion in order to reach a specific target on shared housing.

St Patrick's Barracks: Update

2. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the St Patrick's Barracks site, Ballymena. (AQO 422/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am pleased to advise that my Department is progressing plans to redevelop the former military site that was declared surplus by Defence Estates in 2007. Following the purchase of the site last year, my Department appointed consultants to commence the initial surveys and assessments required for the outline planning application. The preferred development option, to fully develop the 36-acre site, was endorsed by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in July and will be subject to a formal public consultation, which will commence in November. In the interim, I have had a meeting with the council chief executive and the mayor in recent weeks, and I intend to follow that up and visit the site. The outline planning application will be submitted following the public consultation.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for his answer. St Patrick's Barracks has a rich military history, as does the town of Ballymena. Will the Department protect the identity and legacy of the St Patrick's Barracks site in the redevelopment?

Mr Givan: The Member will be very familiar with the site in his constituency, and he is right to highlight the rich heritage that exists there. The preferred development option for the site seeks to retain a number of existing buildings, albeit for new purposes. Suggested retained buildings include the guardhouse, Sandhurst Building and the water tower, amongst others. Final decisions on retention and their use will be made after the public consultation and may be dependent on planning and structural surveys and their viability.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his update. Can he advise on what budget allocation he has set aside for that preferred option and what the time frame is? Can I push him to look at retaining the gates to the barracks, as well?

Mr Givan: On the latter point, the issue was discussed with the council chief executive. In respect of the precise costs to develop the site, there will be an economic appraisal carried out by the project's planning and transport consultants. That will identify the costs required to develop the site. It is an important site for the North Antrim constituency and for Ballymena, in particular, in light of the unemployment that has been announced with the significant closures of some of the factories. I recognise the significance of this site. I have received representation, not just from Mr Swann but from my colleagues from the constituency and the Member of Parliament for the area, about the need to really push on with the development. I want to go on site so that I can meet the relevant stakeholders, identify the key plans for it and then push on. If that means trying to identify additional resources to do so, that is something that I will want to seek to deliver on.

Mr McGuigan: Given that the Minister has outlined the importance of the site and a number of possible proposals, does he intend to use the site for much-needed social housing in the Ballymena area and other much-needed community regeneration purposes?

Mr Givan: In respect of housing, based on the current preferred development option, there have been 140 units identified to allow housing to be developed on the site. I am keen that we do that, but I am also keen to make sure that we can attract industry onto the site, and that we get the right type of industry, so that it can create the jobs that are needed in the Ballymena area.

Mr Allister: The Minister will understand that it is over eight years since the barracks closed and over five years since it was transferred to the Executive. Can he understand the level of impatience locally at the failure to progress this matter to the point of real decisions, and now —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr Allister: Now we are facing a further consultation —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member come to his question, please?

Mr Allister: What hope is there of bringing plans to fruition? Can he tell us whether there is any contamination issue on any part of the site?

Mr Givan: I can understand the frustration that the Member highlighted. I am in this post five months now and am keen to make sure that we really push on with this development. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council has only recently been put on as a key stakeholder, and it has brought strong representation around the need to drive it on. When I met the chief executive of the council and its mayor, that point was made very strongly. They have a very clear vision that they want to develop the site, and the council wants to play its part in doing that. Together we can push on with the development.

I will come back to the Member on the issue around contamination.

Urban Development Grant Scheme

3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the urban development grant scheme. (AQO 423/16-21)

Mr Givan: The urban development grant programme is an important tool in the Department's toolbox for regenerating our towns and cities, encouraging private inward investment, job creation and environmental improvement to derelict, vacant or underused sites in priority areas. My Department reopened the programme on 4 April 2016 with a call for new applications. Within the six-week timescale, 147 applications were received. All have been assessed against my Department's strategic priorities, existing regeneration plans and the scheme's intended outputs.

The standard of applications and proposals was exceptionally high, with 19 applications being taken forward to the next stage, where they are being subjected to a full economic appraisal to determine whether there is a sufficiently robust business case to make a grant offer. Should the projects satisfy successfully the costs and benefits that are assessed in the economic appraisal process, they could lead to over £60 million of new private sector investments being directed into the heart of our towns and cities.

Twenty applications did not meet the minimum standards so were rejected. The remaining 108 applications were all determined to be of merit, but, unfortunately, the level of applications exceeded the available budget. The available budget allocation for this year is £700,000, and that reflects what is deliverable during the remainder of this year.

I am examining the Budget proposals for the remainder of the mandate. It is therefore too early to give a figure for funding in future years. I can, however, assure the Member that funding is being sought that is commensurate with the importance of the programme to the regeneration of our towns and cities.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware that the Argyle Business Centre wanted to develop the Shankill Road Mission into a four-star hotel. Its application was turned down, initially because one of your officials said that it was not of strategic merit, yet it scored 14 out of 15 in the matrix, with two perfect fives for strategic fit. The second letter, from the same official, stated, "No, you are being turned down because of the cocktail of funding".

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question? Will he come to his question, please?

Mr Nesbitt: Can he confirm that 14 out of 15 was the top score and tell us why the Argyle Business Centre has been denied?

Mr Givan: The level of detail that the Member is aware of regarding that particular application is not the level of detail that I have for all 147 applications that were submitted. Obviously, there is a process and criteria. It would be inappropriate for me as a Minister to be intervening and changing those criteria.

On the particular example that the Member raises, it has been relayed to me that the application did have merit but that the departmental officials dealing with it deemed it not to be a viable project owing to the high levels of public funding required for it, which were deemed to breach state-aid rules. The applicant was contacted in writing and spoken to by the Department's officials and advised of that.

I know there was a comparator provided regarding a similar cocktail of funding that was allowed in Londonderry for Bishop's Gate Hotel. The Bishop's Gate Hotel was funded

under the previous urban development grant programme. At that time, the north-west development office did not classify lottery funding as state resources, considering it to be private funding. However, an audit report in 2014 recommended that new guidance should be developed, as there was an inconsistent approach being taken to the assessment, analysis and award of that type of funding. When the scheme reopened, the new guidance was developed, and it clarified that, as it was controlled by the state, lottery funding should be classified as state resources.

3.00 pm

Mr Stalford: Whilst the Minister cannot comment on an individual case, will he outline for the House the criteria against which applicants to the scheme are assessed?

Mr Givan: Applications were considered against three key strategic areas: how well they complied with the Department's strategic vision for regeneration, as set out in its urban regeneration and community development policy framework; whether the project was located in a priority area, such as a town centre or neighbourhood renewal area; and the outputs that the project would generate to contribute to the regeneration of the area. Project outputs include such criteria as the ratio of private sector investment to public-sector investment; the number of jobs that the project will create; its impact on the construction industry; and the amount of rateable floor space that it creates. Those are some highlights but by no means an exhaustive list.

Mr McAleer: Would the Minister like to comment on what similar levels of support might be available for smaller regional towns?

Mr Givan: This was applicable to all towns that met the threshold for my Department, which is a population of over 5,000. When it comes to villages of under 5,000, the regeneration plans fall within the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. This type of scheme has proven to be very successful. We were not able to provide funding for it in the recent past, but we have been able to find some funding this year to get it open. I am keen for us to increase the budget available in future years, subject to the outworkings of that process, because I recognise that it can help to regenerate areas in need of regeneration.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister. Will you indicate to the House what positive conditions are attached to urban development grants to ensure that the schemes seek and draw together open and shared spaces?

Mr Givan: I missed that: was it about the Irish Open?

Mr Dickson: When it comes to the delivery of the grant, what guarantee can you give that the schemes attract shared and open space?

Mr Givan: I apologise for not picking the Member up clearly at the start.

In respect of all of the grants, the main objective is to regenerate an area to make it more welcoming for people and to provide opportunities for businesses to develop. That is on the basis of being open and accessible to everybody in our society.

Musical Instruments for Bands

5. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the uptake of the reinstated musical instruments for bands programme. (AQO 425/16-21)

8. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the future of funding for musical instruments for bands. (AQO 428/16-21)

Mr Givan: Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, with your approval, I will group question 5 with question 8.

The musical instruments for bands programme is designed to improve the quality of music-making in the community by helping bands to replace worn-out instruments and purchase new instruments. The scheme is open to bands based in Northern Ireland that are formally constituted. In the current financial year, £200,000 has been allocated by my Department to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to fund the programme. Grants range in scale from £500 to £5,000, and the scheme opened for applications on 21 July. The Arts Council has advised that 94 applications were received before the closing date of 15 September and that they are being eligibility-checked. All eligible applications will then proceed to assessment. Decisions are due at the end of October. Applications will be assessed on the criteria of artistic quality, public benefit and project management.

Regarding the future of the programme, I intend to establish a steering group to conduct a review of the musical instruments for bands policy. The purpose of the review will be to co-design a more fit-for-purpose musical instruments for bands scheme and make recommendations for improvements or modifications to maximise its impact and improve engagement with young males, who are currently under-represented in cultural participation.

Mr McKee: Thank you, Minister, for your answers thus far. Will you advise what moneys from the fund have been allocated to bands in South Down?

Mr Givan: At this stage, I am not in a position to announce the bands that have been successful. I indicated in my initial answer that 94 applications had been made. Once they are eligibility-checked, a breakdown will be provided in respect of the bands that have been successful, and Members will then be able to see whether their constituency has benefited from it.

Mr Clarke: I am sure that the Minister will agree that many bands were disappointed when the funding was cut. I congratulate him on reinstating it. He said that 94 bands had applied. After the eligibility checks have been carried out — I appreciate that we do not know how many there will be —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Mr Clarke: Given that there is a chance that the fund could be oversubscribed, what is the possibility of additional in-year funding for the programme?

Mr Givan: I clearly wanted to re-establish the fund. The fact that 94 applications were made, which is the highest number of applications for a number of years, demonstrates the popularity of the scheme. For me, it was the right decision. With the success of the process and

the fact that 94 applications were made, it is estimated that, should all 94 be deemed successful, the total budget required will be closer to £300,000. I am pleased to advise the House that, if all those applications are deemed successful, I will make that funding available.

Mr Lynch: Will that funding be offered to similar cultural organisations such as Comhaltas?

Mr Givan: The musical instruments for bands fund is available to all marching bands that avail themselves of musical instruments. No distinction is drawn in its accessibility to one community or the other; it is open to everyone to make an application.

Ms Mallon: Is the Minister content that there is a diversity of traditions in the 94 applications received to date?

Mr Givan: Given the publicity that surrounded it, I went out of my way to demonstrate that the fund had been brought back into existence to give it as wide a public airing as possible. All those who are engaged in marching bands and musical instruments should have been aware of it. The fact that this is the highest number of applicants to have made a request to the fund demonstrates how widely known it is. I assure the House that I have not looked at where the applications have come from. I am not remotely interested in the religious breakdown. If people have a need to be met, whether they are from a more Protestant tradition of musical instruments or a Catholic tradition, they should be able to access the funding. All people had the opportunity to do so.

Benefit Fraud

7. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Communities how many people have been convicted of benefit fraud in each of the last three years. (AQO 427/16-21)

Mr Givan: The number of persons convicted of benefit fraud through the courts was 453 in 2013-14; 294 in 2014-15; and 272 in 2015-16. In addition, administrative penalties were imposed on 657, 447 and 659 individuals in each respective year.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he outline what he is doing to prevent the payment of benefits to prisoners?

Mr Givan: A number of Members have asked that question in previous Question Times. The Department has a proactive and detailed process to prevent prisoner payments. It includes the sharing of prisoner committal and release data twice weekly with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. It is important to recognise the complexity of benefit rules. Staff must assess and apply the rules of each benefit on a case-by-case basis. When possible and within the law, recovery of any overpayments is pursued. I have asked officials to explore the scope for building on our current processes, particularly the potential for increasing the flow of data from the point of committal to the point of benefit adjustment.

Mr Durkan: On the subject of benefit fraud, is the Minister in a position to tell the House how much money has been lost over the past year through benefit fraud and how much has been lost through error?

Mr Givan: Benefit fraud across social security benefits, excluding housing benefit, was 0.6% of benefit expenditure in 2015.

That equates to £28.3 million. It represents a significant improvement, with benefit fraud in 2001-02 equating to 2% of expenditure, which would be £94 million in today's terms. The current low levels of benefit fraud have been sustained for a number of years as a result of my Department's robust strategy for tackling fraud and error.

Ms Gildernew: Will the Minister give an assessment of the current resource dedicated within his Department to benefit fraud?

Mr Givan: The Department invests around £13 million per year across its social security benefit fraud and error operation. That investment provides for a team of almost 400 people directly involved in activities ranging from accuracy checks to prevent staff error to criminal investigations where customer fraud is suspected. Current levels of investment have resulted in a loss through customer fraud and error of just 1% of expenditure. That compares with 3% in 2001-02 and represents a current annual saving of £100 million in today's terms.

Mrs Barton: Can the Minister advise how many of those convicted have set up an arrangement to pay the money back?

Mr Givan: I think I will need to provide the Member with specific detail on that, and I will come back to her.

Ms Armstrong: Fresh Start agreed that half the savings from the error and fraud initiative implemented by the Executive will be reinvested by the Executive instead of the Treasury. To what projects has that money been allocated?

Mr Givan: In respect of what was identified in Fresh Start, we first need to secure the funding from Treasury, and that is something where discussions are continuing with Her Majesty's Treasury on an invest-to-save proposal. It is something I have been pushing within the Department to expedite.

Sport: Participation

10. **Mr T Buchanan** asked the Minister for Communities what his Department is doing to encourage participation in sport by people with a disability. (AQO 430/16-21)

Mr Givan: The performance of our Paralympians in Rio shows how people with a disability can participate in sport right up to elite level. My Department and Sport Northern Ireland recognise the importance of encouraging participation in sport by people with a disability. We have engaged with other Departments and representatives of organisations from across the disability sector to increase opportunities and develop a long-term action plan to support participation in sport by people with a disability. I will be announcing further details on that in the near future, alongside funding to assist with implementing the plan.

A review of Sport Matters, the strategy for sport in 2015, recommended:

"That Sport and Disability is recognised as a ... key priority throughout the next 5 years, to achieve greater ... participation".

The development of the action plan will play a major part in addressing that recommendation and its delivery over the coming years.

My aim is that people with a disability will have an equal opportunity to access sport and active recreation, which will lead to a more healthy, fulfilling and active lifestyle.

Mr T Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he inform the House what plans he has for capital investment in disabled sport?

Mr Givan: In the investment I am currently putting in, there is just over £2 million in Special Olympics Ulster for a four-year period. Across the 11 district councils, £2.4 million is being spent to support Disability Sport NI and Special Olympics. To reassure Members, the Programme for Government indicator includes a very clear line about improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families. That is something that will ensure priority will be given to this.

Also, £1 million for a four-year investment will be provided in Disability Sport NI's new strategic plan. I also inform the Member that, in providing support for disabled persons' participation in volunteering, there is £1,200 for each successful applicant. For lifelong volunteering, £175,000 was provided in the past year.

This is obviously a key priority for me. When you have athletes like Bethany Firth, who topped the league for Team GB, you see there is a clear recognition that our Paralympians performed hugely successfully. Now is the right time to try to capitalise on that success and encourage more people to participate.

3.15 pm

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Cathal Boylan for a brief supplementary.

Mr Boylan: Following on from that, how will the Minister encourage more people from rural areas to participate in the sport?

Mr Givan: Obviously, funding has been provided to all 11 district councils, so our councils have a real opportunity to identify the type of sporting infrastructure that is needed in the areas they are responsible for. The community planning process pulls together all the relevant organisations. Sport NI is part of that process, so it is developing concrete plans to identify the type of infrastructure that is needed. I will want to support that, when we look at the capital budget over the next four years, to provide the type of funding that I believe is needed. With the right infrastructure in place, we can then encourage more people with disabilities and — this is a priority for me — more girls to get involved in sport.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Sin deireadh leis an am do cheisteanna liostaithe. That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Food Banks

T1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Communities what his Department is doing to support the many food banks in the North, given that the growing reliance on food banks is a sad indictment of our social welfare system. (AQT 306/16-21)

Mr Givan: That issue was drawn very clearly to my attention when I recently visited Coleraine's Causeway Coast Vineyard. That church is involved in more than 18

projects that try to help people. One of the key parts of the programmes is the food bank that it is involved in. It is able to identify individuals when they come in and the type of support that they need, and it is then able to signpost them to statutory organisations, given the wide range of projects it is involved in. A lot of organisations, particularly in our community and voluntary sector, have got involved in this, so I want to ensure that the right support is being made available to those organisations when it comes to tackling all these issues, which are very important to address.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given all the work that the Department is doing allegedly to support the work of vital food banks, does he not find it strange that, in response to a recent question for written answer that I tabled to him, he was unable to tell me how many food banks we have here in Northern Ireland?

Mr Givan: It is not a case of what this Department is "allegedly" doing. I take this incredibly seriously. All of us should be engaged in trying to help the most vulnerable in our society. When it comes to these issues, I want to ensure that I do all I can to support organisations out there in the community, working alongside people. I have been out on the ground very quickly to meet a huge range of organisations that are tackling very difficult issues for vulnerable people. I want to assure them that they have my support. The voluntary and community sector is heavily involved in a lot of that work. We have a concordat that recognises officially the relationship between government and the community and voluntary sector. We constantly look at and review that to ensure that government is supporting the community and voluntary sector in the work that it is involved in. Let me be clear: I want to reduce the number of people who find themselves in situations where they have to go to food banks to get support, and I will continue to pursue that.

Drew Nelson: Tribute

T2. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communities to join with him in expressing profound sympathy to the family, friends and colleagues of Drew Nelson, following his untimely passing earlier today, and to state whether he agrees that the far-sighted and positive contribution made by Drew Nelson, particularly to the Orange Order, will be his lasting legacy. (AQT 307/16-21)

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for raising this and for giving me an opportunity, on the Floor of the House, to be able to pay my tribute to Drew. Drew was a friend of mine and was someone in my constituency who encouraged and supported me in many ways.

I look over the Chamber and see Mr Humphrey sitting beside Mr Kennedy — that is typical of what the Orange fraternity can do. It brings people together from whatever background in the Unionist sphere of politics they are involved in. Drew had that foresight. His legacy is one that the Orange Order will benefit from for many, many years in terms of the vision he had for the organisation, the way in which he navigated many issues through the Grand Lodge and how he was able to come forward with programmes that will be of huge benefit.

So, certainly, we join in remembering the contribution that he made. We particularly remember the family at this time and offer them our prayerful support, and we recognise the

huge contribution that he made to the Orange Order and to our community at large.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Minister also ensure that there will be ongoing positive engagement with the Orange institution in future on cultural and community developments as a lasting memorial to the work of Drew Nelson?

Mr Givan: I am more than happy to give that assurance to the Member in respect of supporting the Orange Order in so much of the work that it carries out across our community. When I look at the number of halls, particularly in rural areas, I see how they are accessed by people of all religious persuasions and how those people avail themselves of the support that they get. Drew Nelson was at the heart of taking forward the message about having the halls open and available and the drive to get investment into Orange halls. He continually challenged government on the need to support the infrastructure of the Orange Order for those halls and, of course, he challenged them to recognise the valuable contribution that the Orange Order makes to our society. Drew Nelson will be sorely missed by the Orange Order.

Social Strategy for Northern Ireland

T3. **Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister for Communities to confirm that he will continue to engage with the faith and Church community in his development and consideration of a social strategy for Northern Ireland, given that he will recognise the valuable work that the Churches and the faith community do in supporting and helping people to change their lives. (AQT 308/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am happy to give that assurance to the Member. She rightly points to the contribution that faith-based organisations make to our society; that is something that I recognise and value. I have witnessed at first hand the values that those organisations have and their passion and compassion. That is something that we, as a Government, need to support and do more on.

In the draft social strategy that I have been developing, we have engaged with all stakeholders represented in the section 75 groups, including faith-based organisations. I will bring that strategy to the Executive in the coming weeks, with the intention of having it issued, subject to Executive approval, as part of the new approach to the Programme for Government.

Mrs Little Pengelly: The Minister will be aware of the valuable work, even in my constituency of South Belfast, being done with older people and young people and in supporting food banks, as has already been mentioned. Many of the Churches and the faith community have, perhaps, been excluded for too long from input into consultations and the development of social strategies.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mrs Little Pengelly: Will he confirm that, alongside the development of the social strategy, he will commit to consulting them much more widely on a whole range of departmental policy responsibilities?

Mr Givan: Yes. The need to have further engagement is something that I have already raised in the Department. A mapping exercise is already taking place, which is being carried out by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary

Action (NICVA), so that we can clearly identify faith-based organisations across the Province and the type of work that they are involved in. Through that consultation process, I want to develop a new way of doing business in that respect between government and faith-based organisations.

On the basis of that engagement with the Department, I intend to take forward the development of a faith covenant, modelled on the principles of the concordat between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, facilitating a valued and effective faith-based contribution to policy development and service delivery across government.

Racial Equality Strategy

T4. **Mr Kearney** asked the Minister for Communities whether he accepts that the deplorable racist behaviour towards a Romanian woman in Antrim town in the South Antrim constituency last week underlines the pressing urgency of ensuring full implementation of the racial equality strategy. (AQT 309/16-21)

Mr Givan: Let me join the Member in condemning such attacks and stating very clearly how deplorable they are. When they happen, they are rightly condemned and should be condemned because they are repugnant to us in our society. I very much agree with the Member about that. It is hugely important that government tackles all those issues and that we identify all the vulnerable groups in Northern Ireland and provide the support that is needed. Whether that is through strategies or other processes, we should all have the same aim, namely to try to eradicate that type of behaviour.

Mr Kearney: Mo bhuíochas duit, a chara, as ucht an fhreagra sin. I appreciate your answer, which leads directly onto my supplementary. Do you agree that the Assembly must show collective and united opposition to racism, sectarianism, homophobia and all forms of intolerance in our society and promote equality for all identities and traditions, including respect for the Irish language?

Mr Givan: OK. In respect of all those issues, let me make it clear that, whatever your tradition, background or sexual orientation, you should be protected in our society. We should make reasonable accommodations for people, and we need to find a way to navigate the tensions that often exist. From my experience and from what people tell me, I know that there can be conflict at times between different sections of our society. We need to look at a collective approach where we recognise that we are one whole society but that within that there are differences of opinion.

We need to find ways in which can navigate all of that in a way that respects people without compromising some people's views on different identity characteristics and stop using those different identity characteristics as a way to engage in debates that often leave people feeling hurt and offended. In a free society, people are entitled to free speech and to have their own opinions, but I very much want to create a society where we recognise all those different identity characteristics in a way that allows us to find space to recognise the differences that exist.

Attacks: Faith-based Locations

T5. **Mr Lyons** asked the Minister for Communities whether he agrees that attacks on churches, cultural centres, community halls and places of worship are completely wrong and will not be tolerated. (AQT 310/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Member raises a very important point, and it is one that I intend to address on a more appropriate occasion with something more specific. I have been hugely concerned by the attacks that have taken place on a broad range of our faith-based organisations. The attacks that have taken place against Orange halls and against places of worship, be they Protestant churches or Catholic churches, and the desecration of the graveyards of the Jewish people in our community, should cause us huge alarm and be condemned. We need to recognise that such attacks are happening and then we need to address the situation and call out those people who engage in such behaviour for what they are: people who hate those who have different religious beliefs. That is something that I recognise. It has caused me huge concern, and it is something that we need to address.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Minister for his answer. He mentioned Orange halls, and we are all very aware of the number of attacks on, and the extent of the damage that has been done to, them over the last number of years. I welcome his commitment to addressing that as well as the attacks on people of other faiths and religions. Will the Minister send out a very strong message that any Orange halls that are attacked will be rebuilt and that there is no tolerance for those who are so intolerant in that way?

Mr Givan: Recently, we were able to see in the media the reopening of Thiepval Memorial in Convoy in east Donegal. The attack on that hall was rightly condemned by all the political parties in that part of the Republic of Ireland. The hall has reopened, and it has done so bigger and with more programmes involved in it. That is a demonstration of the resilience that often emerges from people when they are attacked and their places of worship are attacked. As a Government, we need to very much stand clearly beside people who get attacked in that way and say, "You have our support to continue and hold on to the values that you believe in."

3.30 pm

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Jo-Anne Dobson for a quick question with a quick answer.

Hockey: DFC Support

T6. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Communities what support he is providing to hockey clubs to enable them to continue to attract world-stage events to Northern Ireland, especially given that, as he will be aware following his visit on Saturday, Banbridge stepped onto the world stage as its hockey club expertly hosted round one of the Euro Hockey League, with a historic performance from the Banbridge boys. (AQT 311/16-21)

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I did ask for a quick question.

Mr Givan: It was a pleasure to be in Banbridge on Saturday morning. I was recently at Banbridge Hockey Club. David Simpson, Carla Lockhart and Sydney had me there, and the club was able to outline to me its facilities. I then got

to go on Saturday when the club was hosting the Euro Hockey League, which, for Members who are not familiar, is the equivalent of football's Champions League. These were elite sportspeople engaged in hockey. Banbridge had a tremendous result and were supported very strongly by the local community. To put it into context, over 12 million people tuned in to watch Friday's matches online. This was a very significant event for Banbridge to host, and it did so exceptionally well. As a result, £5,000 has been provided to help with the legacy of that competition so that people can buy into the success that it was and, hopefully, more younger people will take up the sport.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up. Tá an t-am críochnaithe.

Private Members' Business

Housing Associations: Reclassification

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes the likelihood that the Office for National Statistics will reclassify Northern Ireland's 22 housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies; that this may limit their ability to access private finance to build new homes; that the £1 billion of private debt already on their books could be added to the Executive's balance sheet, taking the Executive's total borrowing to levels that would reduce drastically their ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities to prepare to bring forward urgent legislation to reverse the reclassification of Northern Ireland housing associations so that they can remain classified as independent social businesses. — [Mr Allen.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "notes" and insert

"the decision by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Northern Ireland's 22 housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies; recognises that this will have a significant impact on housing associations and their ability to provide new social and shared ownership homes; further notes that this decision will add nearly £1 billion of housing association debt to the Northern Ireland Executive's balance sheet, seriously impacting on the Executive's ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities and Minister of Finance to expedite the steps necessary to reverse this reclassification; and agree quickly an interim derogation arrangement with HM Treasury to enable the sector to continue to function normally, to engage closely with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to agree a joined-up approach, and to outline a clear and detailed timeline for specific action, including bringing forward legislation, within the time frame that any HM Treasury derogation allows, to ensure that Northern Ireland's housing associations can remain classified as independent social businesses." — [Mr Allen.]

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I am grateful for the opportunity to address the motion. Like other Members, I am fully aware of the work that housing associations do in building and maintaining a significant number of social homes in Northern Ireland — homes for many of the most vulnerable members of our society. I recognise that anything that threatens that work and, indeed, the added value of the activities that housing associations undertake with, and on behalf of, their tenants is unwelcome and needs to be addressed.

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

Let me assure those Members who brought forward the motion, the Opposition. Well, I am not actually sure whether it was the Opposition. I noted that, when the motion was first brought forward, it was in the name of the Ulster Unionist Party alone. I then noted that, with it having got it so badly wrong, the amendment was brought forward

by Members from the Ulster Unionist Party and Members from the SDLP. I note that the Alliance Party, the Green Party or People Before Profit was not included in that. Maybe opposition exists only within the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP as the official Opposition, or maybe the more minor parties in opposition feel put out by that. I am not quite sure about the genesis of the motion. The motion that was laid first was wholly inaccurate in what it was calling on me to do. It called for:

"the Minister for Communities to prepare to bring forward urgent legislation to reverse the reclassification of Northern Ireland housing associations so that they can remain classified as independent social businesses."

With the motion having been brought forward, the Executive being fully aware of all those issues, and the Minister of Finance and I bringing a joint paper through the Executive, an amendment was then brought forward that demonstrates how flawed the Ulster Unionist Party's motion was. Maybe it is because of the expertise in the SDLP or maybe it was just that the Ulster Unionists read the press release that the Minister of Finance and I provided, but the amendment:

"calls on the Minister for Communities and Minister of Finance to expedite the steps necessary to reverse this reclassification"

and to seek a derogation. There was no mention of the Minister of Finance in the original motion. There was no mention of a derogation in the original motion. After the Executive take a decision and provide that statement to the public, we get an amendment that more accurately reflects what the Executive need to do. The Executive, however, are already doing it. If this is the calibre of the way in which the Opposition are going to conduct their business, clearly it is going to be left to the Executive to get on with doing business. The Opposition should be able to highlight where the Executive do things wrong and how they should go about doing things. I listened to Mr Beggs say that asking for derogation only is "living in cloud cuckoo land." That is exactly what we need to ask for — a derogation. That will allow the Executive and the Assembly the opportunity to take the legislation through it. Does Mr Beggs believe that we should not have a derogation? I do not know because he is not in the Chamber now. Maybe some of the members of the official Opposition, led by the leader of the official Opposition, want to respond on whether we should get a derogation or not. Mr Beggs did not seem to know.

Mr Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Givan: I am happy to give way.

Mr Durkan: We just had Question Time with the Minister for Communities, during which he failed to answer two questions that I put to him. Now that he is supposed to be responding to the debate, might he do that?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I am not sure that that is a point of order. Minister, go ahead.

Mr Givan: It is not a point at all.

I listened to the Members who spoke about this. The SDLP was ably led by Ms Mallon — on her own, I hasten to add. The SDLP is so concerned about opposition that it puts down just one Member to front up the debate, and nobody

else joins them. That is a demonstration of how seriously it takes this issue. The SDLP just so happens to have the chairmanship of the Committee, and the Chairman of the Committee dealing with what is supposed to be and is a very serious issue was not able to be here for the debate. Maybe the Opposition need to reflect on the way in which they want to conduct their business, but this Executive will get on with doing business.

Within hours of the Office for National Statistics announcing its decision, the Executive had dealt with the issue and taken a strategic decision on how we wanted to go forward. The Opposition were left playing catch-up and having to amend their original motion because they got it so badly wrong. I want opposition to work. My party argued for opposition to be put in place as part of the Fresh Start Agreement. It is because of that negotiation that there is an official Opposition. We are being badly let down in the House when we do not have people who are able to carry out the role of official Opposition by testing this Government. They are not able to do that.

Ms Mallon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Givan: I will make some progress and then happily give way to Ms Mallon. Let me explain a little bit more about the detail.

ONS made its announcement on 29 September. On that very day, the decision was issued, and it was agreed that officials in my Department should take forward, as a matter of priority, work to develop proposals to achieve a reversal of the ONS decision. It was also agreed that officials in the Department of Finance should commence negotiations with Her Majesty's Treasury to agree a derogation from normal budgeting rules for a period to allow us time to progress the necessary legislative changes. On one level, this is a technical adjustment to do with the application of international statistical standards to national accounts, and, if that was the extent of the impact, this would not be the important issue that it is. That was highlighted by Members, and Mr Agnew rightly pointed out that this is a hugely serious issue. It is so serious that the Opposition should be ashamed about the cack-handed manner in which they have addressed it. Members have outlined how serious it is, so let me repeat some of those points.

Mr Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Givan: I will give way to Mr Allen later.

The change of status means that the subsequent annual borrowing of housing associations will count against the Department's capital budget. As a result, the capital needs of the housing associations would need to be assessed against other departmental priorities, and this is likely to constrain the annual borrowing of housing associations and therefore impact on the funding of new social housing development. In turn, this would result in a reduction in the number of new social homes being built each year at a time when we have increased pressure on public finances and increasing numbers on the housing waiting lists. That is clearly an unacceptable situation. The treatment of the historical debt of the housing associations needs to be considered as well, but that would have little impact in Northern Ireland. While the historical debt is added to the public sector net debt at a UK level, this does not impact on the Department's budget or the Northern Ireland Executive's debt. Therefore, it does not affect the Executive's borrowing powers.

Officials in my Department will now consider all the detail of the ONS announcement. They will also consider the response in the other jurisdictions — Scotland and Wales have just had their associations reclassified as well — and put forward proposals that best suit our needs. The main areas specified in the ONS decision include the powers of the Department in relation to consent powers over the disposal of land; removing, suspending or appointing committee members to a housing association as a result of an inquiry into mismanagement; and directing housing associations to transfer land to another body as a result of an inquiry into mismanagement.

I indicated that I would give way to Ms Mallon and then Mr Allen.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister. Minister, on a number of occasions, you have emphasised the grave severity of the issue, yet you spent the first five minutes — one third of your response — deriding and scolding the Opposition, followed by another two minutes telling us what we already knew. Will you please address the substantive issues and address and answer some of the questions that I and other Members posed?

Mr Givan: Again, I am not sure where Members have been. I went to the Committee and highlighted that this was an emerging issue. I also raised it repeatedly during Question Time and said that it was an emerging issue that would have serious ramifications for our ability to provide the housing that we need. The direction of travel in all of this was that a decision was coming and we were preparing for it. The Executive then engaged — rightly — on that issue, and, within less than 24 hours of the decision being taken by the ONS, the Executive agreed on the strategic approach that we needed to take. We are moving ahead in addressing the issue, the first step of which is, obviously, seeking a derogation.

During the debate, the Member asked, "Where is the legislation? Why is legislation not being provided?". For the Opposition to do their job, they need to know how all those areas function. Excuse me if the Members feel that I am giving them something of a lecture, but I am doing it in the interests of trying to ensure that the Opposition are in a position to do the job that they are meant to do.

The ONS provided a summary. I am holding the official letter that was received on 28 September and made public on 29 September and that the Executive then addressed. The Member wants to know why there is not legislation on the Floor of the Assembly right now.

Ms Mallon: I did not ask that.

Mr Givan: The Member said that she did not ask that: have a look at Hansard. The final paragraph of the letter from the ONS deals with the issues:

"[This] provides an adequate summary of the points most relevant to this decision. However, please note that this may not be an exhaustive list of all central government controls in place in the current legislation."

The ONS is still to give the detailed publication of its report, which will identify all the measures that it believes need to be addressed to have the reclassification. What a foolish Executive they would be if they produced legislation when they did not know exactly what they needed to legislate for. That is a basic function of how the

Executive have to do their job. When we get that detailed report, please be assured that the Executive have already taken those decisions and that the issue is at hand. The Opposition can rest assured that we will be able to address them.

Mr Allen: I thank the Minister for giving way. On a number of occasions, the Minister has emphasised the seriousness of the matter. However, as other Members pointed out, it was not serious enough for you or the Finance Minister to come before the House and make a statement and give the House an outline of how long a derogation we need to apply for to start shaping the legislation. Will you give us an idea of that?

Mr Givan: Again, Members clearly were not listening when we raised the issue in Committee and on the Floor of the Assembly. I have been questioned on the issue and have sought to reassure Members that I take it very seriously, so seriously in fact that, within less than 24 hours of the decision being taken, the Executive took the decision on how we would effectively deal with it and immediately made that available to the public. I understand that members of the Opposition will maybe feel that they are not being taken by the hand in the way in which they want to have their hand taken. We have informed the public about it all; that was released into the public domain. Instead of the Opposition focusing on the real issues, what I have heard from them in previous debates is that they want the BBC charter to have a requirement to give coverage to the Opposition in the Assembly and that they are concerned about where they should be seated in the Chamber and the title that should be given to the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. Opposition is about a lot more than those issues. It is about delivering on the real issues that matter to people. I happen to take the provision of social housing incredibly seriously. We need to provide the homes that our people demand of us. We will get on with doing the business that is required of us.

3.45 pm

Over the next number of months, we will develop and consult on the proposals and complete the drafting of the legislation. We will then take that draft Bill through its Committee Stage and bring it to the Assembly. I will need the support of the Committee in carrying out its scrutiny role when we get to that stage. Given that the issue, as Members have indicated, is so critical to them, I have every confidence that the Committee will expeditiously deal with all that scrutiny and we will get this through by receiving Royal Assent as soon as possible after we know the exact nature of what we need to legislate for. I look forward to working with all Members constructively on the issue.

Mr Smith: I support the motion and the amendment, which I urge all Members to support. As many said during the debate — I listened to many of the comments — if we had not tabled the motion, when would this important issue be debated? I, for one, certainly do not believe we are wasting our time; we are bringing out key issues that need to be aired. When we as a party formed, along with the SDLP, the official Opposition, we said we would be constructive and positive. Today I hope we have shown that through the intent of the motion and the amendment, which I believe can and should get the Executive parties' support. That is why I have been surprised at the attitude and tone of some on the Executive Benches. The response seems

to be "How dare you ask a question?". I am afraid we will continue asking questions, whether you like it or not, frankly.

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Smith: I certainly will.

Mr Allen: Does the Member not find it extraordinary that the Minister criticised the Opposition for tabling the motion but did not find time in his 15 minutes to outline the timeline for derogation and to say when we would see legislation? Will that derogation be long enough to allow legislation to be passed? What discussions has he had with the Treasury to ensure that the derogation has a timescale that befits what we need to do here?

Mr Smith: I thank Mr Allen for his point. I totally agree: the Minister spent 15 minutes saying very little. He did it very well, but he said very little.

The one thing the debate has brought out is a ministerial statement, such as it was. It has delivered that output — on a hugely serious issue, as the Minister admits. Otherwise, we should do what Mr McCann expected and take it that everything is all good. We were told the Executive approved a paper last Thursday, so we could all sleep easy. The question for me is this: why did the Minister not proactively take the issue to the Floor? Where is the openness, transparency and respect for the House? At least, Minister Ó Muilleoir tweeted yesterday that he was looking forward to the debate and referenced "good partnership work", which is what, I think, everybody was trying to bring forward today. I presume his busy schedule did not allow him to attend despite the tweet, but at least he was making the right noises. We have had to endure a patronising lecture from the Minister. Frankly, when he and his colleagues can deliver good government, I will take a lecture on opposition from him. Until that time, he can, frankly, keep it to himself.

I want to address the substance of the debate. While this is a statistical change to the presentation of national accounts, as my colleague Andy Allen outlined when moving the motion, there are critical elements to the ONS reclassification of Northern Ireland's housing associations as public bodies. There is the obvious impact on the provision of public and affordable housing in Northern Ireland. Without the ability to access private funding, it will be impossible to achieve the Executive target of 8,000 social housing starts. The Finance Minister has already made it clear that the only alternative under the changed accounting rules is to fund future builds from the Northern Ireland Budget. Frankly, that is totally untenable. It is also ironic, to my mind, that, as the public-sector voluntary exit scheme comes to an end, we are potentially adding 3,000 workers to the public-sector payroll. There are massive ramifications of this that need to be aired, and the debate was timely and required, despite what the Minister might think.

Everyone is agreed that we have no alternative but to seek a derogation from the Treasury to allow us the space to legislate to deliver the changes needed to reverse the ONS decision. What changes are needed? First, the Department's direction of governance will need to be changed: consent before disposing of land, powers relating to the dissolution or winding-up of an association and powers relating to the disposal of proceeds funds will all need to be changed. Essentially, the reclassification

is based on the degree of control the state can exercise over housing associations' corporate policymaking, and legislation will be needed to reverse the ONS assessment.

Northern Ireland's housing legislation is both older and more complex than that of Great Britain, making our process more challenging. When the housing associations were classified in England in October 2015, Parliament was fortunate enough in that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 was already under way and could be amended to include a package of deregulatory measures, but even with that running start, the process is likely to take 18 months before Royal Assent. In this jurisdiction, we will have to start the legislative process from scratch. I encourage the Minister to get the process under way, as time is against us. It would have been useful to at least have got some outline today of what a timetable would need to be and also an understanding of what the initial engagement has been with the Treasury around this derogation. I believe that the Treasury is being robust on this. We will need to agree a window of at least 18 months in which to pass the required legislation, so the first action for the Minister for Communities and the Minister of Finance is to convince the Treasury that we have developed a tight timetable and credible plan to reverse the situation and are thereby deserving of the time and space to deliver the required changes.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he agree with me that it is a shame that the Minister could not provide reassurance and that, whilst we accept that the full nature of the ONS comments are not available, the Executive could, at least, be working on legislation at this point based on the initial response of the ONS?

Mr Smith: I totally agree with the Member. It would have been nice to have heard some positivity at least from the Minister rather than just the diatribe that we have had to endure.

There has been mention of the potential for a coordinated approach with colleagues in Scotland and Wales, if required, to secure the Treasury derogation for the three devolved institutions. If that needs to be done, so be it. Again, we need to progress that without delay. The legislative changes that are required will not drastically deregulate the housing association sector, so I do not believe that Members should be overly concerned about the change that is needed. Housing associations will still be regulated by the Department. They will still be regulated charities with charitable controls. There are still the strong protections around the reinvestment capital grant of £2.3 billion that is being invested by the Northern Ireland Executive in housing association assets.

In conclusion, we need to see quick action from both relevant Departments to drive forward the changes needed to reverse this ONS classification, otherwise our ability to borrow to invest will be stymied, and we will be unable to build the thousands of social and affordable homes that Northern Ireland desperately needs. I urge Members to support the motion and amendment.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the decision by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Northern Ireland's 22 housing associations from independent social

businesses to public bodies; recognises that this will have a significant impact on housing associations and their ability to provide new social and shared ownership homes; further notes that this decision will add nearly £1 billion of housing association debt to the Northern Ireland Executive's balance sheet, seriously impacting on the Executive's ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities and Minister of Finance to expedite the steps necessary to reverse this reclassification; and agree quickly an interim derogation arrangement with HM Treasury to enable the sector to continue to function normally, to engage closely with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to agree a joined-up approach, and to outline a clear and detailed timeline for specific action, including bringing forward legislation, within the time frame that any HM Treasury derogation allows, to ensure that Northern Ireland's housing associations can remain classified as independent social businesses.

Growing Northern Ireland's Exports

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments — *[Interruption.]* Order, please. If Members want to continue their conversations, they can leave the Chamber.

As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who speak will have five minutes. Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive, so if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2.

Mr Lyons: I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the recent Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs export data for Northern Ireland, which record a growth rate of 9.5%; notes the Executive's commitment to increase the competitiveness of the economy; recognises the opportunities that the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union presents to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland economic strategy.

I welcome the opportunity to move the motion on behalf of myself and my colleagues this afternoon. As a party, we have made clear our commitment to growing the Northern Ireland economy in order to create more jobs, more wealth and more prosperity for our people. That is something on which, across the Chamber, we all no doubt agree, but how do we achieve it? It is our belief that growth in exports is an essential component in the stronger economy that we all want to see in Northern Ireland, and the benefits of it are clear. An increase in exports leads to increased sales, increased growth and increased profits; it helps to spread risks that businesses may face and helps companies with competitiveness and innovation. No one can doubt that exports, and indeed all external sales, are anything other than positive and beneficial for the Northern Ireland economy.

Of course, we have received good news from HMRC about the value of Northern Ireland exports in 2015. A 9.5% increase from 2014 is very positive, particularly when you consider that England, Scotland and Wales all experienced a decline during the same period. Whilst the figures for Northern Ireland are encouraging and signify that the Executive's strategy is working, we must not be complacent nor content with the current position. There is still huge potential for growth, and the job of the Executive is to ensure that they play their part in keeping the momentum going.

As we move forward, our key outcomes in exports should not only be an increase in their value but an increase in the number of local companies exporting. This is good not only for local companies but for the economy in Northern Ireland as a whole. We do not want to be over-reliant on a small number of companies for our export base. We need to see this grow and expand, but it is going in the right direction. We welcome the action that has already

been taken to support these objectives. No doubt the Minister will outline his recent announcement of the trade accelerator plan, which will address many of the key areas where support is needed.

At this point, I want to mention some work in my constituency that I hope the Minister will commend. The Local Economic Development Company Ltd (LEDCOM), an economic development company in Larne supported by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, is hosting a series of business seminars this year, and the one that is being held in January is entitled 'Exporting within the European Union and beyond Post Brexit – the challenges and rewards'. This is exceptionally positive, as it will provide not only practical help and advice for local companies on exporting but recognise that new opportunities can lie ahead.

The support from the Department and from Invest, and support locally, is particularly necessary in Northern Ireland, as we have the highest concentration of SMEs in the UK, and SMEs are less likely to export.

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I will give way very briefly to the Member for South Antrim, who must have had a very boring night on Saturday, because he was tweeting me. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Aiken: No, I was just saying about the FT.

I fully support this, but one of the things that we should also do is invite the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce to be involved in this dialogue. The promotion of small and medium companies, as well as medium companies, throughout Northern Ireland by the Chamber of Commerce has been first-rate. That is one of the key things that we need to do to develop exports.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not think that there should be any limits on engagement with other organisations that have an interest in helping.

We have also made clear our desire to see our SMEs grow, develop and upscale into larger companies, and these two issues go hand in hand. Large companies are more likely to be exporters, and companies that are exporters are more likely to grow. However, any support should be in a targeted way, rather than a scattergun approach. I was pleased to hear from the Minister when he attended the Economy Committee and said:

"We, as an Executive, then need to ruthlessly and relentlessly support those sectors and subsectors in which we are really strong."

Whilst the Minister was referring to growth in jobs as a whole, I believe that the same approach needs to be applied to exports: not just that we ruthlessly export those sectors where we are strong or competitive or have the potential to be strong or competitive, but that we ruthlessly target those markets where there is greatest opportunity for growth. Members will note from figures recently released that one of the strongest areas of growth has been in the medicinal and pharmaceutical sector. That is an area where we have had much good news, and the Minister will be aware of the success of one such company in my constituency, Terumo BCT in Larne, which he visited with me in his previous role as Health Minister and which is a world leader in medical devices.

This area and others in which we can be competitive and truly first-class should be the focus of our energies.

4.00 pm

It is also important that, having identified our key sectors, we identify our key markets. It is clear that the Republic of Ireland continues to be a significant trading partner, and we want to see that continue. However, figures recently released demonstrate clearly that we are seeing a change in our exporting partners. Sales to the EU and even to the Republic of Ireland are falling. That is not surprising, as they have become a smaller share of the world economy and struggle in terms of economic growth. Instead, we see growth in exports to the mid-sized developing economies, places like Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. The figures there are clear for all to see. Yes, 52% of Northern Ireland exports are sold into the EU, but that is down from 59% the previous year. Trade to countries outside the EU increased by 28%, while overall EU exports dropped by 3.6%.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I have been very generous. If the Member is quick, I will give way.

Mr Allister: Indeed. Would the Member agree that, in setting out the export figures, we need to be mindful that, in fact, our greatest external market outside Northern Ireland is GB? We export 60% to GB, and, of the balance, a fraction goes to the EU.

Mr Lyons: The Member must be good at reading my mind: that was the exact point I was going to make. There is, obviously, a difference between exports and external sales, and, of course, in terms of external sales, the UK is by far our largest market.

Whilst our biggest trading partners are the rest of the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the US, which saw a massive increase of 75% last year, we need to look at the next tier of countries, where there has been significant economic growth and room for us to expand. That is why we included in our motion a recognition that there are opportunities that can come from leaving the EU. We all know the position of each party in the Chamber, and the arguments have been made numerous times. However, I hope that everyone in the Chamber, regardless of their position on Brexit, would want Brexit to be a success. I hope that people will want us to be able to exploit the opportunities that could come from leaving the European Union.

Whilst Sinn Féin has made it clear that it would rather stay in the EU, it has, in its amendment, recognised the result, which is to be welcomed, and that we need to focus on getting the best deal and outcome for Northern Ireland, especially in issues relating to cross-border trade and maintaining the common travel area. For those reasons, we are content to support the amendment if it creates greater consensus in the Chamber than might otherwise be the case.

We tabled the motion to impress on the Minister once again the importance of exports to the local economy and the need to support key sectors and to target key markets. Additionally, we call on the Minister to make sure that, as a devolved Administration, we are to the fore in getting out there and showing the world what we have to offer and,

in so doing, bringing greater opportunities, wealth and prosperity to everyone in Northern Ireland.

Dr Farry: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "economy;" and insert

"recognises the importance of Northern Ireland continuing to participate within the European single market to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland economic strategy."

It will not be lost that Mr Lyons did not give his support to the first amendment and did not take the opportunity to give his full support to the single market. I think that the business community, here in Northern Ireland and across the UK, will take note of that. The fortunate opportunity for the DUP in the House to unite around that does seem to have been missed. Hopefully, they will reconsider as we go along.

At the outset, we can concur that exports are a good thing. Export-led growth is a key route through which we can transform our economy, drive up skills and productivity and enhance prosperity. There has been some recent improvement in that regard, though we may dispute some of the underlying explanations of that. We also concur that exports should continue to be a core element of Northern Ireland's economic strategy.

In some regards, the Brexit decision is especially frustrating at a time when the peace process is well embedded and the Northern Ireland economy is addressing some structural reforms and really has the potential to take off and see real results. We are dragging ourselves down at a time when we are really about to lift off. Our amendment gives the Assembly the opportunity to declare unequivocally that continued participation in the EU single market is one of the most important aspects, if not the most important aspect, of what makes the Northern Ireland economy competitive today and would maximise our competitiveness in the future.

Recent export growth has reflected some microeconomic interventions around skills, innovation and the building-up of capacity among local companies. Over the past few months, there has been a short-term boost due to the radical changes in the value of the pound in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. However, cheaper exports are balanced by more expensive imports for manufacturers and consumers. The drop in the value of the pound also reflects a drop in the value of the overall UK economy. Even the companies benefiting from the currency changes would accept that volatility in exchange rates is not healthy and that an economy cannot be truly prosperous unless it is based on strong and solid foundations. Therefore, the key issue for expanding our export base is accessibility to markets.

There are a number of scenarios when it comes to trading relationships. They range from some form of special status or special arrangement that allows us to continue to be part of the European Union through to Northern Ireland alone or the UK as a whole continuing to be part of the EU single market, passing through some form of access to single market akin to the Norwegian model or the less advantageous Swiss model, with the backstop of the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. Over recent days and weeks, there has been a lot of talk about WTO rules from Conservative Ministers and from some former and current

unionist politicians. That has received a strong rebuke from UK-wide employer organisations such as the CBI, which should know.

Before the Brexit vote, there was a rather warped narrative that there was somehow a choice to be made between trading with the European Union and accessing the rest of the world. No doubt we will hear that reinforced today by some of the apologists for the "Leave" campaign in the Chamber, who will argue that the proportion of Northern Ireland exports to the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the European Union has declined and the proportion of our exports to the United States and the rest of the world is increasing and that, ergo, our future prosperity lies outside the European Union. That neglects to consider that the gap between the level of exports to Ireland and the rest of Europe, whether we are talking about services, manufactured products or agrifood, is still significantly ahead of the rest of the world. While that gap may be narrowing, it is nevertheless considerable. It would be foolish in the extreme to make it more difficult for Northern Ireland companies to access what is still by far their largest non-UK market.

Moreover, Europe versus the rest of the world was never an either/or choice, rather a both/and. The European Union is better placed to create new free trade agreements with other parts of the world than the UK going alone. The UK is no more likely to participate in a free trade agreement with the United States, Canada or China by going it alone than by going through the European Union. Such deals often take years to negotiate and are rarely straightforward. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is already in considerable difficulty, and even the proposed Canada-EU deal is creating controversy. Beyond our shores, we see difficulties with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) for the United States. Of course, bilateral deals can be struck, such as the Swiss deal with China that has often been cited. Worryingly, however, that one was concluded very much on China's terms. If you want simply to surrender to the terms of other countries that wish to trade with us, of course we can do all these deals, but it is not necessarily in our interests to do so.

It is also worth reflecting for a moment on what the term "WTO rules" entails. It is essentially the global multilateral floor on which further progress on breaking down barriers can be built or on which more specific arrangements can be based. In theory, the UK can throw off its tariff walls to imports and hope that others will reciprocate in how UK exports are treated. It is not as straightforward in practice, as many states continue to seek to protect their domestic markets, particularly and notably for agricultural products and services. It is particularly naive to think that the UK can simply lower its tariffs and expect the EU to reciprocate. To do so, especially in the absence of acceptance of freedom of movement, would be to see the unpicking of the wider European project. We should also be clear that there is a difference between the concept of a single market, a customs union and a free trade zone. They are not the same, but many on the "Leave" side seem to think that they are.

The level of tariffs is not the only barrier to trade. Transactional costs, regulatory matters and the policing of issues such as country of origin are just as important, and this is where specific free trade agreements — most importantly, the preference for a single market — become

much more important. These complexities would not be addressed under WTO rules. The further we move away from the notion of a single market, the greater the impact of transactional costs and regulatory issues will be. All that red tape, which I believe the "Leave" campaign was seeking to get away from, will create more and more barriers for our exporters.

If we are serious about doing the best for Northern Ireland, we need to maximise our relationship with the single market and, ideally, be participants in it. Different companies and sectors in the Northern Ireland economy will have different current and potential overseas markets, and there are dangers in extrapolating from outliers. We can all cite the good deals being done by company x and company y in the United States, which is to be welcomed, but let us look at the statistics and see where the bulk of our trade is going and will continue to go.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Dr Farry: Yes.

Mr Allister: I would like some clarification on what the Alliance Party's amendment means, because it uses the rather equivocal language of:

"continuing to participate within the European single market".

Does the Alliance Party want us to belong to the single market or have access to it? The wording used — "continuing to participate" — would cover both. Will you nail your colours to whichever mast it is?

Dr Farry: I am happy to clarify. The word "participate" is fairly clear and unambiguous: we want to be part of the single market, and that is our starting point. The notion of access to the single market is one step removed from that. If we talk about access to the single market, we accept that there will be some barriers, particularly in transactional costs and regulatory issues. Every time we take a step back, the implications for our exporters will become more severe.

It is clearly in the interests of the UK economy as a whole to maximise engagement with the single market. The business community is loud and clear in that regard, most recently in its warnings about the consequences of a hard Brexit. A hard Brexit would entail a drop in the UK's GDP and a major baseline correction in our overall wealth as a nation. This logic is even more acute in Northern Ireland, given our land border with an EU state and the nature of some of our business sectors, such as agri-food, which is, to a large extent, organised on a North/South basis. Agri-food is also a much bigger component of our economy and faces the additional hit of being confronted by the highest EU external tariffs, if we leave the single market.

It is also worth briefly considering our inward investment narrative. There is an air of complacency from some that, given Northern Ireland's recent strong track record and the onset of corporation tax powers, everything will be OK. However, our success to date — it has been a success — has predominantly been around attracting quality back office functions from US companies, and our skills base has been particularly helpful in that regard. That type of investment can continue, but access to markets is also a key consideration for investors. Corporation tax has the potential to be a game changer, but that is based on

attracting profit centres to Northern Ireland, which are much more likely to want to have a base from which to sell to the single market.

At present, our investment context is characterised by risk and uncertainty, and it is important that people fully understand and recognise that. If we are serious about investment, we must recognise that it is not just about tax and talent, as is often said; it is about tax, talent and trade. The stakes for Northern Ireland at present are very high, and it is important that the Assembly takes the opportunity today to declare its full support for the single market.

Ms Archibald: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "economy;" and insert

"recognises that the result of the referendum on membership of the European Union has significant implications for businesses; calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of an economic strategy to achieve long-term, sustainable and socially balanced economic growth; and further calls on the Minister, in recognising the unique circumstances on this island, to work with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure that cross-border trade and freedom of movement continue uninhibited."

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and to move our amendment. I will say at the outset that I endorse the call to ensure that growing exports, and enabling companies to do this, should be an integral part of our economic strategy. However, it is also important to recognise the implications of the referendum result, which present companies here with significant challenges, and we must face up to this. That is not being negative; it is being realistic.

Over the past couple of months, like most Members in the Chamber, I have had many discussions with stakeholders, businesspeople and business representatives. The message most clearly articulated is that the uncertainty following the referendum result is causing difficulties, and there is a fear factor, whether we like it or not. For businesses, this makes it difficult to plan for the future and means that they are less likely to invest. As recently as yesterday, the acting director of the British Chambers of Commerce remarked that the uncertainty we now face is making businesses, which already tend to be risk-averse, even more risk-averse.

4.15 pm

Agri-food is an important sector for our economy and for exports. Last week, the chair of the Agri-Food Strategy Board was before the AERA Committee. When asked about the opportunities being presented by Brexit for the agri-food sector, he made the salient point that energy will now be spent on managing the situation we are faced with rather than building and growing what we know today. He was subsequently asked whether too much emphasis was being put on negative rather than positive impacts, and he responded that we have to understand the risks before we manage them, and, if you work on the basis that there is no threat, you will do nothing about it. We have to face up to the challenges that businesses now face and realise that the environment that we are in does not encourage investment. We need to put in place supports to encourage enterprising behaviours. Organisations representing

businesses, including the CBI and the British Chambers of Commerce, referenced the importance of consultation with the sectors and their representatives in developing any priority for negotiation and helping to create stability in the short term. I believe that we have a responsibility to do that.

It is also important to acknowledge the achievements of companies here. The export data that we have seen this year to June are positive news. We should learn from what may have contributed to that. The report, which shows a 9.5% increase in exports, also includes more detailed information, which Mr Lyons referenced. A 74% increase in exports to the US is highlighted, which is great news, a 56% increase in what it calls "chemical and related products", and a 10% increase in miscellaneous manufactured products. As Mr Lyons said, such industries have been expanding here for some time, and it is really good to see their success. The report shows that the number of businesses exporting here had fallen in comparison with the same quarter in 2015. We have work to do in supporting businesses to explore accessing export markets, and the trade accelerator plan launched last month is a positive step. Alongside that, it is important to ensure that there are appropriate practical and logistical supports in place, particularly for SMEs, to enable them to make the most of any export opportunities that arise. We must also look towards supporting those same enterprises with their product and service development to ensure that they are able to take up opportunities. Supports for innovation and upscaling are also important strands to any economic strategy, and they will underpin general sales and export capabilities. It is important that companies right across the North, of all sizes and sectors, including the third sector, have the same opportunities to access all these supports and are being made aware of them. Any dissemination events must include more diverse locations to ensure genuine regional balance in their delivery.

I now come to the final part of our amendment. The previously mentioned HMRC report also shows that 52% of our exports go to the EU, which is still a sizeable amount worth some £3.5 billion. Remaining part of the single market is important, and the messages coming from Westminster are not reassuring. However, the main export market for businesses here is cross-border, with over 31% of our exports worth £2.1 billion going to the South. It is absolutely vital that we continue to have unfettered access to that market and that trade and movement continue as is. Sinn Féin strongly believes that the best means to achieve that is to negotiate arrangements for the North. That is a real possibility that must be fully explored.

Protests took place at the weekend at border crossings across the country, calling for the "Remain" vote here to be respected. Those present at protests represented a wide cross section of the community — business groups, cancer support groups, disability support groups and individuals — all of whom recognise the impact any changes will have on their lives. We call on the Minister to work with his counterpart in the South to ensure that arrangements will be created to ensure that cross-border movement of people, goods and services will continue unimpeded.

I urge Members to endorse our amendment. We recognise that remaining within the European single market would achieve the aims regarding free movement and trade access, so we will support the Alliance Party amendment. We believe that majority support would be a

strong statement from the Assembly, acknowledging the democratic will of the majority here who voted "Remain".

Mr Aiken: I support the Alliance motion, and to work in such a constructive manner, I will point out some ideas to help to boost trade and exports, which is what we are looking for in Northern Ireland.

First, let us celebrate, because we do not do it very often, and pass on our thanks to our companies that have helped to achieve a much-laudable 9·5% growth in our exports since 2015. Of particular note, as we talked about, is the growth in sales to the United States, which grew by 74%, and the importance of our life sciences sector, which has grown its export value by 56·3%, rising to £1·5 billion. It is also pleasing to note that we exported over £1 billion-worth of agricultural products and that our manufacturing sector exported over £2·3 billion-worth of products.

When looking particularly at our pharma sector, which has over 258 excellent companies, including the great company of Randox in my constituency, we can see that a combination of a highly skilled workforce, linkages to research and development-driven universities and a supportive financial sector and legislative system can, when properly marshalled, produce world-class and globally leading results. That has all helped Northern Ireland exports to rise to the value of £6·6 billion. Indeed, as pointed out, our manufacturing and services sectors outperform, per head of population, those in Wales and Scotland, although our productivity is considerably behind that of the key English regions, such as the south-east, the Midlands and the Northern Powerhouse, and also, worryingly, that of the Republic of Ireland.

We also have to recognise that there will be considerable impact post-31 March 2019, which is fewer than 29 months away. I was going to make a cheap joke about the length of time it takes for the office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to answer an FOI request, but I will not. We will be out of the EU. Worryingly, it is possible that we will also be out of the single European market. We note with interest that our largest export market is the Republic of Ireland. At a value of £2·1 billion, it is double our next largest export destination, which is the US. It will also, post-Brexit, be the UK's only land border with the EU. When any two highly successful economic zones meet, particularly with the EU economic zone being the world's largest economic market, which is not going to change any time soon, and the UK being the sixth or seventh largest economy, there is normally great opportunity. However, as many in the Assembly will be aware, the trade across the Irish Sea is currently worth some £52 billion/€52 billion looking at today's exchange rate. That taken, £2·1 billion is slightly more than 4% of that trade. That is probably a bit of an indictment of our failures to effectively promote that trade. Despite a plethora of initiatives, including the hard work that Invest Northern Ireland and, to a much lesser extent, InterTradeIreland have been involved in, we have no great push to raise the export figure to a more representative one, such as 10% of the current inter-island trade, which is a target of around £5 billion.

We cannot just rest on growing trade to the Republic of Ireland, as we already stated. We must seek to grow all our global exports over the next decade and beyond. We need to work constructively with organisations like UKTI and others to achieve that. In Invest Northern Ireland, we have an organisation that exceeded all its Programme

for Government targets. However, in view of the overall export figures of £6·7 billion measured against the overall figure of UK exports of close to £300 billion, our exports should be in proportion. They should be at least £10 billion to £12 billion. Again, when measured against Programme for Government targets, Invest NI's performance seems impressive, but we have no benchmarking against what UKTI, Scottish Development International or even Enterprise Ireland or IDA Ireland achieve. Those figures would be very useful for all. We have called several times for Invest Northern Ireland to be benchmarked. I would like the Minister to take that for action.

What, going forward, would be worthwhile targets? First, let us achieve 10% of all cross-Irish Sea trade. We will need to ensure that we build economic and trade relationships with the Irish that are as strong as possible. Secondly, we need to grow Northern Ireland's manufacturing sector to achieve 20% of our GDP and boost our exports outside the Republic of Ireland to at least £10 billion to £15 billion. Our target within 10 years must be an export-driven economy that achieves, in 2016 terms, at least £20 billion in exports per annum.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a conclusion.

Mr Aiken: That challenging target, even with the resultant corporation tax, would allow Northern Ireland to be well placed to meet the challenges of the forthcoming decades.

Ms S Bradley: As SDLP spokesperson for the economy, I welcome the 9·5% increase in export growth. Before I get into my speech proper, I note with some amusement the secondary clause in the motion that somehow suggests that the two clauses are connected and that the growth may, in some part, have something to do with this Government. Some might even stand to argue that it happened despite this Government rather than because of them.

That said, amongst the many figures that are presented, there is a breakdown in the overall growth. The stand-out figure has to be that 56·3% growth from chemical and related products and life sciences, which is an impressive growth in any one year. Also worthy of specific mention is the growth in exports to the US. It is unfortunate that the SDLP/UUP joint motion —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. There are Members, Ministers and former Ministers with penetrating whispers. I ask them to show some respect to those contributing to the debate.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I assure you that I am immune.

It is worth looking at. The figures that have gone through are very impressive.

I also note all the companies in Northern Ireland that have contributed to exports. It is worthy of note, and we should take time to congratulate those businesses. They are not asking this House or this Sinn Féin/DUP Government for congratulations. If anybody is really listening to the business community at this time, they will hear that it is asking for leadership and for an economic anchor in this pre-Brexit period. Likewise, companies that are contemplating the possibility of the export market must be supported and encouraged. Policy must reflect something

that they recognise as being something that they can approach and adopt for their own business.

In my view, businesses in Northern Ireland are amongst the most versatile in the world, and they have had to be. I am confident that they will respond to any challenges and opportunities presented to them. However, it is wholly unreasonable for anybody to expect them to respond to challenges that are unknown to them.

Whilst welcoming the 9.5% growth, it is incumbent on all of us in this House to take a much wider view of the economic performance and policies. Today's report issued by the Ulster Bank's purchasing managers' index (PMI) tells us that output and new orders have stagnated during the month of September. The HMRC statistics that we are considering also reaffirm that our largest export market continues to be just over the ditch and further South, right across Ireland. We must acknowledge this as a reality, and it is something that we need to collectively protect.

In its submission to the refocus of Northern Ireland's economic strategy, the Federation of Small Businesses quoted NISRA statistics that the EU represented 59% of our exports, with 37% of that being made in the Republic of Ireland. During recent visits to local businesses and companies that are involved in exports, I have been told that ease of access to trade negotiations, ease of transport with no dependency on shipping, a shared cultural understanding of product and demand and the security of working in the single European market are just a few reasons why the South is such a sustainable export partner.

During the visits, CEOs and management teams also shared with me their thinking on the recent referendum result. Instead of going into the political arena, they are focusing heavily on the real issues. One business informed me that it has considered the possible impact that tariffs may have on sales and it will consider the possibility of setting up business in the South if the burden of costs and administration imposed on it weighs too heavily. A second export business that I spoke to was less concerned about talk of tariffs but recognised that its particular business was heavily dependent on the free movement of people to maintain a level workforce.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a conclusion.

Ms S Bradley: They, too, have also not ruled out the possibility of moving South. I ask the House this: where does it leave our future exports when we face the real possibility of exporting our exporters?

4.30 pm

Mr T Buchanan: One of the key strengths of Northern Ireland's economic growth is the ability to export goods across the globe. While Northern Ireland might be small in stature, in comparison with the economic landscape around the world, it nevertheless punches well above its weight on the world stage. That is evident from the recorded growth rate of 9.5% in exports over the past year; indeed, the value of exports to the United States between June 2015 and 2016 reached almost £620 million, with evidence that the increase in the share of those exports stemmed from within Northern Ireland. We are the only part of the UK to have recorded growth in our export markets, and that is being done in a challenging and uncertain economic climate. Local businesses are keeping

their eye on the ball and steadily growing their business, in spite of the reports of doom and gloom prior to the referendum to leave the EU and thereafter.

It was this party and the First Minister who consistently made the economy a key priority in the Programme for Government, recognising the importance of the economy in growing every sector in Northern Ireland. It is encouraging to see the many reports of local businesses winning contracts around the world. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that local businesses operate in a competitive environment and are well placed to take advantage of external opportunities that face global competition.

As a Government, we must continue to lead from the front and demonstrate that local businesses can and do grow when they have an outward vision, looking outward and seizing the new opportunities coming our way. Encouraging an outward-looking vision and grasping every available opportunity is where we, as a Government, must seek to lead our local economy. The Economy Minister has just announced a trade accelerator plan in conjunction with Invest NI, to build on the growth of exports over the past 12 months and enhance the support available to existing exporters in Northern Ireland and those who are perhaps considering exploring the export possibilities for their companies. Post-Brexit Northern Ireland, with the rest of the UK, will enter the cusp of a new dawn for businesses, with new opportunities presenting themselves around the globe. As the new dawn of global trade emerges, we have an entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland that, I believe, will rise to the challenge of competing for those global contracts. I encourage the Minister to continue his successful track record and ensure that growing exports continues to be a key part of the economic strategy of Northern Ireland going forward.

Export growth will not take place in a vacuum. It will require a combination of key stakeholders in the process from the core research and development that will drive the innovation of the Province to the Invest NI groups around the world that will provide key contacts to develop export markets from the starting point of Northern Ireland. Everyone needs to play their part to achieve success, and we have seen that in the steps that many businesses have already taken in launching their companies into the wider global market. It is up to the Executive to build on firm foundations that have been forged through strategic partnerships and to make that information readily available to the local small to medium-sized enterprises that are considering exporting their products and services.

At this point in our history, we should rise to the challenges ahead, grasp the potential opportunities that present themselves and launch onto the world stage with confidence to realise the potential exports that are there for the taking. I support the motion.

Mr Murphy: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I also welcome the figures and the HMRC report showing an increase in exports from companies here. That is to be welcomed. It is encouraging, as we want to see companies continue to grow and, of course, continue to export, as that is a vital part of building our economy and making sure that it is stronger and spread more evenly throughout every sector of our economy. I certainly welcome the fact that companies are beginning to export to newer markets as well; that is very encouraging. But the reality is that the report is set against what is happening in

England, Scotland and Wales. Given that we operate from a much lower benchmark, some perspective is needed on the figures, although any increase is encouraging.

It is the case that we, as an EU country, are currently exporting to a lot of markets, even newer markets, on the basis of the trade arrangements and agreements that have been made by the EU on the basis of the trade negotiations that have been conducted by it. Of course, if the North were to lose its status as an EU member and as a country that was part of the EU arrangements, the arrangements would be left up to an entirely new set of trade negotiations conducted from London. I think that it is widely accepted that the capacity does not exist to have such trade negotiations. While, on first reading, the report is positive — I certainly welcome that — there is a sense of getting off the sinking ship, grabbing a deckchair floating by and thinking that we are doing very well as a consequence of that.

Even this morning, we got some, I suppose, more sobering opinions. Certainly, one came, I am sure, to most members of the Economy Committee from the chief economist for Ulster Bank, Richard Ramsey, who said:

“While growth in the UK economy as a whole continued to recover from the surprise vote to leave the EU in late-June, the latest PMI data signal that firms in Northern Ireland are facing a much more difficult time of things at present. Data for August had shown a return to growth of business activity, but this has been followed in September with a month of stagnation. Moreover, local firms have yet to see a return to rising new business since the referendum, with new orders broadly unchanged in the latest survey period.”

He finished by saying:

“The overall picture is one of firms struggling to secure new work in the wake of the vote to leave the EU, with the notable exception of those companies able to capture additional export business. Recent noises that the UK government could favour a ‘hard-Brexit’ will likely do little to reassure local firms.”

We also got some feedback from the Food and Drink Association, which has yet to put together a piece on Brexit. It referenced the “53 other trading partners” and the preferential treatment for themselves through lower tariffs or quota from being members of the EU. It also said:

“On exiting Europe we may well also exit these trade agreements and as a result the tariff walls will make it uneconomic to export to those markets.”

Those are sobering checks that make it surprising for us to hear — it is perhaps not surprising to hear some Members on the opposite Benches say these things — organisations like InterTradelreland declare that the business community is excited by the prospects that lie ahead. As Chair of the Economy Committee, I have engaged with businesses big and small over the last number of months, and I can assure you that I have not met a single business that is excited about the uncertainty that lies ahead, the hardening position that seems to be coming from London daily or the plummet in sterling that seems to have happened as a consequence of that.

It would be much better for us if we recognised the challenges that lie ahead — the letter from the First

Minister and deputy First Minister goes some way along that route — and engaged with our biggest trading partners; Members have already mentioned the trade with the South and with Britain and the important trade with the EU. From our perspective, we would like to see the British Government respect the democratic wishes of the people here to remain. We should also seek other opportunities. On Friday, I attended the launch of a report on the potential economic benefits of reunification of this island, which was done by an eminent economist and someone who was involved in German reunification. This is a time not to grasp at straws and try to present them as something significant but to grab hold of the reality of the situation that we find ourselves in and examine all the options to protect the best interests of the people we represent.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion today on what is a very important issue. Northern Ireland has a proud, rich heritage of engineering, manufacturing and processing and has always been to the fore in innovation, research and developing new products that are in use throughout the world.

Invest NI has worked with many companies in providing expert support and advice for businesses that seek to expand and grow their new products into new markets, and it must continue that work in promoting Northern Ireland across the world. Promoting Northern Ireland around the world through trade missions is a valuable way of selling this country, attracting FDI and broadening the horizons of our existing businesses, allowing them to engage with new markets through exports.

There is no doubt that we have seen new markets open up in recent years, such as the Middle East. We must redouble our efforts to expand our sales across the globe and make Northern Ireland an even greater, outward-looking, global competitive economy. We also recognise the work of InterTradelreland as it helps to develop business on a cross-border basis, with programmes of support for existing and new exporters as they seek to build customer links and develop confidence to export new products and services.

One successful recent case study is SDC Trailers in Toomebridge, which has just secured £480,000 of new business in Saudi Arabia. Ulster Carpets has also recently signed major deals in the Middle East, and Wrightbus has been exporting its famous buses across the globe for many years now. The Denroy Group, in my constituency of North Down, has built an incredible reputation as a local company. It is now exporting to 80 countries around the globe, through its top range of hairbrushes, medical devices and aircraft components, making it one of our country's most successful exporters, with annual sales of more than £10 million.

Having spoken to a number of small local businesses that have been on Invest NI missions, I know that they truly value those trips, which have allowed them to grow their export base, develop their business and ultimately create more jobs. Our thriving agri-food sector, in this Year of Food and Drink, is another example of a vital sector with great potential to grow and enhance through exports. The white meat sector through Moy Park and the red meat sector through Dunbia are strong examples of local processors that continue to see growth, exporting quality produce into Europe and world markets.

A recent FSB report indicated that between a quarter and a third of its local members currently export. For every business that currently exports, there is another considering exporting. That is encouraging, and as the FSB points out, the Executive, the private sector and the banking sector must focus on providing support for ambitious businesses that are keen to export and develop. That is why I welcome the trade accelerator plan that was recently launched by our Economy Minister, Simon Hamilton, and is designed to boost exports further and support our local businesses.

Despite the challenges that exist for our companies to be able to create products competitively, there is no doubt that there are real opportunities for Northern Ireland to flourish and grow in the future, to increase the competitiveness of our economy and to grow our exports now, without the confines of being a member of the European Union. I support the motion.

Mr Chambers: I concur with the sentiments contained in the first sentence of the motion. I join the DUP in welcoming the growth in our exports announced by HMRC and applaud any efforts to increase the ability of our economy to compete in a global market. However, I have concerns about joining the proposer of the motion in recognising the opportunities that Brexit presents to improve external sales, without also recognising the major dangers and threats to our exporters placed on them by the UK taking a democratic decision to leave the EU.

The HMRC figures that represent the pre-referendum situation are very encouraging, but we must not become complacent on the back of them.

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr Chambers: Sorry, I will give way later.

It goes without saying that we expect the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key challenge for him. I am confident that it is already foremost in his mind, especially given the growing suspicion that he might have voted to remain in the EU.

Last week, the First Minister was very scathing in her comments about what she called "Remoaners". As she said it, I am not sure whether she even glanced across the Chamber at her Sinn Féin colleagues in the Executive who are currently involved in High Court action on the very subject of remaining in the EU. It will be interesting to see whether Sinn Féin goes into a different Lobby from its Executive colleagues, despite the much-talked-about non-aggression pact. Indeed, I welcome the confirmation from its contributor earlier as to how Sinn Féin will be voting. The DUP might have to borrow from Sinn Féin — Ourselves Alone — when the vote is called this evening.

The funding cuts made to university budgets, resulting in a reduction in the number of courses on offer, and the loss of future EU funding will adversely impact cutting-edge research in the places that lead to income from exports through product development. Is that more lost ground to be made up by new export opportunities? If we are serious about maintaining and then growing export figures, we need firm commitments to invest in our transport and broadband networks, and to provide the right training for our workforce. We must also support calls for a VAT reduction to 9% to grow even further the huge contribution

that tourism makes to our economy, a contribution that sometimes goes unrecognised.

4.45 pm

The most crucial part of our export future is access to the single market. Our Prime Minister is speaking about a hard Brexit, and the president of France and other significant European leaders are sabre-rattling, saying that leaving the EU will be a bumpy ride for the UK. The First Minister claims that it would be madness to show our negotiating hand at this time, but is she confident that she will be playing in a game of economic poker, given that Brexit will undoubtedly be negotiated by people at Westminster whose aspirations may differ from those of the Executive? Now is the time for the Executive to spell out loud and clear what we need from Brexit, and access to the single market should be top of any list.

I am amazed that the DUP motion makes no mention of the single market. My party's document, 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU', is very clear that we must have unfettered access to the EU single market. In a debate about exports, it would be remiss not to mention the efforts of local companies such as Ulster Carpets, Kitchenmaster and SDC Trailers, all of which recently secured export deals to the Middle East, as my colleague Gordon Dunne mentioned, with much appreciated support from Invest Northern Ireland. We should also acknowledge the ongoing contribution to our economy by the many exporters in every sector across Northern Ireland, such as Whale and Denroy in my constituency.

I am left with the suspicion that the motion is a bit of a fig leaf for the DUP to give itself a degree of comfort after the referendum unexpectedly gave it what it wished for. There is considerable uncertainty about exports in a post-EU era. The perfect outcome for Northern Ireland would be to retain all our exports to the EU, especially the Republic of Ireland, and have the chance to explore and grow other markets. I cannot support the DUP motion because it totally ignores the importance of UK access to the single market. I will support the Alliance amendment.

Mr McGlone: As we discuss the report, I am sure that all of us in the Chamber have heard about firms that we have worked with, such as SDC Trailers. I am sure that all of us want the best, and do our best, for businesses, given the circumstances in which they find themselves. We want them to grow, and we want them to collaborate and cooperate. However, other aspects of the report are quite sobering for any business. While exports from the North are up, we are starting from a lower base, and the number of exporters has decreased by 4.5%, which is the largest decrease in the UK. The number of importers has increased by 2.4%, but there was a fall in import value in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland accounts for only 2% of UK exports. The largest customer is still the Republic of Ireland, which accounts for 32%, or, as referred to earlier, £2.1 billion of Northern Ireland's exports. That is where we get into the area of cooperation and the fact that 52% of our exports go to other EU countries, which is a higher proportion than is the case for England, Scotland or Wales. Indeed, food, beverages and agricultural produce make up 35% of Northern Ireland's exports to the EU, so they are an extremely important part of our economy.

I am sure that all of us who speak and listen to businesses know — it is reflected in report after report — that, pre Brexit, the key is stability. We need certainty about the place, but that cannot be given. We have heard “the letter” from FM and dFM to the Prime Minister referred to. It would be interesting to see if there has been any response to “the letter”. One of the Members referred to how FM and dFM cannot reveal their negotiating hand because it is too early: I could understand that if they had just one hand for negotiating with or had even agreed the cards that are in their hand for negotiating with. One says, “This is the way to go”, and the other says, “This is the way to go”. Meantime, the certainty that is required for business is not there. Those are the circumstances that you arrive at when you vote to pull out of something and take us into those uncharted waters.

There has been a welcome surge in chemical-related produce, with an increase of £541 million in the medicinal and pharmaceutical subsections. With other members of the previous ETI Committee, I have visited those very successful companies. That accounts for the vast majority of the overall 9.5% increase. It is high-end produce where the investments have to be in R&D. Horizon 2020 has played a pivotal role in that, collaborating and working with universities or companies in other nation states to help develop that produce and draw down the expertise in those other places. Those related industries involve complex supply chains. For that reason, it is a sector that could be disproportionately hit by leaving the European single market.

Mr Chambers and others are absolutely right: if we do not have that access to the European single market and cannot play a positive role in it, that would not be a good place to be. We have heard the figures on its relevance to exports from Northern Ireland; indeed, when we look at the role that the Republic plays, we see that it remains the North's largest import partner, accounting for 27% of Northern Ireland's imports. There was a slight decrease of 1% from the previous year, but it is so important nevertheless. I welcome the Taoiseach's recent statement about setting up a forum on the issues associated with Brexit. Key stakeholders have contacted me about playing their role in that so that we can collaborate and work together positively in the interests of the entire island.

Mr Allister: I support the motion and oppose both amendments. The Alliance amendment, of course, wishes to take us back. It wishes to drag us against the democratic will of the people of this United Kingdom to effectively remain in the EU. Members will have heard me probe with Dr Farry whether it was about access to or belonging to the single market, and he made it plain that their amendment was geared to remaining in the single market. By the act of staying in the single market, we utterly disrespect the decision of this United Kingdom to leave the EU. It is all the baggage of the single market that caused people to want to leave the EU. The baggage of its relationship with the customs union, of not being able to make a single trade deal for yourself and of having to accept untrammelled free movement of labour are the very things that caused the wise people of the United Kingdom to vote to leave the EU. Saying that we must remain within the single market is to utterly disrespect that decision. I am disappointed to hear that the Ulster Unionist Party, having said that it accepts the outcome of the referendum, intends to vote for the Alliance Party amendment.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Dr Farry: Will the Member concede that it is perfectly possible for the UK to technically leave the European Union but remain part of the single market? That is, in essence, the so-called soft Brexit option advocated by the CBI. It may not be his preference, but it is entirely consistent for people to make that argument if they wish to do so.

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

Mr Allister: It is technically possible, but it totally negates the effect of leaving the EU. It leaves you in the worst possible position and leaves you shackled to all the restraints, the bureaucracy and everything else that comes with being in the single market.

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Quickly, yes.

Mr Aiken: Thank you very much indeed. I am sure the Member is probably aware that, if we were not part of the single European market, trying to deal with the World Trade Organization would probably be just as bureaucratic or even harder. Would the Member care to outline some alternatives, therefore, if we are not to deal with the bureaucracy of the World Trade Organization going forward in our trade discussions?

Mr Allister: We would be master of our own negotiations. We would not have to depend on Brussels, with all its attachment to endless hideous bureaucracy, to negotiate anything for us. We would, in fact, have a seat at the table, which we do not have in the WTO. We, the United Kingdom, would have a seat at the table and therefore could negotiate for ourselves. Outside the EU, we could also make the trade deals. The whole economic argument about leaving the EU is made on the simple premise that you want to follow the growth. The growth in the world is not in the moribund EU, where the economies are failing and falling; the growth in the world is elsewhere. Yet, there are those who want to tie us haplessly to the very place in the world that is failing economically instead of lifting their eyes to the vision of what lies out there in the world where the growth is. That is why we have to get mastery over our trade deals and our regulation.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: No, I have been very generous with my time.

I was disappointed to hear the proposer from the DUP say he is minded to accept the Sinn Féin amendment. It takes the one salient, useful thing out of the DUP motion, namely recognising the opportunities that leaving the EU presents to improve external sales. The DUP, having put that in the motion, is now prepared to see it written out of it in pursuit of a negative spin about recognising the effects of the result of the referendum and its significant implications for businesses. Worse than that, the last phrases of the Sinn Féin amendment are about setting the ground for opt-out. It says:

“recognising the unique circumstances on this island, to work with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure cross-border trade and freedom of movement continue uninhibited.”

That can happen only on an opt-out. Did we not hear the Prime Minister say there can and will be no opt-outs? We entered as one nation, we leave as one nation and the United Kingdom Government negotiate for us. I am disappointed at the tendency towards accepting that amendment. The DUP was absolutely right not to accept the Taoiseach's invitation to whatever forum he is setting up. It would be absolutely wrong to accept the amendment, which, in the same tenor and towards the same direction, takes out of its motion the very thing that is most important, namely —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: — grasping the opportunities to build our future where the growth is: outside the EU.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I very much welcome the debate and the opportunity to respond to the motion and the contributions made so far. At the outset, I thank the Members who tabled today's motion. It is right that we recognise the many successes and outstanding performances of Northern Ireland businesses. That is something we should do more of in the House. I am determined that during my time as Minister for the Economy we will seek to celebrate success in its many guises.

It is understandable that creating more and better jobs will get the bulk of our attention, but it is my intention to celebrate new contracts that see local companies exporting their goods, products and services.

Examples, such as the success of SDC Trailers from Toomebridge and its £480,000 contract with the Kanoo Group in Saudi Arabia and Ulster Carpets' contract to provide carpet to a new five-star resort in Dubai, were announced in the last week. Growing our exports and expanding trade opportunities is absolutely crucial for Northern Ireland and central to the Executive's economic strategy. In a small region like ours, we simply cannot rely on a home market of 1.8 million people to deliver economic growth. We have to look beyond these shores.

5.00 pm

I am absolutely delighted that the latest HMRC figures showed that Northern Ireland had an increase in value of 9.5% on exported goods. Significantly, we were the only part of the United Kingdom to record an increase in exports over the last year. That equates to £6.67 billion of sales in a 12-month rolling period. That is excellent news and a reflection of our increasingly global outlook when it comes to trade.

I want to pick out a few highlights from the HMRC figures. Exports to Japan were up 31% to £40 million, while sales to Australia were up by 11.1% to £80.3 million. The Americas continue to be a target market for companies from Northern Ireland, with exports recorded at £2 billion, up by 49.7%. Northern Ireland manufacturing exports to the USA have been impressive, increasing by almost three quarters to £1.46 billion. The most notable growth in the US market was that recorded in the medical and pharmaceutical sector, where product exports increased by £458 million, driven by the ongoing success of local firms like Almac and Randox. We also saw significant growth recorded in Canada, with exports reaching £372 million, an increase of £10 million or 2.8%, largely due to increased sales in the food, medicinal and pharma sectors.

Last week, I travelled to the Middle East to meet influential business leaders in the United Arab Emirates and see at first hand the success of local companies in securing business in that important market. I would like to pay tribute to the work of the excellent team of Invest NI officials who are based in Dubai and work closely in support of companies that are seeking to trade in the Middle East. I was hugely impressed by the team and the success of Northern Ireland companies who are proving that opportunities exist in the Middle East for those who want to make their mark on the global stage. Exports to the UAE alone stand at £60 million in 2015-16, which is up almost 15% on the previous year. Businesses like CDE Global, Wrightbus, Brett Martin and Kitchenmaster have set up offices in the UAE to act as Middle East bases to boost their trade opportunities in the wider region. Other companies, such as Ulster Carpets, AJ Power and Mallaghan Engineering, to mention but a few, have been successful in securing orders in the Middle East. From what I saw in the Middle East, Northern Ireland companies are more than capable of securing contracts and succeeding anywhere. The quality of products and services that are provided by Northern Ireland companies is second to none, and that is being increasingly recognised.

Of course, winning new orders and contracts internationally helps grow employment locally. Growing our exports is an absolutely critical element of creating the increasingly outward-looking, globally competitive economy that I want to see Northern Ireland become. That is why I recently launched the new trade accelerator plan, which offers a range of enhanced support for businesses to explore more trading opportunities outside Northern Ireland. Mr Aiken mentioned working with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We certainly use and will continue to use the chamber and, indeed, all chambers of commerce and business organisations, to deliver our message on exports. I will be engaged with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry at one of its Export First events in early November. Indeed, November is Exporting is GREAT month so there will be a renewed focus on exports in that month.

My role and that of my Department is to help open international doors for Northern Ireland companies, and, in the months ahead, I intend to work in close cooperation with our network of Invest NI teams around the globe and in concert with colleagues in the new Department for International Trade to expand our exports and build on the success that we have seen reflected in the latest figures. We are on the cusp of exciting times for the United Kingdom, and I am determined to ensure that Northern Ireland is perfectly placed to take advantage of the opportunities that the years ahead will present.

Aspects of the proposed amendments to the motion predictably, given their source, focus on the impact of the democratic decision of the people of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. It is hard to take seriously the predictions of doom and gloom for Northern Ireland exports that emanate from the same people who predicted immediate doom and gloom for the UK economy after June's referendum. We all know that there are challenges for the UK as a whole and Northern Ireland in particular as a consequence of Brexit. The Executive continue to work closely with local business to identify these challenges and with Her Majesty's Government to secure the best possible

deal for Northern Ireland, including securing the best possible deal on trade.

Trade is perhaps the area where the greatest number of opportunities arise from Brexit for the UK. I want us to continue to trade with the European Union post-Brexit. The nature of those trading arrangements will be determined by the upcoming negotiations, but we should use this once in a generation opportunity to be forward-thinking and outward-looking in our trade ambitions. If we look more closely at the aforementioned HMRC export statistics, we see that the greatest opportunities lie beyond the borders of the EU and that, while the EU accounts for a large chunk of Northern Ireland's exports, it is not perhaps as dominant as some would have us believe.

Mr Allister and Mr Lyons made the distinction between external sales and exports; that is an important distinction. Our largest market for external sales outside our region is, of course, Great Britain. If you take manufacturing alone — I am using not HMRC figures but the wider figures that NISRA correlates — GB manufacturing accounts for £10 billion worth of sales outside this region. The ROI, by comparison, is £2.1 billion. That is a factor of five to one of a difference, a point made by Mr Allister in his contribution.

Of Northern Ireland's top 10 trading destinations, using the HMRC data, five are inside and five outside the EU. The five outside the EU include the US, our second biggest export destination, Canada, our third, as well as South Korea, China and Thailand. These non-EU markets account for 48% of exports and have been rising in our top-10 destinations. It is the trend in the figures that is most interesting: EU markets, such as the Republic of Ireland and France, showed a 2.5% and 6.5% decrease respectively, while the US accounted for a staggering 74% increase over the last year.

Similarly, when we look at the trend in export figures by territory, Europe's trend is downward, while the Americas and Asia Pacific are upward. That reflects the fact that growth in the global economy is not being driven by Europe; it is being driven by the rest of the world, especially by the emerging markets. Between 1996 and 2016, average GDP growth in the European Union was a lowly 1.7%. In comparison, average GDP growth in the United Arab Emirates between 2000 and 2015 was 4.7%; in China, between 1989 and 2016, it was 9.82%; in Indonesia, between 2000 and 2016, it was 5.3%; and in Brazil, between 1991 and 2016, it was 2.72%.

We are all aware of the well-publicised and ongoing economic problems of the eurozone; we are probably less familiar with the diminishing competitiveness of the EU. The recently published World Economic Forum competitiveness index shows that 11 of the top 20 places are occupied by non-EU states, with non-EU states taking the top three positions. Securing trade deals with states and regions outside the EU should be our future focus, learning the lesson of, for example, the free trade agreement between Singapore and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which has seen an increase in trade of about 30% between the two since the commencement of the agreement just a few years ago. That is why our Invest NI developing markets and emerging/frontier markets are dominated by destinations outside the EU, such as Canada, the Middle East, Australia, India, south-east Asia, South Africa and Nigeria. To reflect that, our Invest NI trade mission calendar will focus heavily on markets such

as Canada, China, Peru, Columbia, Mexico, the Middle East, Malaysia and Singapore over the next year.

Clearly, as well as expanding our export opportunities with emerging markets, we will want to continue to trade with Europe. I was recently in Germany and found business there still to be very interested in investing in Northern Ireland. Germany is Northern Ireland's fourth biggest trading partner, as measured by exports and imports. We import around £100 million more in goods than we export to Germany. I am confident that, as a pragmatic nation, Germany, which dominates the EU, will want to ensure that future trading arrangements do not jeopardise its huge volume of exports to the United Kingdom.

I will continue to work closely with Dr Liam Fox, whom I have already engaged with, to ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from the new trading opportunities that Brexit will bring.

I believe that the latest export figures show that the Executive strategy of focusing strongly on exports and supporting businesses to expand into new markets is working. However, we cannot stand still, and I want us to build on the success of this latest rise in exports by helping Northern Ireland to become an increasingly outward-looking trading region. There are still far too few companies exporting from Northern Ireland, and I believe that we are capable of much more.

Growing our exports is a critical element of growing local business and transforming Northern Ireland into a globally competitive economy. It enables our economy to better withstand economic shocks and helps to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland can contribute to and reap the benefits of growth. To do that, we must strive to be more competitive in everything that we do. Enhancing our competitiveness is an important element in supporting long-term economic growth. Being better than before is obviously laudable, but I make no apologies for believing that we should strive to be the best exporter amongst comparator regions. We need to know that we are forging ahead of similar small advanced economies. That is the true measure of competitiveness.

The opportunity exists now to transform our economy. We have come through one of the worst recessions on record; we are forging ahead with plans for the introduction of reduced corporation tax; and we are on the cusp of an exciting new era for the United Kingdom. When and where doors are opened to new trading relationships and emerging markets, Northern Ireland must be ready to seize the opportunities. My Department's Export Matters action plan sets out our ambitions for growing exports with three main targets: to increase the volume of external sales by 80% by 2025; to increase the number of our companies engaged in external sales to 16,000 by 2025; and to increase the geographical diversity of our export markets. Key to achieving those targets is enabling the companies already active overseas to be more successful and supporting those not yet selling overseas to become export-active. Creating the economy that we aspire to requires partnership between the public and private sectors. Our role in central and local government is to provide the framework and conditions that enable our companies to flourish and grow. For those that already export, Invest NI is increasing its support for market visits to ensure that businesses are able to strengthen existing relationships through the trade accelerator plan. That support will include assistance for more country

visits and access to Invest NI's team of advisers based in countries around the world. For those that are yet to take the first step and begin exporting, Invest NI is enhancing its programme of support for first-time exporters, looking at our closest markets in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

I conclude by again recognising and celebrating the export success of local companies over the past year, as witnessed in the latest figures. Northern Ireland has fantastic companies across all sectors producing goods and services of the highest quality that can compete with businesses anywhere in the world. Globally, there are huge opportunities. We should have the ambition, confidence and self-belief to grasp them.

Dr Farry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I will not give way.

As we strive to become a globally competitive economy, I assure the supporters of the motion and the House as a whole that, in my role as Minister for the Economy, I will do all in my power to assist our exporting companies to succeed internationally and deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. I found the debate to be useful; I have no hesitation therefore in supporting the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr John O'Dowd to make the winding-up speech on amendment No 2. You have five minutes.

Mr O'Dowd: Five minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker? Thank you very much.

Who would argue against supporting a motion that congratulates our companies for raising their game in relation to exports? Of course, you would support it. Well done to everyone involved and to all those who have supported them. I wish them continued success in the future. However, wishing them success is not the same as enabling them to have success. We are actually restricting the potential of local companies to export. Several Members, particularly those who favour leaving the EU, were keen to talk about where local companies currently export to and how they have exported outside the European Union, which raises this question: we are still members of the European Union, so how do our companies export to countries beyond it? To listen to some of those who support Brexit, as it has become known — I am not necessarily saying that it is those in this Chamber — you would think that we were going to set sail to discover new lands. Here is a newsflash: the European Union has already discovered those lands, is already trading with them and already has trade agreements with them. I will go through several of the countries that were mentioned.

5.15 pm

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will not, no.

One Member mentioned Turkey. Our trade has increased with Turkey. He failed to mention that Turkey is a member of the EU customs union. He failed to mention that Turkey pays into the EU budget for the privilege of being a member of the EU customs union. Mr Allister described the EU customs union as something akin — he did not use these words — to the devil and as a barrier to trade. Guess what? We trade with Turkey. Why are we trading

with Turkey? Because it is a member of the EU customs union. Other Members went on to talk, rightly, about our increased trade with the United States of America. How are we trading with the United States of America? Through trade agreements negotiated with the European Union and others. I will quote —

Mr Allister: There is not one.

Mr O'Dowd: I quote —

Mr Allister: There is not one.

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently negotiations around a new trade agreement —

Mr Allister: There is not one.

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently negotiations around a new trade agreement, but we are trading with it on the basis of agreements. I will read —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I would like to continue without being constantly interrupted.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. It is clear that the Member has no wish to give way.

Mr O'Dowd: I quote the comment from the European Commission on the relationship with the United States of America:

"The European Union and the United States have the largest bilateral trade relationship and enjoy the most integrated economic relationship in the world."

What did President Obama say to people in Britain about new trade agreements when he visited? Get to the "back of the queue". That was his comment. How is that going to help our local exporters move forward?

Oliver Hart has just been awarded the Nobel Prize for economics. He is a Nobel Prize-winning economist. He has just been awarded it. Here are his comments on Brexit:

"The EU is Britain's most important trade partner. Trade barriers with the EU would rise and this will hurt Britain's investment and growth."

I move on to Saudi Arabia. How are companies exporting trailers to Saudi Arabia? How is the company in my constituency providing carpets to Saudi Arabia? Through the European Union's Gulf Cooperation Council, the EU's largest exporter to that region. How are those companies doing this? They are doing it through current EU arrangements with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. How are we — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mr O'Dowd: How are we trading, as the Minister mentioned, with Japan? Japan is the second-biggest trading partner in Asia, next to China. Who with? The EU. Trade is conducted with Australia through the EU-Australia partnership framework. The Minister mentioned South Korea. Again, I quote the European Commission:

"1916" —

no, 2016; I am thinking of another debate *[Laughter.]* —

"2016 marks the fifth anniversary of the EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement".

Lo and behold, the EU has discovered all these trading partners that those who support Brexit and those who believe they are going to support our exporters are going out to find.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for giving way. Surely it is a legitimate point of view for people in the Chamber to say, "I voted against leaving the European Union, but at the same time I can recognise that there are opportunities that can come from leaving the EU". That is the problem that we have seen in the Chamber today. People want to rerun the referendum rather than say, "This is where we are. Let us get on with it and exploit the opportunities".

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has the guts of an extra minute.

Mr O'Dowd: I believe that the "Remain" vote should be respected here and that we should remain members of the EU. I have read out to you today a list of trade agreements that already exist with countries that other Members in the Chamber have said we should trade with. We are trading with them; we trade with them through the EU. Once we leave the EU, we have to rewrite and renegotiate every trade deal that there is. Will that help our companies to export or hinder them? I believe that it will hinder our local companies in their export progress.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Stewart Dickson to wind on amendment No 1. Again, you have up to five minutes.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. First, I thank my colleague Stephen Farry for moving the amendment today and for the reference that he made to the importance of the single market in that. Indeed, I thank colleagues in the Chamber from Sinn Féin, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP who have indicated their support for the amendment as well.

This is about sending out a clear signal that unites pro- and anti-Brexiters in this debate: the single market is vital to the future success not only of Northern Ireland but of the United Kingdom.

This is not about the specifics — the nuts and bolts — of how all of that is to be achieved. The Prime Minister and, hopefully, the Executive and the Executive Office will be involved in those matters as they evolve.

It is clear that the referendum result has to be accepted. We cannot have a rerun of the question that was put to the country earlier this year, but there has to be a democratic grip on the process. It is quite clear that the Prime Minister is very unkeen to let go of the undemocratic grip that she has on the process by so far refusing to allow her MPs even to debate the matter. However, that debate will have to take place not only in Westminster but in this place, Scotland and Wales.

Today is about sending out a strong signal that the European single market is important to the future of the United Kingdom, and it is important to the future of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Much has been said about improved exports. While all of that is true, a stable pound is the most important thing for our economy. A volatile pound is not what is needed for this economy; it is what will, ultimately, lead to a very volatile

market situation. While we can all laud the improvements in exports, the widening deficit between imports and exports in the United Kingdom is the figure that we should be keeping an eye on, and it has reached an eye-watering £4.7 billion.

Forty years of trading relationships — building trust, building exports, building stability and, as other Members said, building beyond is the legacy of the EU and what it has done in trade negotiations. Export figures are to be welcomed — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mr Dickson: — but, as I have said, the trading deficit is what we need to keep our eye on.

Today is about the economics of remaining in the single market. The politics, and the future of the UK and the EU, are a debate for another day. Sadly, for every positive export story, there are negative stories. Recently, lorry drivers in my constituency of East Antrim have been telling me of their fears and concerns as owner-drivers and small companies. They have to drive across Europe, and they fear the red tape and additional problems that they will face — if, indeed, they have any business to do on behalf of their clients in a single market in the future. Access to the single market is what the debate is about; it is what it should always have been about. It is somewhat disappointing that the DUP failed to include that in its motion.

Mr Allister referred to the benefits of deals with the World Trade Organization. That may very well be true, but the reality is that the word is "negotiation". It is a two-way street, and those negotiations are currently undertaken on our behalf by key and skilled negotiators. The Government have admitted that they do not have such negotiators in the United Kingdom, and those skills will have to be built up over time.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Yes.

Dr Farry: Does the Member recognise — this is probably the key difference to arise in the debate — that, given the current WTO rules, we are more likely to see the opening up of different markets around the world, in the United States, Canada and China, if we are part of the single market. They are much more likely to do a deal with the European Union than with the UK in isolation.

Mr Dickson: I entirely agree with the Member.

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

Mr Dickson: Thank you.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: No, I have to finish. I entirely agree with the Member. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, none of those nations or states that he referred to has indicated at any time that it would be better for the United Kingdom to be out of the EU and out of the single market. In fact, it is my understanding that every single one of them wants us to remain in the single market and would have preferred that we remained in the EU.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: No.

A Member: Are you scared of him?

Mr Dickson: Certainly not.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mr Dickson: It is important for us to continue to negotiate with states within the European Union and maintain our links with the single market.

Finally, I say to the Minister directly that, while he has clearly set out a cogent argument of where we need to go now and in the future with our trade and exports for Northern Ireland — I do not necessarily disagree with what he says —

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

Mr Dickson: — given the situation that we find ourselves in, can he point to any trade or employers' organisation in Northern Ireland that agrees with his analysis?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member's time is up. It occurs to me that very few of us mind Germany doing well as long as it is not in Hanover tomorrow night.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Before I put the Question on amendment No 1 — oh sorry, we have not yet heard from the Member who is to make the winding-up speech on the main motion. *[Laughter.]* We must have a story from Mr Storey.

Mr Storey: I have never had an introduction like that before in the House.

I will start by saying a word of congratulations to all who took part in the debate this afternoon. It is about the tone and tenor of what we said, because let us remember that, while we clearly have our differences, the business community out there wants us, as its public representatives, to do the very best for it. It gets frustrated with cheap political point scoring and jibes. Sometimes, that masks for us all because we all have organisations, companies and families who are involved in these businesses, and they want us to do the very best.

Here is the starting point: the referendum clearly indicated the will of the British people. I am disappointed in a party that was once shackled to the Conservative Party and was quite happy to bring David Cameron here, and now, all of a sudden, it wants to distance itself from the current Conservative Government. However, whatever the politics of that may be, we must respect it. Other parties in the Chamber lectured us for many years about recognising the democratic process, then, all of a sudden, they lose the vote and say, "Oh no, but it was only Northern Ireland. We were talking only about Northern Ireland". When I went to vote, it was very clear that I was voting as a citizen of the United Kingdom. Let us ensure that that is said.

With regard to the competitive nature of Northern Ireland, let us be very clear that we saw that at the weekend. Northern Ireland can clearly win on the pitch, and, as the Deputy Speaker said, we wish them well in their endeavours tomorrow night in Germany and trust that they have a good result. Saturday evening proved to us again that there is that competitive edge, drive and fervour in Northern Ireland companies. In the debate today, we heard

a range of comments and views on where we are with our economy.

I commend my colleague Mr Gordon Lyons for opening the debate. He emphasised the commitment to growing the economy. That is what we all, collectively, want to see. If we are worth the salt of our occupations in the House, we all want to ensure that companies in our constituencies do well. The products mentioned ranged from hairbrushes — my colleague Mr Dunne extolled the merits of the company in his constituency, and you can see by the look of him that he uses one pretty regularly — *[Laughter.]* — to a variety of other businesses. Members referred to Wrightbus in North Antrim, of which we are rightly proud across the world because of what it does for Northern Ireland's manufacturing and the reputation of manufacturing in the United Kingdom. Last week, I had a great opportunity to accompany the First Minister in visiting Christies Direct in Ballymoney. The company, based in Northern Ireland, is going beyond the bounds of its ability to sell its products and has become the second-most-visited website in the world after Walmart.

It is based in Ballymoney. That is a great credit to a local business that is taking on, on the world stage through the Internet, a very challenging set of circumstances.

5.30 pm

Let me turn to some of the comments. Mr Farry referred to a number of comments, and he said that the referendum was frustrating. It may be frustrating, but that is what it is. He then went on to talk about us "dragging ourselves down". Who is it that is dragging us down? It is the constant, relentless naysayers and doom-and-gloom merchants who on the one hand say, "We have these wonderful companies. Look at what they do and how well they perform, and look at the great products they have", but it is all doom. They say, "We are all going to head into the abyss because of this awful decision". We have —

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr Lyons: Would the Member agree with me that the reason we hear some of those comments from other parties is that they do not want Brexit to succeed? They want to be proved right, and they do not want to see the success that we are having in our economy.

Mr Storey: There may be an element of that, but it is also a case of wanting to have the best of both worlds. The reality for us is that we will leave the European Union. That is the reality for us as a result of the decision. If you listen to the comments by Liam Fox, you will find that he is intimating that, while the negotiations have not yet started, there will be countries that want to come and do business with the United Kingdom. There are companies that want to ensure that the opportunity to do business with the United Kingdom is still in place and enhanced and can be benefited from. That is where we need to focus our attention.

Going back to what Dr Farry said about "dragging ourselves down", we have now unshackled ourselves. Not many Members have reminded the House of the imposition of rules and regulations and red tape that have been a hindrance to business and that have, in fact, been an impediment to making progress.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for giving way. Could he tell me under what trading scenario he envisages that there will be no rules and regulations? Does he recognise that, if he follows through on some of his party's policies on, say, immigration, he will be asking businesses to take on more regulations, such as checking people's right to work in the country?

Mr Storey: We have never said that all regulation is bad, but we have talked about imposition by unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels telling businesses in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom how they should best operate when they are the worst. Let us remember that this is an organisation that cannot even balance its budget. This is an organisation that has the most bloated bureaucracy of any democratic — I would not even call it "democratic" —

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: I will give way to my colleague from North Antrim. No, not the one from South Antrim.

Mr Allister: Would the Member agree that one of the greatest punitive impositions of the single market is that its hideous regulations apply to every company whether it exports or not and, therefore, every company in the United Kingdom is pulled down by regulations that have no relevance to it, in the sense that it is not even going to export? By escaping from the single market, we escape that hideous burden.

Mr Storey: The Member makes the point, and he makes it well. Five per cent of companies export, but they have to be subject to 100% of the rules and regulations, therefore —

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Aiken: The key here is the World Trade Organization. If anybody here thinks for one moment that the World Trade Organization will be easier to deal with than the EU, they are very sadly deluded. We need to get the best trade deal we can, and we must be able to do so by getting the most sensible deal we can, whether that is with the EU or going forward.

Mr Storey: The Member misses the point that we limit our own ability in terms of bilateral trade agreements. It seems that you must always accept the lowest common denominator in planning for the future. There is no ambition or certainly very little ambition; I did not see much ambition in the 10-point plan that was produced by the Ulster Unionist Party. My other North Antrim colleague has left the Chamber: maybe he has left because he knows what his stance was in regard to the referendum and what he was telling the voters — *[Interruption.]* — and the farmers in North Antrim. At least, we have now raised the temperature of the debate in the House. Let us — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. The Member has about 10 seconds.

Mr Storey: It was all going well until I stood up. *[Laughter.]* Let us make Northern Ireland work. I believe that, unshackled from the European Union and given the negotiation of Her Majesty's Government, we have a bright future, a future that is to the benefit of all our citizens.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member's time is up. I am rather glad I let him in. The House is in good tune.

Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 30.

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mrs Dobson, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Kearney, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McKee, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Sheehan, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Armstrong and Mr Dickson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lyons and Mr Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): As I indicated, amendment No 2 will now not be voted on. I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), that there is agreement that we can dispense with the three-minute rule and move straight to the Division.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 30.

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mrs Dobson, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Kearney, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McKee, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Sheehan, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Armstrong and Mr Dickson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lyons and Mr Robinson.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the recent Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs export data for Northern Ireland, which record a growth rate of 9.5%; notes the Executive's commitment to increase the competitiveness of the economy; recognises the importance of Northern Ireland continuing to participate within the European single market to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland economic strategy.

Adjourned at 6.02 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer you to the debate last week on openness and transparency. You will recall an exchange on the Floor in respect of the rights of smaller parties and their participation in debates. Will you review the Hansard report of that debate in relation to three matters? First, given that exchange, will you, as Chair of the Business Committee, consider circulating the minutes of a Business Committee meeting in late May of this year, when the rights of smaller parties with regard to their speaking in the Chamber were decided? Secondly, subject to the content of that minute being circulated, should Mr McCartney be invited to correct the Hansard report? Thirdly, will you review Mr McCartney's comment during that debate, when he referred to a Member being economical with the truth? That could be unparliamentary, depending on context and circumstances. I ask you to consider those three matters and make a ruling on whether Mr McCartney's comment was unparliamentary.

Mr Speaker: I will review the Hansard report.

Private Members' Business

Racial Equality Strategy

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

Mr Lynch: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the positive contribution that ethnic minorities make to our society; notes with concern an increase of 87% in hate-related crime in the last four years; and calls on all Ministers to continue to give priority to implementing the racial equality strategy and the Together: Building a United Community strategy, and to providing the financial support to ensure that both of these strategies are supported and implemented.

I do not support the amendment. Sinn Féin is fully committed to implementing the two strategies referred to in the motion, the racial equality strategy and T:BUC.

First, it is important to outline the positive contribution that ethnic minorities make to our society. They provide substantial economic and social benefits to the North of Ireland. A recent report written by two academics from Queen's University said that about 4% of the workforce is made up of migrant workers. It is reported that they contribute more in tax than they use in services. The report highlights contributions in taxes, labour and cultural diversity and how they are enriching our society rather than threatening it. We frequently hear claims that migrants take our jobs and use up our limited services. The truth is that they are vital to this economy. We, as political leaders and elected representatives, need to stand up for a vision of an open, tolerant and outward-looking society. Mind you, the tone of the rhetoric and comments on immigration and foreign workers emerging from last week's Conservative conference could be described as toxic, sending out the wrong message and making people feel fearful and vulnerable. As a society, we need to challenge prejudice and prejudicial attitudes at every level.

Figures quoted in the recent Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report state that 14% of nine- to 10-year-olds and 8% of 12- to 13-year-olds were bullied because of their colour. Those are the ones who

came forward. Those are the ones who we know about. There are silent voices out there of those who keep quiet until it is too late. Minority ethnic students experience lower levels of belonging and higher levels of exclusion. Schools tend to lack the knowledge and awareness needed to deal with issues of ethnic minorities and how they find themselves in certain situations. We had the incident of a woman who was at the airport to pick up her mother and, while waiting in the cafe, was asked to produce her identity. When she showed her passport, her son asked, "Mummy, do we have to carry our passports at all times?". It is wrong that, simply because of her colour, this woman had to show her passport to prove that she belonged here.

In recent weeks, we have had a number of calls about more needing to be done to tackle racial discrimination. A recent report from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance:

"calls upon all political parties to take a firm stand against intolerant discourse and instruct their representatives to refrain from making derogatory comments targeting a group of persons on grounds of their 'race', religion, citizenship, language, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender identity."

The report makes a total of 23 different recommendations to the UK Government. One of those recommendations includes the implementation of an equality strategy. In the UN report, concluding observations on the elimination of discrimination set out a plan to achieve a vision of where we live in a society free from fear and intimidation. While the report welcomes the positive action taken by the Assembly in the publication of the racial equality strategy 2015-2025, it expresses concerns that the North of Ireland does not have an equality Act. The UN Committee calls for the adoption of a bill of rights for the North of Ireland. The UN Committee report also notes with concern the reduction in resources for the Human Rights Commission and that measures that are adopted must be meaningful and relevant and aid an increase in the reporting of racist hate crime.

The Human Rights Commission, in its submission to the UN Committee, raised concerns about the fact that there is no single equality Act here in the North. It is also important to note that the Equality Commission has called for an equality Act and that the commission has a paper on its website listing the disparities.

The Equality Commission has also highlighted the point that black and minority ethnic individuals in the North of Ireland have less protection against racial discrimination, harassment and victimisation than people in other parts of the UK. It has produced a paper called 'Race Equality Law Reform: Strengthening legal protection'.

The rise in hate crime here is disturbing, and I appeal for political leaders to highlight the positive impact of inward migration. It is sad that people living in the North of Ireland today, particularly the foreign national population, have never felt more insecure about their vulnerability to crime. Sinn Féin believes that everyone has the right to freedom from fear, and that is a challenge for the policing and judicial system to meet. It is a challenge that must be met without prejudice and with respect for human rights. Racism is prevalent, and we need political leadership.

Sinn Féin welcomes the announcement by the Human Rights Commission that it is investigating the issue of Travellers' accommodation. The chief commissioner commented that the commission completed a scoping exercise in June 2016 that identified significant human rights concerns on a potentially systemic level. Its findings concluded that a human rights examination of the issue is necessary. The commission will publish its findings in autumn 2017. One has to ask this: in the 21st century, where is the equality of justice, opportunity and dignity without discrimination for every man, woman and child from the Travelling community?

Eleanor Roosevelt said:

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home — so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he"

— or she —

"lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works."

Everyone living in the North of Ireland has the right to equality before the law and the right to the equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, social or economic status, marital or family status, residence, language, religion or belief, or politics or other opinions. That is the goal that we should all work towards.

Mr Beattie: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "four years;" and insert

"further notes the concerns of bodies representing ethnic minorities that gaps exist in our racial discrimination laws; and calls on the Executive to fulfil their responsibility to implement the racial equality strategy effectively by putting in place an action plan, timetable and key priorities, and to ensure that the Programme for Government reflects this obligation."

We all look to our experiences while dealing with black and ethnic minority communities, be that when they come to a constituency office and you talk about issues that they have, when we see it on the streets or on the news or when you notice on holiday how things are slightly different in a cultural sense. I spent seven months living with Hazara people in a village, and, as the guy who was the ethnic minority living there, I saw what it must be like for them living here. I spoke to the wakils, the imams and the village elder and tried to understand the culture. I went out of my way to try to eat their food continuously, to wake when they woke, to go to bed when they went to bed and to understand them culturally. I tried to learn about their religion and tried to offer them my religion and my culture, but I found it extremely difficult. I felt like an outsider. I felt alienated. I felt isolated. That must be what it is like for those from minority communities who come here to live and who try to integrate but find it incredibly difficult, no matter what they do. That difference is the real problem.

I welcome the motion from Mr Lynch and welcome the fact that he brings it to the House for debate, but his words do not match the motion. The motion is weak. It is a soft ball being bounced around the Executive. It is not pushing the

issue forward. It is the same argument that we had two and a half years ago.

The Ulster Unionist Party amendment —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that our BME communities could be forgiven for thinking that they are not a priority? They had to wait for five years in the absence of a strategy; every year, groups do not get a decision on their funding in time; and there has been no review of the Race Relations Order, despite that being agreed by the Assembly close to 10 years ago.

10.45 am

Mr Beattie: I absolutely agree; we need to drive this issue forward. We had the debate two and half years ago, so we need to take it and move things forward. That is what our amendment is all about: setting an action plan; setting a timetable, which is important; and setting key priorities. It is absolutely no good sitting in the corner doe-eyed like a puppy, looking up and saying that we have an issue without driving that issue forward.

Our amendment gives BME communities strength, and it gives an intent to the motion. I ask people to think before they decide to vote against it.

Of course, we have laws here that deal with our two-tier equality strategy: the Race Relations Order 1997 and the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998. The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance believes that Northern Ireland should consolidate its equality legislation:

“taking inspiration from the Equality Act 2010”.

We do not have that, and we all know why. That is an argument for a different day, but it is something that we really need to drive towards.

When we think about the BME community, I guess that we all think about the Romanian migrant workers who come here, set up home, put down roots and live amongst us. I guess that we think about the Portuguese, Polish and Lithuanian communities who now live among us. I think that that is what we all think about. If you go out into the community, you will have people complaining that these communities are filling our NHS and our A&Es. Yes, they are filling our NHS and our A&Es. They are filling them with doctors, nurses, skilled labour and non-skilled labour. They are absolutely a part of the community — a valued part of the community. On that, I absolutely agree with Mr Lynch.

There are other groups that we have to look at as well, such as the Roma gypsies or the Irish Travellers. They are no different and are all in need of help as well. With all those groups, we really have to look at how we can address measures to support them, including education, employment, healthcare and accommodation. In the case of Irish Travellers, we have to make sure that we have caravan sites for them.

Yesterday, we had a very heartfelt debate on Syria. We know that refugees are coming out of Syria, but we need an integration programme for those who come to live here. We cannot have the same debate in two and half years' time and say that we will have such a programme. We need to do it now, and that is what is what our amendment is all about.

The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance calls on:

“all political parties to take a firm stand against intolerant discourse and instruct their representatives to refrain from making derogatory comments targeting a group of persons on grounds of their ‘race’ [or ethnic origins]”

It goes on to talk about sexuality, but I will not get into that.

We have something that we really need to do as political representatives. We need to watch our words and give a firm commitment to people in the BME community that we will support them. If you remember, a while back, Peter Robinson said that he would be happy to send members of the Muslim community to the shop. Fair enough, he apologised, and I absolutely believe that it was a slip of the tongue —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beattie: Yes; absolutely.

Mr Stalford: Does the Member accept that using language that at least implies that refugees are similar to dogs is perhaps not appropriate either?

Mr Beattie: I stand and I answer. You have asked me something that is absolutely obvious. Of course, I accept that. If you had allowed me, I would have gone on to say that Peter Robinson apologised for what he said — absolutely. I was going to say that there was no inference that he meant what he said. It was a slip of the tongue, but we all need to be concerned by that slip.

Look at the Sinn Féin motion in Derry City and Strabane District Council calling for a ban on Israeli goods. I understand what Sinn Féin is trying to do, although I do not agree; but that raises the stakes for the Jewish community here. We have to be careful of our words. There is no point in saying, “We need to support our BME communities”, when you allow your councillors to table a motion that alienates some of the very people we are here to protect.

I thank Mr Lynch again for tabling the motion. I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate it on the Floor. I hope that people listen to the debate and then make up their minds, rather than walk through a Lobby because it is the easy thing to do. I hope that they think about it. What we are proposing, as well as an action plan, timetable, and key priorities, is that all our Departments and Ministers be held to account. This does not sit just with the First and deputy First Ministers: it sits with the Ministers of Finance, of Education and of Health. They need to come together to come up with a strategy and set the targets.

I acknowledge the motion, but I move the Ulster Unionist Party amendment.

Mr Irwin: I believe that in Northern Ireland we pride ourselves on being friendly and welcoming; indeed, that has been acknowledged in survey after survey and review after review by those in the travel industry and many media outlets across the world. However, we are also well aware that, on occasion, unsavoury elements in society raise their head. That can be in the most sickening of ways. Attacks on any individual or, indeed, race are absolutely wrong and can never be reasoned away as anything other than a criminal act deserving of the most stringent punishment.

In Tandragee, in my constituency, only a few days ago, a young eastern European family was targeted in an attack that left them terrified and feeling that they could no longer

stay in the area. Indeed, they have since moved away. The gang targeted the house, breaking the glass in the rear door of the property. That is a concerning incident, but, thankfully, the family, including their baby, were unharmed in the attack. However, such attacks leave a very real feeling of vulnerability amongst the victims, and that is the unseen impact of many of these attacks.

Sinister footage also surfaced last week of schoolboys abusing a Romanian woman in a shocking incident. Indeed, it was all the more worrying given that young schoolchildren were the ones hurling the abuse and using very distasteful terminology. It is clear from the type of hurtful and racist comments used that there is work to be done to change attitudes and perceptions across all age groups, including amongst schoolchildren.

The view of the majority in Northern Ireland is, of course, one of tolerance and respect. In my constituency, a number of large businesses heavily rely on staff from ethnic minority backgrounds. In many cases, workers from ethnic minority backgrounds make up the bulk of the workforce and make a very valuable and vital contribution to those companies. Indeed, that is repeated in companies and organisations across Northern Ireland. However, there are, of course, very worrying incidents of people being trafficked to Northern Ireland by criminal elements and made to work in unacceptable conditions. This again came to light in recent days, when a Romanian gangmaster appeared in court for keeping 15 people in a three-bedroom house against their will, taking their wages and telling them, when they rightly complained about the conditions and of hunger, that they could eat stones. That was a shocking state of affairs, and it is all the more shocking given that the gangmaster had a string of convictions in other countries.

In my constituency, operating a full-time constituency —

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member's giving way. At the end of the last mandate, this House, I think by 90 votes to 9, passed the human trafficking legislation.

The instruments now exist in statute for judges to issue severe penalties to those who traffic and exploit people in the way that the Member describes in his constituency. Does he agree with me that that is what needs to happen in cases like that?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. I believe that the full rigours of the law should be brought to bear on those responsible.

In my constituency, operating a full-time constituency advice service, I assist many people, including those from ethnic-minority backgrounds. Many within that category who contact me are in full-time work, with very good employment conditions, and are keen to remain in employment in Northern Ireland. I know that the Executive have a responsibility with regard to the matters that are outlined in the motion. They are matters that Ministers in my party take very seriously and will continue to tackle head-on to help to change attitudes and confront racism in any form.

Mr McPhillips: As the SDLP spokesperson on the Executive Office, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on an issue that, considering the increase in race-related crimes, has, at least prima facie, got much

worse in recent years. Issues of race and immigration have raised their ugly head across the UK and Northern Ireland in recent months, and it is concerning that the North of Ireland is often labelled as a racist state. It must be said that, especially in Great Britain, racist attacks have been exacerbated by the decision of England and Wales to leave the European Union, which has brought with it a sad state of affairs.

*(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)*

Racism and xenophobia take many forms in society and actively disadvantage people based on their race, ethnic background or religion. The debate is timely, as there is a lack of clarity on future British Government policy regarding immigration and there is yet to be a very clear reassurance to the immigrants and migrants who have chosen to make their home here in the North.

As we discuss the motion, it is of utmost importance that the Assembly acknowledges that migrants make a huge contribution to society, from local economies to providing key roles in the health service and tourism sector. Without this contribution and the cultural variation that exists, the North would be a much more depressing place to live, and our public services would most likely collapse. Despite this, and perhaps most worryingly, the most recent PSNI figures from June 2016 show that racist attacks continue to be a scourge on society. In the 12 months to June, 1,113 incidents were recorded where there was racist motivation, of which 700 contained one or more crimes. This means that, each day in Northern Ireland, there are a worrying three hate crimes reported to the PSNI. Only yesterday, the 'Irish News' reported that, during the period from 1 April to 1 October 2016, there were 600 hate crimes. That underscores the big issue that it is across the North, and immediate action must be taken.

Such crimes are intolerable. It is my opinion that the vast majority of people in the North of this island are repulsed and disgusted by racist attacks, but we must acknowledge that certain sections of society have certain prejudices, and the Executive have failed to address them due to inaction. They have failed to permeate the deeply held views in some of the most deprived communities. Tackling this must be a main priority during this mandate as we move closer to a Programme for Government.

Since the last racial equality strategy expired, it has taken almost 10 years to produce another. This is mostly due to mounting pressures from the Equality Commission and other organisations, which have clearly identified gaps in provision here and have called on the Executive to drive forward and implement a racial equality strategy. Despite the publication of the new strategy and all its commitments — for example, in attempting to tackle bullying in schools, calling for a review of fair employment legislation and a promise to tackle racial crime — the only progress that has been made to date has been the appointment of a subgroup and racial equality champions.

11.00 am

These are welcome developments and have an important role, but there has been a fundamental failure to include an action plan, there are no specific time frames, nor has there been the correct level of resources

for implementation. We have no responsibility or accountability.

If this Chamber and the Executive want to take racism seriously, they must properly develop and invest in a coherent action plan. Otherwise, any advancements will be only tokenistic and will not end the plight of racism that many suffer on a daily basis. It is for this reason that I, and my party, will support the Ulster Unionist amendment. We need to get serious on racism, and we hope that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister fully acknowledge the concerns raised today and take meaningful action to rectify them.

We need the strategy to do what it says on the tin: provide ultimate protection for ethnic minorities —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr McPhillips: — and educate and raise awareness to tackle racial inequalities and hate crimes in the North of Ireland once and for all.

Mr Dickson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue. As others Members have already noted and highlighted, racism is a profound problem in this community and society. Indeed, we are often dubbed in the regional and national media as a race hate capital in Europe.

There have recently been some decreases in reported racism, and that is to be welcomed. However, emphasis has to be placed on the word “reported”; sadly, and all too often, it is the unreported crimes that should give us the greatest concern.

I will begin by thanking our colleague Mr Lynch for bringing a motion on such an important issue, and we will support it. However, the Government are not really doing their job. Racism in Northern Ireland has, perhaps, become more disturbing over the last number of years, and we have already heard of the types of incidents and issues that arise in our constituencies when it comes to race hate and crimes. I had expected to spend most of my time discussing the complexities of dealing with racism in Northern Ireland, and, indeed, the racial equality strategy. Unfortunately, and rather ridiculously, my argument will have to focus on another issue: the failure of the Executive and Executive delay.

I am standing with my party and Opposition colleagues somewhat bemused as Sinn Féin brings forward a motion calling on their own deputy First Minister and his Executive colleague Arlene Foster to implement the strategy. One wonders why Sinn Féin and the DUP criticise opposition when they seem themselves, as the Opposition, to criticise their own Ministers. It is not even the first time this week that the inability of the Executive to function has resulted in their own parties having to come to the Chamber with motions to try to motivate them to do their jobs.

And here we see the consequences of the lack of action — a barely implemented strategy for dealing with a problem that, if not dealt with, will have a continuing and ongoing damaging impact on the whole of Northern Ireland and our communities for decades to come. Racism in Northern Ireland — the strategy addresses this — impacts housing, schools, jobs and healthcare, yet somehow there has been failure to implement the strategy. My colleague Chris Lyttle recently received a response to a question on the racial equality strategy, with an update on how it was progressing.

The answer outlined three points proposed in the strategy that had been acted upon. That is three out of 11. I do not think in anybody's book that can be seen as a success.

Where is the Minister of Education today to update us on how he has identified ways to tackle racist bullying in schools? Where is the Minister of Justice to tell us about her plans to develop an approach to tackling race hate crime — indeed, if any of that is happening at all?

Mr Carroll: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: I will.

Mr Carroll: Does the Member agree that one of the deficiencies in the racial equality strategy was the absence of any indicators or ways of assessing how Ministers were increasing or decreasing racism through their actions and words?

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

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I totally agree with the Member. Has the fair employment legislation been reviewed? Has the delivery model for the minority ethnic development fund been reviewed? On paper, dealing with racism is considered an important issue by the Executive.

It is intrinsically linked to dealing with sectarianism. Yet, in practice, public policy is shaped more in dealing with the things that divide unionists and nationalists, nationalists and unionists. The isolation that the ethnic minority groups feel in Northern Ireland is a result of being considered last. Is it that we are working so hard to heal our sectarian divisions that we ignore the divisions and problems of minority and ethnic communities in Northern Ireland?

We need to embrace the proposals of the strategy, and we need to implement it in full — not small steps. We need to develop it in full. We need to introduce a single equality Bill, harmonise and update existing equality and anti-discrimination measures and strengthen equality provisions. We need a Bill that revises fair employment monitoring to ensure that monitoring better reflects the diversity of mixed and multiple identities in Northern Ireland.

I extend my support to the amendment because the issue of racism in Northern Ireland needs to be dealt with at every level of government. As Mr Carroll said, without an action plan, a timetable and key priorities, the task is just the greater. A Programme for Government reflecting this obligation is required. Today, my plea on behalf of the Alliance Party is to implore the First Minister and deputy First Minister to prioritise the strategy. We, in the Chamber, know what happens when irrational prejudices are allowed to fester in this society and community. It is important that we strive to overcome those prejudices and redirect our resources towards the most vulnerable and isolated groups in Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party will support the motion and the amendment.

Mrs Cameron: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion today. From the 1600s, Northern Ireland has had a long history of immigration. From the influx of Scots during the plantation of Ulster to the 19th-century arrival of a large number of Italians. The past influences of immigrants can be seen everywhere in Northern Ireland from the growth of the linen industry, which led to vast prosperity across the Province, to the beautiful marble and terrazzo

in the Great Hall of this Building, and who has not been to the north coast for an ice cream?

Between 2000 and 2014, we in Northern Ireland moved from a position of net migration loss to one of an annual population gain. During that period, it is estimated, around 175,000 people settled here, which is a completely unprecedented position for us to be in. Immigrants are an intrinsic part of our culture, probably on a greater level than we even appreciate daily. Yet, it seems that, in recent times, we have developed an attitude that immigration is something to be feared rather than celebrated. Whilst racially driven hate crimes have decreased in the last year, they are still at an unacceptable level. There are incidents such as the recent attack on Jewish graves in the Belfast City Cemetery, and, only last week in my constituency, three young men filmed and posted to social media footage of themselves racially abusing and throwing stones at a Romanian woman. That highlights that there is still a massive amount of work to be done on how we view people of differing races and ethnic origins. It is, however, comforting for me to see the outrage that was demonstrated on social media by the people of my home town, Antrim, to that revolting incident.

I realise that much of the anxiety around immigration is caused by the misconception that people coming to live here are a drain on our public services. Of course, the increase in our population means that we must look at the number of available school places, the way in which we manage our healthcare system and accessibility to social housing, all in the context of financial constraints. The economic and social contribution that immigration provides cannot be ignored. For example, due to nursing shortages, our Department of Health has recently undertaken a programme of recruitment for nurses from the Philippines, Italy and Romania. Those nurses will deliver much-needed assistance in our health trusts. Frankly, we would be at an absolute loss without the care that they provide in our hospitals. It is estimated that around 30% of doctors and 40% of nurses working in the NHS in the UK were born abroad. I cannot stress enough how much that assistance is to be applauded and welcomed. We are all aware of the pressures on our health service, and I, for one, am grateful that we have such skilled individuals willing to take up the mantle, come to our country and work in our hospitals, surgeries and clinics, and look after us all as patients.

The racial equality strategy seeks to tackle racial disparities and eliminate racism and aims to encourage good race relations. It is only the start, but I hope that it is given the recognition that it requires across all Departments. It is vital that we recognise the contribution that immigration can bring to our society culturally, socially and economically. I am pleased that each Department has appointed a racial equality champion and hope that they will work proactively to implement, monitor and review how the strategy works in practice. The workings of the subgroup, alongside the Executive Office and other Departments, will give a clear picture of areas that could be improved and of areas that are working well, and that will consequently bring a positive change in the delivery of the strategy.

While we currently have the lowest rate of immigration in the UK, I hope that, in moving forward, we continue to educate and inform people that immigration is not something to be afraid of and we should embrace the

cultural diversity that it affords. Attacking people simply because they are of a different skin colour or speak another native language cannot be tolerated in our society, and I trust that all Departments will bring forward the racial equality strategy, bringing about the societal change that will inevitably follow. I support the motion.

Mr McGuigan: Like everybody else, I welcome the opportunity to speak to today's motion. Muhammad Ali once said,

"Hating people because of their color is wrong. And it doesn't matter which color does the hating. It's just plain wrong."

Muhammad Ali was correct, of course, but it is an unfortunate reality that racism exists in our society today. Whether it takes the form of physical attack, attacks on property, graffiti, verbal abuse, bullying on social media or the not-so-visible unequal access to jobs and services that others take for granted, racism is destructive to individuals and communities and needs to be tackled. Just yesterday, as Mr McPhillips said, it was reported that, in the past six months, over 500 race hate incidents took place in the North. That is between two and three race hate incidents a day. One race hate attack in any time period is one too many.

When I think of the millions of Irish citizens who left this island out of necessity at the time of the famine or in the early and late 20th century and the various forms of treatment that they received, both good and bad, when landing in America, Australia, England or elsewhere around the world, I believe that we have an extra special duty to welcome, embrace and support all those who come to these shores. Whilst the "No blacks. No dogs. No Irish" signs may be an iconic snapshot of a previous time, let us just hope that those sentiments remain where they belong: in history. They should, however, serve as a reminder for us to remain vigilant to hatred.

The 2011 census figures demonstrate the diverse nature of the minority ethnic community here. Over 32,000 people gave their ethnicity as something other than white. That figure will continue to grow, and I welcome that. It has already been said by my colleagues Seán Lynch and Doug Beattie that people who come to Ireland add to our society. They add to it economically through their work and spend, but they also add to it culturally. The world is now a smaller place. It is a much smaller place than it used to be, and our neighbours may not have an "O" or a "Mc" in their surname any longer. While society is changing, it is important that our policies and practices change and adapt to the new situation.

We must ensure that equality means equality for all. The racial equality strategy is a vital cog in that wheel, and the motion calls for the strategy to be given the priority and financial support to see that it is implemented. The strategy demonstrates a commitment to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and develop good relations. It is key to identifying the real and varied needs of our ethnic minority population. It identifies barriers and how to overcome them, and it raises awareness and helps focus responsibilities.

I welcome the words of Martin McGuinness on the publication of the strategy:

"We must not just aspire to create a place where people can live, learn, socialise and work together regardless of race or ethnicity, we must all step

forward and make it happen. Government alone cannot and will not eradicate racism and racial inequalities. There are already many people and organisations who are doing powerful work in their neighbourhoods, places of worship and workplaces to tackle racism. The Strategy provides a platform for action to build on these efforts and generate further momentum.”

As well as welcoming those sentiments, I praise the people in our community who do great work to make the lives of those who come to our shores easier and to tackle racism. In particular, I thank the Ballymena Ethnic Minority Forum for the work that it does in my constituency. While I agree with Martin that government cannot do this alone, politicians, as others have said, have an important role to play in trying to eliminate racism. Whether it be discussing this subject, migration, refugees, conflicts across the world or even Brexit, we need to be careful with our language.

Sometimes what we say and how we say it produces consequences. I take exception to Doug trying to compare imposing economic sanctions, as used against apartheid South Africa, with derogatory comments denigrating people because of their ethnicity.

11.15 am

I am glad that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination report welcomed the racial equality strategy as a positive step and a road map to tackle racial discrimination. I am less happy that the UN report had to point out that, in the absence of an equality Act here in the North, we still face challenges to combat racism.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to close?

Mr McGuigan: I support the motion, and I call for it to be implemented, along with, in the future, an equality Act in the North.

Mr Humphrey: I speak not as a member of the Executive Committee but as a Member for North Belfast.

The Belfast Jewish community continues to make an important and valued contribution to the life blood of Belfast. At sunset tonight, Jews across the globe will celebrate Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Across Europe, synagogues will have armed guards because of the risk of attack on those places of worship. In the past few years, deadly attacks on kosher shops in Paris, a synagogue in Copenhagen and a Jewish museum in Brussels have occurred. In the United Kingdom, Jewish schools have guards and bombproof windows.

The Community Safety Trust, members of which I met some months ago, has produced the following statistics: in 2014, there were 1,179 anti-Semitic attacks in the United Kingdom; last year, there were 924 similar attacks. There have been anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish Members of Parliament Ruth Smeeth and Luciana Berger. Anti-Semitic racism is the oldest type of racism that exists. Sadly, it is not just on the European continent, and is not just on the mainland of our United Kingdom. The synagogue is in my constituency, and Members will be aware of Rabbi David Singer speaking very recently of the evil anti-Semitic phone calls and emails that he, as the pastoral leader of the old and established Belfast Jewish community, has been receiving.

The graffiti recently daubed on the synagogue and in Belfast city centre was absolutely sickening and harked back to the 1930s and Nazi Germany. Sadly, these attacks followed the removal of the Chaim Herzog plaque from a building on Cliftonpark Avenue. The plaque was removed for its protection. There was an attack on a mural in Northumberland Street that praised an Ulsterman who worked with the Israeli defence forces. Also, in August of this year, in an awful and evil attack on the Jewish sector of Belfast City Cemetery, 13 headstones were damaged by a mob carrying bricks, rocks and hammers. Having spoken to the rabbi on two occasions, having met, along with the Belfast Lord Mayor, the Belfast Jewish Council in the City Hall, and visited the synagogue recently, I have to say that the Jewish community in this city is very fearful of attack.

The debate that took place in the Guildhall, Londonderry last week was mentioned. Without question, parties who voted for that motion have to take responsibility for raising anti-Jewish tensions in Northern Ireland. I have spoken to members of the Jewish community who have told me that that is exactly the case. They are friends of mine, and I know it to be true.

In making good the damage at Belfast City Cemetery, I have met the director of parks for Belfast City Council and the local police in north Belfast. I have invited the Chief Constable to visit the synagogue. I have invited the First Minister of Northern Ireland to join me —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Humphrey: I will surely.

Mr Stalford: Does the Member agree that the disgusting attack in the City Cemetery was merely the culmination of a campaign directed against the Jewish community in Belfast that goes back a long way? We have not only kids from Israel working on the Dead Sea products stall in Castle Court being attacked but products being torn off supermarket shelves because they come from Israel.

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

Mr Humphrey: The Member is quite right: people take part in so-called pro-Palestinian rallies, but they turn out to be anti-Israel rallies. I am not here to speak about the whats, wherefores and “whataboutery” of Israel; I am talking about the indigenous Jewish community in this city.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Humphrey: I do not have time. Sorry.

As I mentioned, tonight is Yom Kippur: the Day of Atonement. The evil people who took part in the attack in the City Cemetery, daubed graffiti on the synagogue and sent threatening emails to members of the Jewish community, including the rabbi, need to atone for their evil actions across not just Europe but this United Kingdom. We must stamp out anti-Semitism. I and my party will continue to stand firm in support of Belfast's small but growing Jewish community. They have provided so much to this city's cultural, political and, most importantly, commercial life, and they continue to do so. The Jewish community is valued in this city. I am greatly privileged to represent the Jewish community in North Belfast, where the synagogue is placed, and I regularly visit there. The attack is a sad reflection on the city. This city, nationally

and internationally, was damaged reputationally by that vile and evil attack in the City Cemetery.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Humphrey: Such actions have to be condemned across the House. I am glad that they were.

Mr Smith: I support the amendment. The First Ministers made a short statement on 27 June, after the EU referendum result, in the context of increased attacks on migrants in Great Britain. They reassured local migrant communities that they were welcome and valued in Northern Ireland. That statement needs to be echoed and amplified once again. I call on the Executive Office to reiterate that statement today with greater volume and more repetition.

A few days after the referendum, I was invited to one of the larger and more successful agri-food businesses in my constituency to speak with the company's management team. From memory, about 18 people were part of the management team, the vast majority of whom were from other countries; they were not originally from the UK or Ireland. They came from a wide variety of EU states, such as Slovakia, Poland, the Baltic states and Portugal, to name but a few. All those people had long service with the company; I think that, on average, it was nine years. Most had been promoted during their service in tribute to their skills, motivation and contribution. Many had married while living in Northern Ireland, some to locals and some to other migrants not necessarily from their own country. They are all bringing up their children in Northern Ireland, putting down roots and making a valuable contribution to our economy and society. During the next hour or so of the meeting, the managers detailed to me their fears and concerns, which were amplified by the Brexit decision. Some asked about what would happen to their children, as their children had UK passports and they did not. Some asked whether they should proceed with their house purchase. Some asked whether they should start to look for work outside Northern Ireland. They were all very concerned for their future, and they were not alone. The business owners were equally concerned for the future of their company and about access to labour, skills and markets.

Our migrant labour community needs to hear from the House. A loud, unified voice needs to come from here to say that that community is welcome and valued and will continue to be so, no matter the outworkings of Brexit. I understand that some people are concerned by migration. Indeed, it was said to be one of the main drivers for the Brexit vote. I say to the people who are genuinely concerned that Northern Ireland is the UK region least affected by migration. The latest figures show that Northern Ireland has a net 1.2 migrants per 1,000 population, compared with 4.5 in England, 1.9 in Wales and 1.5 in Scotland.

Yet all studies show that our migrant worker community makes a significant positive contribution to our economy and society.

The cause of racial equality and the development of a diverse and vibrant society has taken a knock post-referendum. I call on the Executive Office to include in an action plan tasks that will help instil confidence in the migrant worker community. A good start would be to send out a clear message today to migrant workers, their

families, their employers and the wider Northern Ireland community.

Mr Stalford: I am glad to speak in this debate. You will know that I am very proud to be from Belfast, as are other people in this room. I am very proud that Belfast enjoys a well-deserved reputation of being in the forefront of being a welcoming and kind city with welcoming and kind people. We can take pride in the fact that the people of Belfast elected a Jew from Hamburg to be the Lord Mayor of their city at a time when Jews across Europe and, indeed, on this island were being subjected to pogroms and persecution.

We can be proud of the fact that civil and religious liberty is afforded to all our citizens, whether they be Jew, Muslim or Christian. I believe very much in the words of Shimon Peres, who said that we are all Abraham's children, and those rights that I ask of others, I would give to them.

I do not believe that any child is born hating people. Attitudinally, children see no difference between each other. I have seen this in the case of my own children. My daughter is in P2 and my son is in P1, and they both have classmates whose parents came from beyond our shores, and they see no difference between the children in their class who are Polish or Lithuanian and themselves.

All around Belfast, we see the positive contribution that has been made by people born beyond our shores. In south Belfast, the most well-established ethnic minority community is, of course, the Chinese. The Chinese people came to Belfast and invested in our city at a time when nobody wanted to and when the heart was literally being ripped out of the city. So we recognise in government the valuable and positive contribution that people make. It is important that it is put on record that that is the case. Through the racial equality strategy, the minority ethnic development fund, the crisis fund, the racial equality subgroup and all the other programmes that the Government are responsible for, we give a lead on tackling racism and working to create a place in which every person feels safe and secure.

Northern Ireland is a compassionate place and a compassionate society. Over 200 people have been settled here under the vulnerable persons relocation scheme. These people are here because they are fleeing a hellish war zone. We talked yesterday in the House about the circumstances that have forced people to flee Syria, and I would like to believe that, were I ever confronted with circumstances similar to those that those people are facing, friendly neighbours would let me in.

Coordinated action across government is evidenced even this week. Hate Crime Awareness Week, involving the Executive Office, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Victim Support, the Probation Board, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of Justice, shows that the Government take our responsibility seriously in these areas, and we are determined to act to protect all our communities from fear or persecution.

Once again, I thank Members for the contributions that they have made. I think that there is broad agreement in this debate about the direction in which we want to travel, and that there is a recognition of the need to travel it.

11.30 am

We must all recognise that those of us in positions of responsibility have a role to play, and I believe that that is the case for every Member of this House: that we are committed to delivering a society in which everyone feels safe, secure, valued —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: Yes, I will.

Mr F McCann: This is with respect to your intervention when the last Member from your party was up. He rightfully mentioned the disgusting attacks on the Jewish plot in the city cemetery. However, he did not go on to mention that the local community rallied behind the Jewish community to show their abhorrence at those attacks. When we mention those attacks, we should also mention the actions taken by the local community.

Secondly, when people come out onto the streets in support of Palestinians, it is not anti-Jewish sentiment; it is against Israeli attacks on Gaza and the West Bank. That is what they are doing.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute. When an intervention is made, it should be short.

Mr Stalford: Thank you. I am absolutely happy to acknowledge that that is the case with the local community. In the communities that I represent, I have seen occasions when a dreadful attack takes place, and an entire community can be branded like that as a racist ghetto, usually on the front page of certain newspapers, an allegation that is completely removed from the reality of the situation on the ground.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Stalford: I say to the Member, very briefly, that the ease with which people interchange the word “Zionist” for the word “Jew” is deeply disturbing.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Claire Hanna. You will have five minutes, but if you choose to take an intervention, on this occasion, I will not be able to give you an extra minute.

Ms Hanna: That is a good reason not to take interventions.

I welcome the debate on the motion. It is right and timely for the Assembly to send out a clear and unambiguous message to people of ethnic minorities and those who have come here to live and work that their contribution is valued and needed and that denigration of them will not be tolerated any more.

I hope that the Executive deliver on this, and, as such, we support the constructive Ulster Unionist Party amendment. The racial equality strategy has taken too long; it cannot just be about photo opportunities or a talking shop. It has to have meaningful actions, targets and accountability.

We welcome the publication, a number of months ago now, of the racial equality strategy, but we share the deep frustration at the years that it took to bring it forward and the lack of demonstrable progress on it. We regret the failure to address a number of gaps and imbalances that have led to this region trailing behind in legal protection for black and minority ethnic people. The UN Committee

on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has, for almost a decade, repeatedly highlighted the faults in the race relations orders and amendments to that legislation. I want to ask the Government when they will make those legislative fixes. If ever anything deserved a quick royal prerogative change, it is that.

As Mr Dickson said, we need to differentiate between sectarianism and racism. Certainly, they are related cancers for this society, but there is a danger that sectarianism, which I accept is our biggest challenge, will crowd out the growing issue of racism, in terms of resources, funding and police time. The same black and minority ethnic funding has to be shared out from projects as diverse as great projects like the Mela festival in Belfast and those tackling the destitution of refugees and asylum seekers. In no other funding stream would those two needs sit side by side, but we justify it because both address the needs of minority ethnic communities.

We also need to be very aware of the language of politicians. A casual “N” word in a tweet or a “not trusting people to go down to the shop” remark sends the message that such language is acceptable and legitimises the demonising of new arrivals and people who are different.

Failure to tackle myths was a feature of the Brexit debate. It laid the blame for many societal problems at the feet of new arrivals, and that was very stark. I took part in a debate recently in which a senior politician was asked about net migration figures and did not know the statistics. When he was advised of the very small figure — we are almost a net exporter of people — he said that the quantum did not matter and that it was the perception that there were too many migrants. When did it stop being the responsibility of politicians to base our policy on fact and to challenge myths?

It is all too easy to pin racism on specific communities. I think that that is an issue; we are labelling communities where race hate attacks take place as “racist communities”.

I will be very clear: anybody who attacks, does graffiti or intimidates on the basis of racial difference needs to be very forcefully targeted by the police, but we cannot let off the hook higher-level and institutional xenophobia that feeds exactly that information.

A Business in the Community report published yesterday collected the experience of 25,000 workers around the UK from ethnic minority backgrounds, including those in Northern Ireland, and showed that black and minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented at every management level. One in eight workers is from an ethnic minority background, but only one in 16 occupies a management position. Thirty per cent of those surveyed had experienced racial harassment or bullying in the workplace. There are a number of recommendations that I will not have time to go into on using public procurement to incentivise racial diversity and for businesses to demonstrate real leadership.

Related to that is the need for better regulation of precarious and low-paid work. That is obviously not just a minority ethnic issue, but the horrific stories in the media last week of a gangmaster keeping workers almost as slaves highlight the need for increased protections and vigilance across society.

The context of the debate is, of course, Brexit and the fact that tens of thousands of people, who are contributing here, are propping up our public services and are making a net benefit, have a cloud hanging over their head and have had all year. They do not know whether they can sign that lease or whether, if their kids started school, they will be here in a couple of years. To say that those people are “bargaining chips” —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Hanna: — for the UK is appalling language, and the Executive should have been first out the door to condemn that language. We support the motion.

Mr Ross (Junior Minister, The Executive Office): I want, first of all, to thank everyone who participated in this morning's debate. I think that the tone highlighted the fact that, as Mr Stalford said, everyone in the Chamber is committed to welcoming minority ethnic communities and those working in our society here in Northern Ireland. I mentioned last week during Question Time how we need to have a greater aspiration than simply building a tolerant society. We need to have one that recognises and celebrates the diversity and cultural richness that modern Northern Ireland is all about. As Members said during this debate, we must recognise that migrant workers and ethnic minorities contribute not only to the economic life here but to our social, political and cultural life, and that contribution is incalculable.

The skills, talents, fresh perspective and energy that migrants and minority ethnic people bring benefit all of us. Since being appointed as junior Minister, I have had the privilege of attending many events with our ethnic communities and seeing first-hand the important role they play in making Northern Ireland a better place for all of us. Of course, I have long recognised the important role that migration plays in many important sectors here in Northern Ireland, not least the agri-food sector, as some Members referred to.

I want to emphasise that, whilst we often use terms like “minority ethnic communities” or “migrants”, we are, of course, talking about families, individuals and colleagues, and I think that it is important to put that on the record as well.

Mrs Cameron, in her contribution, spoke about migration to Northern Ireland over a long time. Over the last decade, of course, we have had people from a diverse number of nationalities, cultures and ethnic backgrounds come to Northern Ireland to make a new life, joining existing community and minority ethnic families, including the Chinese community, the Indian community and the Jewish community, who have lived here for many generations, and, of course, Irish Travellers, who have been here for many centuries.

Mr McGuigan, in his contribution, talked about that diversity being reflected in the 2011 census, which reported that there are now over 90 languages spoken in Northern Ireland. So, our society is changing. The old ways of seeing things and the old prejudices are falling slowly away, and, hopefully, they are being replaced by a much more cosmopolitan and complex take on life and society.

Mr Lynch, in opening the debate and proposing the motion, talked about the importance of the racial equality strategy, and many Members touched on that as well. That

strategy was, of course, launched last December, and it is full of ambition and high expectation. It establishes a framework for Departments and others to tackle racial inequalities, to eradicate racism and hate crime and, along with the Together: Building a United Community strategy, to promote good relations and social cohesion. We must be clear that it will take the work of society as a whole to achieve racial equality, and to ensure that we work towards that common goal, it is important that the opinions of everyone are taken on board. By sharing experience and knowledge, we can collectively address the issues of racial inequality and work towards a fully inclusive society, and that is exactly how it should be.

Mention was also made of the subgroup. I was pleased to join my junior Minister colleague and the First Minister and deputy First Minister recently at the inaugural meeting of the equality subgroup.

It is important that the subgroup has a voice that will be heard at the very highest level of government. I am pleased with the feedback that we have already had from participants, and I know that it is meeting again next month.

A number of Members talked about hate crime. Of course, the motion is explicit on reports of an 87% increase in hate-related crimes over the past four years. Mr Lynch also talked about “silent voices”, and that is something that we should recognise. Historically, racism and racist incidents have been under-reported. We can look at statistics in different ways, but, in one sense, an increased number of reported incidents shows that people from ethnic backgrounds are now more confident in coming forward when they have been the victim of such racist attacks or abuse. It also shows that there is more confidence in the police. However, irrespective of what is behind the statistics, it remains a source of shame and causes damage to our society's reputation and to our economy, and it must be challenged.

Although hate crime is, first and foremost, a matter for the criminal justice system, the Police Service, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and the courts, we must all play our role in challenging it at every turn. I am aware that, behind statistics, there are real individuals who have been abused and insulted, who are frightened and intimidated and who increasingly can be isolated in society. A number of Members raised specific issues in their constituency, and it is important that they did that.

Mr McPhillips mentioned the European referendum. Again, it is important to put on record that the post-Brexit spike in race hate crime in England and Wales is not reflected in Northern Ireland. That received considerable media coverage, but the evidence that we have has suggested that racist attacks in Northern Ireland are falling, and that should be welcomed. It is also important to say that the referendum did not create racism. The calling of the referendum did not cause it, and the result is not going to bring about more racism or get rid of racism. I caution against drawing that link, because in all societies there are always those who resent, fear and hate those who are different from them based on race, gender or religion. Those people are wrong, and they are misguided and misinformed, and, as I said, we have to challenge that.

It is encouraging that the 2015 life and times survey, which was mentioned earlier, showed that 61% of people living in Northern Ireland think that the culture and traditions of

minority ethnic people add to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland society. It also found that 68% of people here said that it is important to them that public bodies such as local councils, hospital trusts and Departments take into account the needs of ethnic minorities. That has also been my experience from attending some of the events that took place around Community Relations and Cultural Awareness Week, where many people participated to learn more about what is going on there.

Mr Beattie proposed the amendment. Of course, he was critical of the Executive, which has been a running theme since we returned following the Assembly election. He talked about his experience of living abroad and the challenges that there are for ethnic minorities or newcomers to Northern Ireland in living here. That is absolutely right, for it is quite a courageous thing to move to a new country and a new culture. However, I am continually encouraged by talking to people who have started a new life in Northern Ireland, particularly those who have been part of the refugee resettlement programme, and by how welcoming they have found people in Northern Ireland. Undoubtedly it is challenging for them, but they have emphasised how welcome they have been made to feel.

He mentioned the review of legislation. I know that there have been media reports about that in the past few weeks, and a number of other Members mentioned that as well. The Executive are aware of the suggestion of gaps in the legislation. The racial equality strategy commits to a review of the current legislation, including a review of the current Race Relations Order and fair employment legislation, and Mr Agnew, Ms Hanna and others commented on that.

Mr Agnew: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ross: Yes.

Mr Agnew: Does he agree that, rather than taking a piecemeal approach to the review of various pieces of legislation, we should be looking at having a single equality Act?

Mr Ross: That is an important point to make. The statute book is an incredibly messy thing. There could be piecemeal approaches taken to different pieces of legislation that could be encompassed in a consolidation Bill of some sort. That is something that the Executive Office will look at. We are going to examine the statute book to see what legislation is there. If a consolidation Bill is required, that can be something that we will give consideration to.

Talking specifically about refugees, I mentioned the courage that it takes to come here. The Department has assisted the humanitarian crisis through the vulnerable persons relocation scheme (VPRS), which is currently the only formal scheme through which we receive refugees.

It has been successful: over 200 people from Syria have resettled here under the scheme and, as I said, been made to feel welcome. The feedback has been very encouraging, and we expect to consult on the refugee integration strategy later this year.

11.45 am

The draft Programme for Government (PFG) sets out, in outcome terms, the improvements in well-being to which the Executive aspire for everyone living in Northern

Ireland, and we remain committed to the implementation of the racial equality strategy. Over the coming weeks, we will work to explore how the strategy's implementation can support the achievement of the PFG outcomes, with particular reference to addressing the issues raised by minority ethnic communities.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ross: I will not give way, because I have only five minutes left, and there are a lot of contributions I want to get through. I hope that the Member forgives me for that, because I generally do give way.

The racial equality strategy subgroup has a significant role to play in making sure that action plans, timetables and priorities are moved forward at a quick pace. The subgroup will advise the Executive Office and other Departments on the implementation of the strategy, and it will be tasked with working with Departments, and vice versa, to develop an implementation plan, and with monitoring and reviewing progress on implementation. That is an important role.

I will touch on some of the other comments made by Members. Mr Irwin mentioned that Northern Ireland is a welcoming place, and that is borne out by conversations that I have had with people who have resettled here. He talked about a particular incident in his constituency — an incident that, of course, should be condemned — and the importance of working with the police to ensure that those responsible are held accountable for their actions and dealt with appropriately when brought in front of the courts. This is Hate Crime Awareness Week, and junior Minister Fearon and I will join the Justice Minister later this week to highlight some of the issues around race crime and look at how we can tackle those attitudes in society.

Mr McPhillips talked about the failure to tackle the issue. We all have a responsibility for this. Members have said before that political parties have a responsibility for what their members put on social media, and councillors have a responsibility for the motions that they support and the impression that that gives society. He talked about investment, and there is £60 million going to the T:BUC strategy over the next five years, which is hugely important. He and Mrs Hanna talked about financial support for minority ethnic groups.

The minority ethnic development fund is as successful as it has always been; in fact, it is more successful than it has ever been. Since the fund was established in 2001, it has supported hundreds of different projects and helped thousands of people. Over £1 million is being distributed through the minority ethnic development fund to assist minority ethnic and community organisations to promote good relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds.

Over 30 projects are being supported in this financial year. It is important to highlight that the number of applications is increasing year-on-year. For 2013-15, 85 applications were received. That increased to 92 applications for the 2015-16 fund and to 99 for the 2016-17 fund. That is indicative of the growing confidence among minority ethnic groups, which means that they are coming forward and not only highlighting issues of concern to them but promoting and celebrating the role that they play in Northern Ireland. There is also the crisis fund, which has a £100,000 budget and was established to assist vulnerable migrants, destitute refugees and asylum seekers, those who have

been subjected to trafficking — my colleague mentioned the Bill that was passed here and the additional powers that that has created — and other identifiable vulnerable groups, including the Roma. That issue has been raised.

Mr Dickson talked about the need to tackle racism, and he was exactly right. That is why we have the strategy and the subgroup up and running. I am encouraged by the feedback, as I have said many times before. He talked about the isolation felt by many ethnic groups. That is not what we are hearing from the subgroup, which feels that they are being listened to at the highest level of government, which is very encouraging.

Mrs Cameron talked about the incident in Antrim. I think that all of us were horrified when we viewed the video footage, and people across the country were rightly disgusted. She also talked about the importance of migrant community workers in our health service, which, again, everybody would agree with.

Mr Humphrey talked about the impact on the Jewish community in Northern Ireland. It is worrying that, particularly in Great Britain, there seems to be a rise in anti-Semitism in one of the main parties. He talked specifically about the harassment of the Jewish community in Northern Ireland. It is important that the House condemns all types of racism and intolerance, whether it is based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or anything else. We should not tolerate it.

Mr Smith talked about the referendum, and I have cautioned Members about linking the referendum to the scourge of racism in our society. He said that we need to echo the statement by the First Minister and deputy First Minister about the importance and value of migrant workers in Northern Ireland.

It is not just the words but the actions. I know that Executive Office officials have been in contact with minority communities and migrant workers in Northern Ireland to reassure them that they are very much part of Northern Ireland's fabric of society, advise them on their rights and continue the long-standing relationship that we have with them. He said that it is important that we state how valuable they are. I have not heard a single person say that we do not support the migrant community in Northern Ireland, nor have I heard a single person say that they should not remain here post Brexit. Mr Stalford talked about their positive contribution and the fact that many children are in much more diverse schools than would have been the case before.

Today's contributions have clearly demonstrated the breadth and depth of the support here for the Executive's work towards achieving racial equality and good race relations. We recognise that racial equality and good race relations are essential if we are to flourish, but I would counsel that there is no quick fix to this. There will be a sustained effort on the part of Departments, public and private sector organisations and businesses and individuals. I am proud of the work that this Department and the Executive have done to try to achieve those goals. I do not think that anybody underestimates the challenge, but —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Minister bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Ross: — through the racial equality strategy, the minority ethnic development fund, the crisis fund, the racial equality subgroup and other programmes, we will continue to make sure that we make progress on the issue.

Mr Nesbitt: We have a motion, and we have an amendment. It is a motion that is not much more than warm words, if it is more than that. They are woolly words and confused words about budgets and how they relate to strategies. However, in the amendment from my colleague Mr Beattie, there is something concrete, something that says, "Let's have action plans, timetables and priorities, so that we know where we are going". Is that not consistent with the new Executive commitment to outcome-based accountability in government, the very thing being talked about in this city in a two-day conference that will come to Parliament Buildings later in the day?

If we are looking for a real clue about the Executive's commitment in this area, where better could we look than the important letter penned by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on 10 August, which highlighted five concerns about the implications for Northern Ireland when we leave the European Union? It was a letter stating the blindingly obvious. One of the concerns was about migrant workers, and there was a plea to the Prime Minister to recognise that we need to be allowed access to unskilled as well as highly skilled labour in the public and private sectors. However, there was no recognition that we value those people as more than the mere commodity that they were defined as in that letter. Do we really value them? Do the Executive really value them? We saw today the fault line, with one half quite rightly talking about the valuable contribution made by the Jewish community in Belfast over the years and the other half supporting attacks on the state of Israel. I know that we can conflate ethnicity with nationality, but there is the fault line.

The Member for South Belfast brought in the contribution of the Chinese community down the years and during some very difficult years. I notice that he failed to mention the Indian community and Diljit Rana, for example, who came here in difficult times and decided to build a business empire. He found it rather difficult, because, every time he opened a business, republicans blew it up. I may exaggerate by saying "every time" because he obviously got there eventually.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, do I have five or 10 minutes?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Five.

Mr Nesbitt: Five minutes.

Mr Lynch says that ethnics have never felt more insecure as if his party has not been in government and in charge for the last nine and a half years, as if there has not been a long hiatus between the racial equality strategies, and as if stakeholders like the Council for Ethnic Minorities do not think that the new strategy is a retrograde step. The minority ethnic development fund saw another hiatus. Why did we tell groups that we would fund the gap last year and then change our mind? We are sitting on this estate dealing in billions of pounds and saying to those small groups, "You will have to go to the bank or wherever you go to and find some sort of bridging loan to see yourselves through". I do not think that it is fair, and I do not think it reflects a proper commitment to our ethnic minorities.

I am a little disappointed with the quality of some of the debate. Mr Irwin seems to think that we are a welcoming country because travel journalists think we are a welcoming country. I do not know what that has to do with this. Mrs Cameron said that, since the 1600s, Northern Ireland has had a long tradition. She is as confused as the First Minister. Northern Ireland is not even 100 years old. There is a big tradition in the north-east of this island but not in Northern Ireland. Mrs Hanna talks about the failure to tackle myths. We are in danger of moving into a post-factual society, and the new realities and the new normals —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his comments to a close?

Mr Nesbitt: — are that Northern Ireland is no longer a binary state of orange and green or unionist and nationalist. That is why we should support the amendment.

Mr Boylan: I want to read a few words into the record and then pick up on some of the contributions. I have to commend the Minister. He must have been reading my notes.

I want to take the opportunity to commend the Executive on their vision for the T:BUC strategy, which outlines a vision of a united community based on equality of opportunity and the desirability of good relations and reconciliation and strengthened by its diversity where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together free from prejudice, hate and intolerance. The strategy seeks to address the deep-rooted issues that have perpetuated segregation and resulted in some people living separate lives. It is important to note that the T:BUC strategy is a journey towards a more united and shared society. There is clearly a long and difficult process of change and development for our society in the North of Ireland. Strategies such as T:BUC and the racial equality strategy demonstrate that the Assembly is trying to challenge sectarianism, racism and prejudice. It is important that we have a joined-up approach in government to tackle all those problems. Notwithstanding the comments made in the EU and UN reports that my party colleagues mentioned, the T:BUC strategy recognises the serious problems that we face in the North in tackling sectarianism, prejudice and hate.

One of the shared aims of the strategy is to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations. I want to highlight one example: the shared education campus of St John's Primary School and Moy Regional Primary School, which has been selected by the Department of Education as one of our new shared campuses that will be created over the next number of years. As well as three shared education campuses, other initiatives include getting 10,000 young people who are not in education, employment or training a place on a new United Youth volunteering programme; establishing 10 new shared housing schemes; developing four urban village schemes; developing a significant programme of cross-community sporting events; removing interface barriers by 2023; and piloting 100 shared summer schools. If we are to measure the success of T:BUC, look at what outcomes have been achieved.

In addressing all the issues that we face in the North, we must not forget the Good Friday Agreement, where the declaration of support commits —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Yes; OK.

Mr Lyttle: I mean this with the greatest respect to the Member, but he spent minutes talking about targets that were set about three years ago and washed over the outcomes that have been achieved without referencing any.

12.00 noon

Mr Boylan: It is a work in progress — *[Interruption.]* It is a wee bit rich of the Member: he has come into the Chamber at the end of the debate and has not really been listening in. I was good enough to give him the intervention. I know that it is a work in progress and that junior Minister Fearon, like junior Minister Ross, has been doing a lot of work on it. If the Member does not mind, I will continue with my speech.

The declaration of support commits all participants to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all in sections on rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity. The signatories affirmed their commitment to the mutual respect, civil rights and the religious liberties of everyone in the community, and we need to continue to see that implemented. That is according to the Good Friday Agreement. That is why it is important that the departmental equality schemes are robustly implemented.

I want to go back to where I started off. I have written down exactly what the junior Minister wrote down about the debate — they are the same notes — but I will not go through all of what was said. I will say this: my colleague said it at the very start. People should read the motion. I have heard words like "woolly" and Doug Beattie talked about it being "weak", but Mr Lynch said that the Executive are committed to those two strategies. The main point that he highlighted — I think that we would have agreement on it in the Chamber — is the need for a single equality Act. A number of Members, including Steven Agnew and others, mentioned that on the Floor of the House. That is what we are talking about. We all know what the Equality Commission and the UN reports have stated. As I said, I have recorded everything that Members said and will pick out a few brief points.

Let us start with Mr Beattie, because I have touched on him. The only other point that I want to make about my colleague Mr Lynch — he mentioned it and the junior Minister picked up on it — is the issue of silent voices. That is a concern for us and something that we certainly need to look at. I want to talk about Mr Beattie's contribution; he certainly shared some of his experiences. He is right: he finished his remarks by saying that it sits with Ministers. I agree, but we all have to take collective responsibility. There is another issue. He spoke for seven and a half minutes. It is not for me to say what his contribution should be about, but I will say this: his last three lines were only about those three words. He talked about an action plan, timetable and key priorities, and I would have thought that this was the forum and an opportunity for people to bring forward suggestions for those. I would have liked to hear that in his contribution.

Mr Nesbitt made the winding-up speech on the amendment, and he also had an opportunity to raise those points. It is OK putting the motion to the vote. At the end of the day, part of your contribution was that it sits with Ministers, but if you read the motion you will see that it

refers to the Ministers and responsibility. I do not know how you can bring in those two points without making any reference to how we will achieve that or what your ideas are. I sit on the ethnic minorities group as the ethnic minorities spokesperson. We have a meeting next week, and we will go through this debate and see exactly what was said. I think that there was an opportunity for the debate to be expanded into that.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: No, I want to finish some of the other comments. To be fair to the Member, I normally do give way, but I want to pick up on some of the other points.

Richie McPhillips picked up on a good point. He is right about Brexit because there are concerns that, after Brexit and the vote on Europe, those issues have raised their heads. There is no doubt about it: the number of attacks has grown and there are concerns about that.

Mr Dickson always makes a good contribution, but I thought that it was a wee bit rich picking on the Justice Minister. His party had the Justice Ministry for five years and the Justice Minister was not here. To be fair to him, he has always supported the idea of a single equality Bill. He mentions that all the time, along with us. I just wanted to pick up on that point.

Mr McGuigan highlighted some of the issues. It is shocking to think that there have been 500 race hate incidents in the last six months.

It is certainly very worrying and something that we need to look at.

I will just pick up a few other points. Claire Hanna is not here, but she said something about looking at the legal framework. The Minister, in his contribution, said that he would examine the statute book. That is a positive comment.

I will finish there. I support the motion and am against the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 30; Noes 42.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beattie and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy,

Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mr McGuigan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the positive contribution that ethnic minorities make to our society; notes with concern an increase of 87% in hate-related crime in the last four years; and calls on all Ministers to continue to give priority to implementing the racial equality strategy and the Together: Building a United Community strategy, and to providing the financial support to ensure that both of these strategies are supported and implemented.

Assembly Business

Mr Agnew: On a point of order, Principal Deputy Speaker. Since your appointment, you have been called many things during debates, including Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure that, in each instance, the Member in question meant no disrespect.

The Principal Deputy Speaker will have her own view on the term “Madam”, but I argue that it is perhaps somewhat outdated. Can we review the titles that we give to the Speaker, the Principal Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Speakers and look at removing gender-specific titles?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: My preferred title would be *Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle*, or Principal Deputy Speaker, but it is up to the Members to decide what way they want to address me.

Private Members’ Business

Healthier Lifestyles for Children

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The next item on the Order Paper is a motion on Healthier Lifestyles for Children. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the amendment and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who speak will have five minutes.

Ms Lockhart: I beg to move

That this Assembly encourages schoolchildren to live a healthier lifestyle; acknowledges that following the introduction of a levy on drinks with a high sugar content, an estimated £18 million will be allocated from the Treasury to the Executive’s Budget in 2018; and calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the health service.

I bring the motion today in the hope that we leave a legacy for the children and adults of the future. I want to commend Neil Johnston of Chest, Heart and Stroke for his very proactive lobbying and hope that this will get cross-party support. We do not want to look back and see a history of wasted money or missed opportunities. We want to see, in this mandate, a focus on our children’s health. This is a unique opportunity to shape and set in place a programme of healthier living. The £18 million that I refer to, very clearly comes as new money to this devolved Government. It is not costing us anything but is, in essence, a windfall from the UK Government, following the introduction of the sugar tax, or, to give it its correct title, the soft drinks industry levy. Under the Barnett formula, we will obtain our share of the tax, which is aimed at the producers, not the consumers, of soft drinks.

It is a stark fact that in Northern Ireland 22% of children are classed as obese or overweight in primary 1. By the time they reach year 8, this has risen to 29%. All the studies show that being overweight is preventable through healthier choices of food that are accessible and affordable and regular physical activity. The reality is that obesity problems manifesting in primary 1 and upwards are being carried forward into early and later adulthood. The estimated cost of obesity to the Northern Ireland economy and the health service is around £370 million per year, through absence from work and problems with ill health. I read that the cost to the Health budget represents 3% of the Department’s overall spend.

My thought on the motion is that, surely if we can invest to prevent, it should be a priority for the House. The figure of £18 million has been suggested by the Department of Health’s obesity prevention steering group, and will potentially reduce year on year, which is welcome because it means that drinks will be reformulated to a healthier combination. This is about penalising the companies who produce drinks with a higher sugar content, and ensuring

that we make the best use of this resource to tackle and prevent obesity.

The sole aim of this motion is to garner support and allow for early preparation in the Department of Education for a physical education programme in schools that will allow for increased physical activity at an early age. Currently, in the schools curriculum, it is suggested that there should be two hours of physical education for children aged between four and 16. Unfortunately, whilst two hours is the suggested amount, many are getting just one hour per week, on average. The reality is that 36% of children in P1 to P3 get less than one hour per week. At this early age, we all know that children are absolutely bubbling to get out of the classroom and use some of their energy. We also know that bad habits are hard to break. I do not blame this on teachers, I probably blame it on a lack of investment. Pupil:teacher ratios prevent PE classes for changing purposes. We see poor facilities and, I believe, a lack of creativity in our syllabus. We need to see fun activities that will engage these children and young people. This money could be used to expand on initiatives that are already operating and that would ultimately result in a mandatory two hours per week physical education programme and help keep their little bodies healthy. No one wants to see their child overweight.

An excellent initiative has recently been piloted in my own constituency of Upper Bann. It is an innovative and creative programme aimed at getting our primary-school children fit and healthy. Healthy Kids has been running for two years and has already expanded into 17 local schools. Kevin Creery from Tannaghmore Primary School has spearheaded it, and he is on record as having said:

“he was astounded at the societal statistics regarding the inactivity of children and as a PE teacher he decided to do something about it.”

The statistics clearly demonstrate that, within the UK, Northern Ireland has the least active children. With a group of individuals, Kevin put together a 16-week physical literacy programme, aimed not just at getting kids back to fitness but assessing their progress with detailed data and video analysis to show just how well the children have done. So far, the project has seen 942 children tested, and it is expected that 2,000 will be tested before Christmas.

The project has four strands: professional coaching in schools; the “golden mile”, which enables children to run round their pitches for 15 minutes, twice a week; habit building; and performance monitoring. From this programme, there has clearly been an increase in children's stamina and speed. It is increasing their participation in competitive sports outside schools, and parents have also noticed that their children want to do more outside and to involve themselves in more physical exercise. We all know that we are in an era of electronic devices, and it is vitally important that we try and engage our children to enjoy the outside world as well.

Major studies have examined this issue and found a strong relationship between the amount of PE offered and a child's obesity risk and age-adjusted BMI. In the US, a study found that an extra 60 minutes of PE per week in primary schools lowers a child's age-adjusted BMI score by 10% and reduces the possibility of obesity by 5%.

In conclusion, we support the amendment, because ultimately it just continues what the motion calls for. There are a few statistics that I want to leave you with. Research by the University of Ulster shows that in 2004-05, only 5% of schools in Scotland offered two hours or more of PE; 10 years later, they are sitting at 98% participation in two hours of physical education. The stark contrast is that Northern Ireland has only 8%. The Institute of Chartered Physiotherapists suggests that regular exercise can lead to better concentration, learning skills and self-esteem, and one major US study found that integrating moderate-intensity physical activity into academic lessons in primary school resulted in a 6% increase in performance in standardised academic tests.

The benefits of this money being ring-fenced for education are immeasurable, and I have no doubt that it will go a long way in creating a fitter, more active, higher-performing generation of young people. Whilst it will come to the Finance Department, this money will give an Education solution, but it will have immeasurable benefits for the Department of Health in the long run, so we are really cutting across the entire Government portfolio. Therefore, I ask Members to support the motion.

12.30 pm

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move

Leave out from “2018;” and insert

“notes with concern that only approximately 6% of pupils in each primary year are accessing two or more hours' physical education per week; calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the health service; and further calls on the Minister of Education to improve the monitoring and reporting of physical education hours per week accessed by primary pupils and to issue a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory obligation on schools to facilitate an appropriate minimum amount of physical education hours per week for primary-school pupils.” — [Mr Lyttle.]

I welcome the opportunity to debate this important matter, and I thank the proposers for bringing it to the Assembly. The issue of child health, physical education and activity is vital. I particularly welcome the opportunity to speak about it, as it is an issue that I have raised with various Education Ministers over the years. It is clear that we need to face up to the stark reality that, according to the most recent school omnibus survey, on average only 4% of our primary-school children are accessing the Department of Education's recommended two hours' physical education per week in our schools.

The debate is, of course, connected to the wider issue and national scandal of childhood obesity and overweight children. Here in Northern Ireland, 21% of children are classified as overweight and 7% as obese, which means that one in every four children is either overweight or obese. That has significant costs for the Northern Ireland economy and our health service and creates all those long-term health issues for our children and young people.

These are scandalous realities that should be as big a priority for the Executive, the Assembly, the media and

our wider society as any of the issues that we face in the Assembly. Tackling those problems will of course require a multifaceted, international, national, regional and partnership approach, of which increased physical activity and taxing excessive sugar in drinks form only part.

It is worth noting that many people feel that the UK childhood obesity strategy falls far short of what is expected. Malcolm Clark of the children's food campaign has gone as far as calling it:

"a truly shocking abdication of the Government's duties to secure the health and future of the next generation"

Others, such as Professor Parveen Kumar of the BMA board of science, said that the strategy should have included other measures, such as tighter controls on irresponsible marketing and promotion.

Therefore, it is important that the Assembly and the Executive consider how we can influence a more robust UK and international approach to obesity, as well as the full range of measures that we can take in Northern Ireland to improve the health and well-being of our children. It will need to be a comprehensive approach, and that makes me somewhat cautious with the call to ring-fence funds just for educational awareness and physical education. There is a range of measures available: improved food labelling, early years nutrition intervention and support for our sports clubs that do tireless voluntary work across our community.

A range of Departments is responsible through various policies. The Department of Health has the Fitter Future for All strategy, which is the framework for preventing and addressing overweight problems and obesity in Northern Ireland. The Department of Health and the Department of Education share the food in schools policy. Access to free fruit and vegetables and greater access to free school meals is something that has been successfully employed in other jurisdictions. The Department of Health, the Public Health Agency and the Department for Infrastructure's cycling unit promote the excellent Active School Travel and Safe Routes to Schools programme that also merit investment. Of course, the Department of Education has its own curriculum sports programme that the IFA and the GAA contribute to so ably.

I am somewhat cautious about the call for ring-fenced funding just for education, physical education and just the Department of Education, but I do assume that the spirit of the call is that the funds will be used wisely and effectively to promote child health and physical activity. Hence, we are willing to support that aspect of the motion, and indeed the motion and put forward the amendment.

The Department of Health's obesity prevention strategy, a Fitter Future for All, has a specific target of every child in Northern Ireland over the age of eight having at least two hours' per week extracurricular sport, physical recreation or play. That will be something for us to look at as well.

Most pertinent to today's motion is the Department of Education's recommendation that all pupils participate in at least two hours' PE per week. The shocking reality, from the figures that we have available to us, is that, on average, only 4% of primary pupils are accessing that recommendation. Furthermore, that is according to the school omnibus survey, which is not, as far as I am aware, mandatory, and, in 2015, was completed by only 36% of

grant-aided schools. That is a totally unacceptable situation when we are dealing with such a serious issue. It is something that the Education Minister must take extremely seriously. I had hoped that the Education Minister would be here today, given how many of these issues fall across his responsibility. Hopefully, it is something that we will hear from him on at an urgent future date.

The first step, as set out by the amendment today, is for the Executive to accept that they are failing our children and that this is an exceptional problem that will require exceptional action. According to the Chest Heart and Stroke organisation, further to the establishment of open, transparent and firm targets and investment in PE support, 98% of Scottish primary schools offer at least two hours per week of PE. That is compared with 4% to 7% in Northern Ireland. Of course we need to allocate additional resources wisely and effectively, but it is also clear that the Assembly requires significant improvements in the monitoring and information available to us to hold the Executive to account. It is clear that the non-mandatory omnibus survey is not the comprehensive information that we need.

We are often asked for specifics by the Executive. Chest Heart and Stroke recommends that, by 2021, 70% of primary-school pupils should be able to access at least two hours of high-quality PE each week. We should have a network of specialist PE facilitators to monitor all primary schools on the extent to which they have met the two-hour target and to report specifically in inspection reports on whether that target is met. Importantly, as the proposer of the motion stated, it is vital that we equip and support our teachers and schools to meet those important targets. Therefore, we should have a PE fund that will award grants and assistance to our primary schools to be able to meet that need.

This is one of the greatest challenges facing our society. I propose that the Education Minister, in partnership with Executive colleagues if that is helpful, initiates and facilitates a public consultation as to how we properly address this unacceptable situation, how best we utilise and allocate any additional resources we receive and whether we need to change the failing guideline of two hours' PE per week per pupil to a statutory obligation. The Assembly must show that it is willing to get serious in its response to the issue and fight to improve access to the good nutrition, balanced diets and physical activity that our children and young people need and deserve.

Mr McElduff: I begin with a few remarks from my perspective as Chairperson of the Committee for Education. The Committee has not taken a formal position on the issues covered by the motion, so my remarks in this section of my speech, before I make some remarks as a Sinn Féin MLA, are designed to inform the House's understanding of related matters.

Of course, physical education is a compulsory element of the revised curriculum for all pupils from foundation stage, which is preschool, to Key Stage 4, which is GCSE. Schools are encouraged to provide at least two hours of PE every week. The delivery of all aspects of the curriculum is, however, a matter for schools. The Department does not compel schools to require pupils to undertake PE, even if we think that they should. The decision on what specific sports or games are offered to pupils and the funding allocated to chosen sports or games is also a matter for each school. The curriculum sports programme is a DE programme not unfamiliar to

you, Principal Deputy Speaker. It has been in place since 2007. It is designed to develop the physical literacy skills of our youngest children through participation in enjoyable sports activities, to help to raise children's confidence and self-esteem and to raise the confidence and skills of primary-school teachers in delivering physical education.

The Gaelic Athletic Association and the Irish Football Association have provided a network of qualified coaches who work with children at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 in primary schools. At one point, there were 61 coaches in 571 primary schools in the North, reaching over 39,000 pupils, which is 41% of younger children participating. Those two sporting organisations led the way in that sense. Priority was to be given to schools in which children were likely to benefit most from curriculum-linked physical activity, in particular schools in disadvantaged areas. It is my understanding that the programme cost about £1.3 million per annum.

John O'Dowd will be my party's next contributor to the debate, and he will make more of the points that I will briefly state now. Sinn Féin feels that the tone and sentiment of the motion is good and positive, but we believe that ring-fencing Barnett consequentials through individual motions of this nature is not good budgetary practice. Sin an méid.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and commend its signatories for bringing it to the House. In March, the then Health Minister, Simon Hamilton, expressed this concern:

"a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks might simply cause people to switch to other unhealthy foods, with the result that the problem is displaced but not solved." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 114, p130, col 2].

Setting aside his concerns during the Final Stage of the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill that it is a regressive tax, he is right that the revenue made available as a result of the tax should be utilised to increase public health, and where better to start than with our children?

I agree entirely that funding should be set aside for this purpose, because instilling healthy lifestyle choices in our young people will result in short- and long-term health benefits. We know that eating a balanced diet, taking regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight can add years to your life and reduce the risk of certain diseases, including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity — the list goes on and on. Not only does a healthy lifestyle bring short-term benefits to the health of our young people, but it delivers skills, knowledge and practice that will live on through generations of our people. If the Executive get it right when it comes to the health of our young people, that will deliver not only countless benefits to families and public health but financial savings by reducing pressure on an already over-pressurised health service and the excellent staff —

Mr Lyons: I appreciate the Member giving way, and I appreciate my colleague bringing the motion here today. Is it not true that early intervention and prevention should happen not just for obesity but right across the health service? If we can tackle these issues now, we can make massive savings and save people an awful lot of pain and suffering at the same time.

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

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for his intervention. Early intervention is key right across, as you state.

If the Executive get it right on the health of our young people, that will deliver countless benefits and reduce the pressure, as I said. I pay tribute to the excellent staff who work in our health service every day.

I have heard it said many times that your health is your wealth, but I would extend that description: our people's health is Northern Ireland's wealth. There is a clear and direct link between healthy eating, healthy living and a healthy economy.

Last week, I had the honour of hosting writer, cook and friend, Jilly Dougan, as she launched her new initiative, 'Sow, Grow, Munch', in the Long Gallery. It is an inspirational new book and online tool that connects children of all ages with the concepts of food growing, food heritage, the importance of buying local produce and how to cook it from scratch. It is precisely the sort of initiative that we should encourage for our children and young people. I thank the MLAs who attended and supported Jilly at her launch. The breadth of attendance at that event gives a flavour of the organisations whose input is crucial when it comes to encouraging healthier choices amongst children: the Public Health Agency, the Food Standards Agency, the Belfast Food Network, Northern Ireland Environment Link, the Department of Justice, Eco-Schools, the Education for Sustainable Development Forum, the Health and Social Care Board and the Ulster Farmers' Union were there, to name but a few. Promoting healthier lifestyles amongst our children is not a stand-alone job for the Education Minister or the Health Minister. If we are to achieve the best results, there must be a combined effort across government with input from the private and voluntary sectors.

12.45 pm

Skills learned in childhood last a lifetime, and the pace of life seems to increase year on year, with quick-fix solutions often meaning that healthy lifestyle choices are given less thought than they should be. The choices made have a long-term consequence for families and, indeed, for the health service. Health choices have less prominence in the child's life and therefore less impact on them physically and mentally. On the flip side, promoting healthier living will have long-term positive benefits for families.

I thank the Members who tabled the motion and encourage the Finance Minister to support the concept of an approach to promoting healthier lifestyles amongst our children. That approach should include government, the private sector and the voluntary sector.

Mr Durkan: As health spokesperson for our party, I support the motion and the amendment. It is as health spokesperson that I have been appointed to speak on the motion, although I tried to extricate myself from doing so by arguing that this is much wider than a Department of Health issue. The presence of the Finance Minister to respond to the debate indicates that the Executive get that, which is to be welcomed.

What we have heard today demonstrates clearly that the key to reducing the massive, overwhelming pressure on

the health system lies not in the Department of Health but elsewhere. Education has a key role, and that is reflected in the motion and expanded on in the amendment. The statistic cited by Mr Lyttle and others — only 4% of children in school get the required amount of physical exercise — is shocking. Look at what happens in Scotland, home of the deep-fried Mars bar: compared with the exercise that they get, we really have an awful lot of catching up to do.

Mr F McCann: A Mars a day.

Mr Durkan: I know that Fra is a big fan. *[Laughter.]* The benefits of exercise are much more than physical. That does not apply just to young people, but it certainly applies to them in terms of the benefits to one's mental health. Young people learn when they are involved in sports, particularly team sports. They learn about social cohesion and how to interact with others. They learn the value of things such as teamwork that are invaluable as they go on in life. The link between —

Mr McNulty: Will the Member give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Members who tabled the motion. Last night, you may have seen Tomás Ó Sé, a guy whom I had the honour of playing football against, on 'Claire Byrne Live Extras'. Having identified a lack of education on diet and lack of exercise in primary schools, he has instigated a programme that is starting to educate young people about the sugar content of their food and the importance of exercise. It has had tremendously positive effects on young people, not alone on their health but on their self-esteem. The power of sport and exercise in developing kids and improving their health is enormous, and it is very positive in developing their self-esteem and character.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute. I remind Members that interventions are meant to be brief.

Mr Durkan: I thought that I might have got more than an extra minute for that one.

The link between exercise and healthy eating is inextricable. Much has been done in the area of healthy eating, such as what is available and on offer to young people in schools and, importantly, what is not.

While we have heard — the sugar tax might be a case in point — of increasing the price of foods that are deemed unhealthy, I would like to see us do more work to reduce the price of healthier foods, making them more accessible and certainly more affordable for young people. I know that there are young people in my constituency who are maybe four or five years old and have never eaten a banana or an apple. It is frightening to think that.

School is only part of the picture, and that is a point that Mr Lyttle made very well. I think that it is also reflected in a briefing I got from John McBride from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, who said that one in five children in the UK is overweight or obese by the time they start school. So, obviously, there is work to be done with parents through early years programmes. I always say that the early years are not quite Vegas, because whatever happens there does not stay there; it carries on throughout life.

More needs to be done to educate and empower parents. We have to recognise that there are challenges for parents bringing up children today, and any parents in the

Chamber will recognise the demands on them and the demands from children. Exercise is competing against TV and on-demand cartoons — you do not just have them for an hour a day any more — computers and consoles. Also, we have to recognise the pressures on children today. I think we have to be mindful that, while there is a lot of talk about obesity and children being overweight, we are also seeing huge, increased pressure on children — boys and girls — to have the perfect body, and we are seeing an increase in the number of young people — again, girls and boys — with eating disorders as a result and other mental health issues.

The importance of physical activity cannot be understated. The importance of a healthy and balanced diet is also huge. We have to do all we can to ensure that the next generation get both. Schools have a massive role to play, and we have to ensure that they get the support to do so. There are the Sure Start and early years programmes, which need to be supported too, as well as —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Durkan: — other external sporting and community organisations.

Mr O'Dowd: As my colleague Barry McElduff said, the principles behind this motion are very good. Who could argue against, first, a sugar tax? It has long been the practice of Government to set their social agenda either through taxation or legislation. Given the impact that sugar, particularly white sugar, is having on humanity, it is only right and proper that the Government try to shape attitudes towards it through taxation.

The question arises as to who should have the right to place that tax and how that tax is raised and spent. I firmly argue that that decision should be a matter for the Executive through tax-raising and tax-varying powers. However, the Westminster Government have introduced a tax, and they are telling the devolved institutions here, in Scotland and in Wales how that tax will be implemented and raised and what level it will be set at. I think that it would be foolish for us to move straight away, before we know the exact level of revenue that will be raised and the implications of ring-fencing it, to pass an Assembly motion that calls for the ring-fencing of approximately £18 million. I assume that that is per annum. That is quite a significant investment by the Executive, and we are going to call for it to be ring-fenced after a one-and-a-half-hour debate.

I know that there is a lot of research out there on the benefits of a sugar tax policy, and there is also research on the benefits of physical education, education and a well-educated workforce. I fully support the principle — a number of Members addressed this — that it is not solely the responsibility of the health service to look after the health and well-being of citizens: that is the responsibility of the entire Executive. If you have citizens in good jobs, living in good accommodation in good environments, who have access to leisure activities and are content in their lives, you will, by and large, have a healthier population than you would otherwise. However, if I am going to be asked to invest £18 million of public funds, or £14 million or £12 million or £10 million or whatever it turns out to be, in a specific area of our public services, then I want a policy to back it up. I want the research to back up the policy, and

then the money should follow all of that. We are putting the cart before the horse in these circumstances.

Unfortunately, our schools are underfunded because our Executive are underfunded. However, our schools are currently funded to provide physical education, and they also have access to a number of schemes and additional funding from the Department of Education to provide after-school activities, particularly in socially deprived areas, which can and should promote good health and well-being. If we are going to add an additional £18 million to that, then I want the policy and research to back that up.

There is a bigger fundamental question here in relation to how we set our Budgets. The Finance Minister sets the Budget on behalf of the Executive. The Executive agree the Budget. We have had much debate in recent months about a new style of Programme for Government which should have outcomes. To have outcomes from a Programme for Government, we need a Budget to back up those outcomes. The Programme for Government has not been decided on yet. The consultation is complete, and the Executive will come forward with a finalised Programme for Government and present it to the House. The fundamental question is this: why would we bring in the practice of ring-fencing Barnett consequentials ahead of our Programme for Government? That is the wrong way to do Budgets and the wrong way to do business.

Ms Lockhart: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes.

Ms Lockhart: I appreciate the way in which the Member has outlined his position, but my concern is that £18 million is not a significant amount of money in the grander scheme of things. I do not want to see this £18 million go into the ether and disappear. It needs to be quite a focused activity and programme.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Beidh nóiméad eile ag an gComhalta. The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr O'Dowd: I appreciate that the intentions behind the motion are good. There is no argument against the intentions of investing a tax to combat obesity into the health and well-being of our children. The principle behind it is good, but I want to put the £18 million in context. One million pounds will hire 30 teachers for a year, approximately 30 nurses for a year or, probably, 50 classroom assistants for a year. I know that when we get into the habit of talking in billions, millions seem irrelevant, but they do the task when you put them into the right order.

I fully appreciate the principle behind the motion and its intention, but if we are going to have a Programme for Government with outcomes, then the Budget has to follow the Programme for Government. That is the way that we should deal with our budgetary processes, through the order that is set out —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr O'Dowd: — so that the outcomes from the Programme for Government ensure that our young people have access to healthy lifestyles.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 1.00 pm 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 will resume after Question Time, and the next speaker will be Philip Smith.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.58 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Economy

Mr Speaker: We start with listed questions.

Lakeland Dairies: Banbridge Plant

1. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Economy what engagement his Department, or its agencies, have had with Lakeland Dairies in relation to the status and future viability of its Banbridge plant. (AQO 434/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I met with Mr Michael Hanley, the chief executive of Lakeland Dairies, in the immediate aftermath of the announcement regarding the Banbridge plant. In June 2014, Invest NI offered Armaghdown Creameries financial assistance of £750,000 in support of a £15.6 million capital investment project, which primarily involved the installation of equipment to enable the heat treatment of milk powder, the manufacture of products featuring low spores, and extending the shelf life of its product portfolio. Only £70,000 of the offer has been drawn down.

In August 2015, it was announced that Lakeland Dairies and the Fane Valley Group were in discussions to create a dairy joint venture with a view to enhancing economies of scale, improving efficiencies, and helping to underpin milk prices for dairy farmers. Following that announcement, Invest NI had extensive communication with Fane Valley regarding the implementation of the investment and amending the offer to allow the new proposed joint-venture company to avail of its support. An amendment to the offer was issued to Fane Valley in March 2016, allowing it to draw down the offer upon completion of the joint venture.

In May 2016, Invest NI became aware that the proposed joint venture had become a sale, with Lakeland Dairies acquiring Armaghdown Creameries and the milk pool outright. I, and my officials in Invest NI, have met Lakeland Dairies and offered to novate the letter of support on several occasions since then. In August, Lakeland Dairies announced a 30-day consultation on ceasing production in the winter months. Since the announcement of the consultation period, the employment service in my Department has actively engaged with Armaghdown Creameries. Out of the 70 employees, 57 have taken voluntary redundancy and three are being redeployed in the group.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Minister for his answer and his confirmation that there has been assistance offered to the previous and to the current owners through investment from Invest NI to secure the future of the plant. Is the Minister aware that there is speculation in the community, now that the plant is closed, that the seasonal operation will not reopen in the springtime of 2017? Will he ask Invest NI to redouble its efforts with the current owners to ensure that every option for investment in the plant is investigated and that the owners are aware that investment is on the table for them?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to point out, and I sought to do this in my answer, that we have made offers of support and that there is a history of making and remaking offers of support. In the meeting that I had with Mr Hanley immediately after the announcement, whilst looking into the history of the issue, I made it clear to him directly face to face that we would be prepared to look at the offer again, do whatever was required, and perhaps even enhance the support if it would secure employment at the Banbridge plant. That was not met with a favourable response on that occasion, not least because the scale of investment required in the plant far exceeds what the group is prepared to engage in.

As for rumours or talk in the local area, that is not something that I have heard, and it is certainly not what I have heard directly from the company. My understanding is that 10 employees have been retained on-site as a skeleton staff to keep the plant ticking over for the winter period before seasonal work comes back next year. That is what I have been told. The fact that 10 staff have been retained at least points positively in that direction, and clearly we will continue to engage, at my level and at an official level, with Lakeland Dairies to ensure that they do what they say they will do. If there is any further support that they want to avail of, we will meet that with a positive response by engaging with them to see whether there is anything we can do.

Mrs Dobson: Minister, you will be aware that I wrote to you in August on behalf of the Banbridge employees, many with over 20 years' service to the company, who were concerned about their future and that of their families. Does the Minister share my condemnation of a company from the Republic of Ireland purchasing the creamery to great fanfare in May only to close it in September? What steps will he take to avoid future piracy in the dairy industry?

Mr Hamilton: Those are very strong terms from the Member, and she is of course free to use those terms if she wants. I am not going to get into the business of condemning any business. I am concerned, and that is why I got involved in the issue immediately on hearing the news. I have concerns about how this has worked out and developed over recent months. I wanted to get involved directly in it and make that offer to the company that the support that was on the books was still there and, indeed, said that we would look at further support if that was something that the company wanted to avail itself of. I am not going to get into the business of condemning any company for decisions that they make when we are not in their position and cannot look at the fullness of the situation that they face. It is very easy for us to sit here and condemn them without understanding the entirety of what they had to deal with. My job is, first, to work with the now former employees to make sure that they have all the support that they require, but it is also to try to work with the company and indeed other companies to ensure that an agri-food sector in Northern Ireland that has been buoyant continues to flourish.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his very keen interest in this matter. I brought it to his attention when the news broke, and I really appreciate him coming down to the constituency and meeting the organisation. What steps are the Department's employment services taking to assist

the employees in Banbridge to find or prepare for new employment?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her question. I put on record my praise for her for being quick off the mark and inviting me down to her constituency to meet management from Lakeland Dairies. We did that a couple of days after the news first broke. The Member was there and can testify that all sorts of offers of support and assistance were made to the company, and those remain very much on the books.

My first priority is not to condemn the company but to ensure that the staff working at the Banbridge plant get all the support that they require in what is a very difficult time for them. Almost immediately, the employment services and Careers Service in my Department engaged with the staff at the Banbridge plant. They held a number of clinics to provide advice and support around job seeking, interview techniques, CV development and the sort of things that you would expect, as well as to provide information packs to guide them through what was a very difficult time for them.

As I mentioned in response to Mr O'Dowd, 57 staff have taken voluntary redundancy, three have been redeployed within the group, and 10 have been retained as a skeleton staff to maintain the factory. I understand that some of those who have taken voluntary redundancy have found employment elsewhere, particularly in the agri-food sector in the locality. We will continue to work with those staff and ensure that all of that support is available to them on an ongoing basis so that they can get back into the world of work as quickly as possible.

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that questions 2 and 9 have been withdrawn within the agreed limits.

Marching Bands: Tourism Potential

3. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for the Economy how he will ensure that the tourism potential of local marching bands is maximised. (AQO 436/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Since 2006, Tourism Northern Ireland has been working with the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland to help maximise the tourism potential of the flagship Twelfth parades. Tourism NI has worked in partnership with the flagship parades to provide tailored world host training. This training was specifically designed to facilitate engagement between marching bands and visitors. The aim was to equip parade participants with local product knowledge to enable them to maximise the tourism opportunity arising from local parades. This year, the Royal Black Institution's 13 July event at Scarva received support through the National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme and leveraged further funding through the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink tourism events scheme. This event and Twelfth of July celebrations and Orangefest were promoted on the Tourism Northern Ireland website discovernorthernireland.com.

Research tells us that international visitors are interested in our heritage and culture. Potential visitors to Northern Ireland are already looking for information to inform their travel decisions for 2017. It is therefore important that marching bands are integrated into the local tourism offer and to make sure that they are included in the 'What's On' events guide so that they can become a valuable part

of the overall tourism experience. Funding is available through the Tourism NI events fund, which is currently open for applications. I encourage any marching bands that are interested in showcasing themselves to a tourism market to apply to this fund, providing that they meet the criteria.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Minister, you referred to Scarva. You are well familiar with the demonstration and event that takes place there each and every year, with an attendance of up to 100,000 people and many bands participating. What is your assessment of Scarva's tourism potential?

Mr Hamilton: Mr Speaker, if I may, I want to put on the record my sadness at the passing of Drew Nelson, which we learned of in the past 24 hours. A lot of the positive work being taken forward by the Orange Institution and the loyal orders owes a lot to Drew, particularly the development of the tourism potential of the institution and our loyal orders. If it had not been for Drew and his leadership, that would not have happened. We mourn his passing and will certainly miss his leadership in the Orange Institution and the wider family of loyal orders.

To answer Mr Anderson's question, there is huge potential for Scarva, which is a very special event. The Member will be able to testify that it is an excellent day out. The best marching bands from across Northern Ireland and further afield come to Scarva on 13 July. You have the sham fight taking place in a lovely setting in what is a beautiful village for it. That potential is measured by the fact that, in 2015 and again in 2016 — the Member knows Scarva very well: it is a very small village — around 100,000 people visited Scarva on 13 July. It is an event with huge numbers, and that brings with it huge potential. That is why, in the 2015-16 financial year, Tourism NI backed the event for the first time to the tune of £20,000, with a further £15,000 this year. It is why we are using it to market the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink as well. I want to see that potential developed further with infrastructure, particularly around car parking and perhaps seating for the event, and I want to try to attract tour buses to get people to Scarva for the day. It is a huge event that is very successful already, and I look forward to working with the Royal Black Institution to take it further.

Mr Butler: I welcome the Minister's comments thus far and his willingness to work with the Department for Communities in support of marching bands and a tourism strategy. Will he further undertake to ensure that the Ulster-Scots Agency is suitably supported to ensure that this important area of our Northern Irish culture is fully recognised?

Mr Hamilton: I absolutely agree with the Member. He is right: it is not entirely my Department's responsibility or duty to develop the tourism potential of either marching bands or Ulster-Scots heritage and culture. It spans a lot of Departments. The Member mentions the Department for Communities, and I am glad that the Minister for Communities has reintroduced the scheme to support the purchase of musical instruments by marching bands. I think that is around £200,000 a year.

The Member is right about the need to work with the Ulster-Scots Agency, and we have a very good relationship with it in the Department and through Tourism NI. I have already had some discussions during my time in office

about how we can expand the potential. I mentioned some of the areas in which support had been given through Tourism NI, but support has also been given to the Belfast Tattoo, which is a hugely successful event now — it is now almost a fixed event in our calendar — as well as various pipe band championships. Some people maybe have a fixed view — an unfortunately fixed view — of marching bands, but the Member and other Members will appreciate that it goes much broader. It is quite a broad and expansive culture, and I am pleased that Tourism NI has continued to support it. I want it to do a lot more of that and develop it much further into the years ahead.

Mr Murphy: I am tempted to ask the Minister how he can minimise the impact of some of the marching bands on our tourism product. Nonetheless, at the moment, I am sure, he will be putting together his tourism strategy, through which we hope to see a significant upturn in the number of visitors and the input from tourism into the local economy. Has he been able to come up with a cost for a successful tourism strategy and presented it to the Executive?

Mr Hamilton: I am sure that the Member will agree with me that we should celebrate all our culture in Northern Ireland. People from outside Northern Ireland are interested in our culture, and, through Tourism NI and, indeed, Tourism Ireland, we have been trying to market and promote that so that, regardless of what part of the world people are from and what their family background is, there is something here that they will be interested in. We want that to be developed, professional and world-class, and we want there to be something for everyone. I am sure that the Member would agree that we must do that. It must also be part of any tourism strategy.

2.15 pm

The Member is right that the Department is in the process of developing a tourism strategy for Northern Ireland. I want it to be ambitious. In the last number of years, we have seen significant growth in our tourism sector. In the last year, we recorded the highest ever level of external visitors to Northern Ireland, and I want to push on and build on that recent success. That will require some bold vision for tourism in Northern Ireland. We already have some fantastic products, such as Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway, and lots of other parts of our tourism infrastructure have been developing positively and attracting people from around the world. We need to be bold and imaginative with hotels and air links and how we can further develop our infrastructure. It was great to see the Heaney HomePlace opening last week. That is another thing that adds to our overall tourism product.

The Member is right to identify that that will come at some cost, and I have been considering that cost with officials. I have not yet put a final figure on that, and it will obviously depend on what resources are available. A sector proven to be doing well is one that the Executive and, indeed, the Assembly as a whole would want to support, particularly if there is a bold, ambitious and forward-looking tourism strategy that we can all follow.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. May I add to the tourist event that is Scarva the Orange pageant at Carrickfergus Castle? Sadly, Minister, there is a very dark and sometimes very negative side to some bands and, indeed, to organisations that march around the Province of Northern Ireland. What actions will you take

to deal with the negative image that many of these events conjure up? I encourage you to support events such as the Orange pageant in Carrickfergus and others that send out a more positive signal.

Mr Hamilton: I am very familiar with the Orange pageant in Carrickfergus. I have attended it a couple of times over the last number of years. It is a great day out, a great family day out. I also attend it to see David Hilditch dressed in period costume. Members, it is worth it for that alone. I encourage Members on all sides of the House to attend just to see David dressed as the Mayor of Carrickfergus, which, of course, he was in recent times.

Mr Lyons: The king of Carrickfergus.

Mr Hamilton: "The king of Carrickfergus", somebody said. That is probably a more appropriate title.

It is a great event. Perhaps the Member or others have encouraged this: they look at events on all sides of our culture that hit the headlines for the wrong reasons, but they are few and far between. The Member will be aware that a vast number — the overwhelming majority — of loyal order parades throughout the year pass off peacefully and without incident. Sometimes we forget that. That is particularly so around the Twelfth, 13 July and other significant dates in our marching season. They are family events and have been increasingly so over the last number of years, and that has been to do with the far-sighted vision and leadership of people such as Drew Nelson. We owe it to him and his legacy to continue with that work over the next number of years.

I do not have a musical note in my head, but I admire the dedication of the people in our marching bands, who, weekend after weekend and throughout the week, practise and then go out to display their talent. We should acknowledge it as something that people are dedicated to, and wonderful discipline comes from that. If there is a tourism benefit, as I believe there is, we should seek to exploit that to the maximum.

Global Air Links

4. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline any discussions his Department is having to increase global air links from Northern Ireland. (AQO 437/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Air connectivity is an important driver of economic growth in Northern Ireland and provides access to key markets for investment, exports and tourism. I am keen to support our airports to improve Northern Ireland's air connectivity, particularly where a route can provide benefits to the wider economy. For example, we have provided support to United Airlines to secure Northern Ireland's only transatlantic connection to the United States, and the Executive have announced a £7 million package for the north-west to assist with the development and growth of the City of Derry Airport.

I am encouraged by the recent growth of 8% in the number of passengers passing through Northern Ireland's airports in the year to March 2016. I look forward to seeing that trend continue in line with economic conditions and seeing increased air connectivity from Northern Ireland. I welcome recent positive developments in the sector, including the establishment of a Ryanair base at Belfast

International and the launch of a new connection to Brussels from Belfast City Airport.

Belfast has also been successful in its bid to host Routes Europe in April 2017; it is a major aviation conference that brings together decision makers from airlines, airports and tourism authorities.

My officials are in regular contact with all Northern Ireland's airports to support them in their route development endeavours. We are exploring all options to expand our air access by developing strategic links to promote economic and tourism development in Northern Ireland. I will consider any proposal for a route with business or inbound tourism potential that can benefit our economy.

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Did he use the opportunity of his recent visit to the United Arab Emirates to seek to develop an air route from Northern Ireland to the Middle East? I thank him for mentioning Eglinton as well.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I was pleased that the Executive were able to come forward with a package of support for City of Derry Airport, which is an incredibly important gateway to the north-west. Whilst the airport has had some difficulties, I hope that the package will attract in a new airline or airlines and enhance connectivity to the north-west.

The short answer to the Member's question on whether I used the opportunity of my visit to the Middle East last week to promote and to seek to develop air connectivity to Northern Ireland is that I did. The issue came up, even without my pushing it, time and time again, particularly in conversation with people from Northern Ireland who are doing business in the Middle East. They see the huge potential of exporting into the region, as we discussed in our debate on trade and exports yesterday. Whilst there are other connections that they can take, they know that there is huge potential not only for tourism — Middle East tourists tend to be very high spenders and travel in large groups — but for business. If we had a direct connection to the Middle East, there would be huge opportunities to grow trade as a result.

I am fully aware of the importance of air links, and not just from the point of view of tourism, outbound or inbound: routes with bigger planes, in particular, are hugely important for boosting trade. We made some very useful contacts when we were in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, both of which are home to major airlines that continue to grow. I want to make sure that we are talking to key decision makers in those airlines over the coming months. Contact was made in the past, but I want to ensure that, as they seek to expand further, they hear from Belfast and City of Derry about tourism and trade potential in Northern Ireland.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. I place on record my gratitude for the Executive's intervention and investment in City of Derry Airport. Will the Minister inform the House whether he or the Executive have any plans, working in conjunction with Derry City and Strabane District Council, to encourage and increase the use of City of Derry Airport?

Mr Hamilton: The Member will know better than me of the challenges facing that airport over the last number of years. It was regrettable that Ryanair pulled out of City of Derry, albeit moving a lot of operations to Belfast

International, which bolsters that airport. Clearly, we want connectivity to be maintained into the north-west, which is why the Executive were innovative and bold in doing what we did and in putting a mixed package of support forward for City of Derry Airport. We want to work very closely with it and the council. There has been a lot of contact with the council over the last number of weeks to try to attract in another airline or several airlines to solidify and affirm the position of City of Derry Airport and increase connectivity from the region.

The Member referred to our "intervention", and, over the last number of months, I came to a quick and firm view that, while these airports are not our responsibility — they are private entities that are not in our ownership — we as an Executive need to be a little bit more interventionist sometimes and not heed the advice of others. We need to be directly involved in trying to attract routes to Northern Ireland. It is my experience that, if we are not involved, we do not win; everybody else is getting directly involved and intervening. If Northern Ireland does not see its airports as strategic assets, we will not win, succeed or increase connectivity, and nor will we get the benefits in inbound tourism or trade that we hope for and expect.

Mr Aiken: Would the Minister like to see how the aviation sector could be appropriately incentivised, given suitable business cases, to encourage the establishment of additional air routes, particularly to North America and Europe? I welcome the news about the Middle East. While he is doing that, I would also like the Minister, along with his Executive colleagues, to urgently investigate what many consider to be the unfair and uncompetitive practices that are now being adopted by the Dublin Airport Authority. In supporting increased global air links, will he support the scrapping —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to come to his question.

Mr Aiken: — of air passenger duty (APD) and the improvement of road and rail links?

Mr Hamilton: I think that I counted about three questions there, Mr Speaker. I will try my best to answer them in the time that is available to me.

Again, there is a perception, perhaps, that we are not doing well in attracting air routes. We have always got to remember that this is a small region with a population of 1.8 million. It will be difficult to attract and have the volume of traffic, whether that be from tourism or trade, to justify routes to all parts of the world. That is why it is important that we are strategic in seeking routes to important areas. That is why I said in response to Mr Robinson's question that the Middle East is a gateway to that broader region and, indeed, into the Far East. It is an incredibly important place that we should be working on.

In recent times, we have attracted direct flights to Brussels and Amsterdam out of the City Airport and to Berlin and Milan out of the International Airport. There has been success in attracting routes, particularly into key markets. It was interesting that, when I was up at the International Airport welcoming the Berlin route, there were as many people coming from Germany to Northern Ireland as going out to it. It was not one of these routes whereby people leave Northern Ireland, spend their money there and come back; it was one where there was two-way traffic.

Those routes have been secured in spite of air passenger duty, which has obviously been waived at a cost to the Executive for long-haul flights. It is disappointing that, with the exception of a few charters, that has not yielded a permanent long-haul route over and above the United Airlines flight to Newark. Clearly, work continues to target key routes into places like Canada and the Middle East, as I have mentioned. I will continue to do that and to have all the conversations that I possibly can to try to attract various airlines. Indeed, I have already had some.

I think that APD should be scrapped. It works against peripheral regions like Northern Ireland. It is incumbent upon Her Majesty's Government to do in Northern Ireland what they have done with the highlands and islands of Scotland and scrap it specifically for that. They should take the burden for doing that, having introduced it in the first place.

Ms Archibald: The Minister mentioned United Airlines in his previous answer. How has his Department ensured that there is value for money from the Executive's contribution to ensuring that the link between Belfast and the USA is sustained?

Mr Hamilton: We were faced with a very difficult set of circumstances, as the Member will appreciate and understand. Back in the summer, with the threat of the imminent withdrawal of our only transatlantic flight, I took the decision, which was backed and supported by the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and indeed other Members in the House, that it was too important to Northern Ireland to let it go and lose it. We obviously offered the support that we did. I took a very clear view very quickly that Northern Ireland needed to retain its only direct transatlantic route, but I also take the view, as I mentioned in response to other Members, that we need to work very hard to ensure that it is not our only transatlantic route or direct long-haul route to key strategic markets. Work will continue to develop other routes, as well as trying to ensure that the United Airlines flight remains.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Allister for a quick question and a quick response from the Minister.

Mr Allister: Has the Minister any concerns that the generosity of the Executive's multi-million-pound bailout for the Newark route will leave us hostage to similar expectations and pressure from other operators and future operators?

Mr Hamilton: I am sure that the Member asked the question having not wanted to lose the direct transatlantic flight to Newark. As I mentioned in the previous answer, we were faced with a very difficult and challenging set of circumstances back in the summer. We took the decision that we did. There was a broad team approach, both from the private sector and across the political sector, to taking that decision. I believe that we did the right thing. Some may disagree with that, but I think that it was fundamentally the right thing to do to maintain Northern Ireland's only direct transatlantic route.

2.30 pm

I am willing to work with any and all operators to develop routes from Northern Ireland, particularly to key strategic markets, and I want to be a bit more directly involved and interventionist in doing that, as it is clear to me that other regions do it. If we want to increase and enhance our connectivity — I am sure that everybody in all corners

of the House would agree that that is a good thing for Northern Ireland — we will have to be more directly involved in doing that. I have already had engagement with some airlines, and, indeed, with all the airports, and I look forward to more over the weeks and months ahead. Hopefully, that will bear fruit in more routes from Belfast and from City of Derry.

Mr Speaker: Members, that ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Medical School: North-west

T1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for the Economy whether he has had any discussions, either with his colleague the Health Minister or the university, about the establishment of a medical school in the north-west. (AQT 316/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any discussions in my current position with the Minister or with the colleagues whom the Member mentions, although it is something that I am familiar with from my time as Health Minister. I am seeking to draw on my knowledge from that time.

There was a very good proposal, although it was in its infancy and early stages and required significant development by the university, to open a graduate medical school in the north-west. That was a good and positive thing that could address two issues in particular. One was high locum costs in the Western Trust area — I have now reverted quickly to my previous role, as the Member will notice — and an issue with general practice, which was raised by Paula Bradley in the House yesterday. Those issues are pertinent to the Western Trust area.

I have not had the discussions that the Member has had, but I expect that we will have discussions as the university develops its plans and ideas for a graduate medical school in the north-west.

Mr Durkan: I recall in a previous role words of support for this proposal from the Minister. Can the Minister now give the Assembly an assurance of his commitment to making this medical school a reality?

Mr Hamilton: I will give the same view now as I did when I was Health Minister, which is that I very much support in principle the idea of developing a graduate medical school in the north-west, as it made sense for the health reasons that I mentioned. Obviously, that has to be done in connection with available finances and all the requisite business cases and so forth. In principle, however, absolutely it is something that I support, and I look forward to working with the university, and, indeed, colleagues to make it happen.

Manufacturing Sector: BRES Assessment

T2. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for the Economy for his thoughts on the recently published annual business register and employment survey's (BRES) assessment of the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland. (AQT 317/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The manufacturing sector has been the subject of debates, discussions and questions in the House over the last number of months. The survey and the register show very good results for the sector. I reiterate that I would not come to the House and dismiss

for a second issues such as the impact of the loss of 200 to 250 jobs at Caterpillar, which will affect the Member's constituency, or, indeed, at Bombardier or some of the other well-publicised job losses, particularly in the Ballymena area. I would not for a second say that they were unimportant; they have had serious and significant impacts, particularly for the people affected. However, as I have said in the House, and publicly as well, it belies a positive trend in the overall manufacturing sector, and the register shows that clearly.

There was an overall increase in Northern Ireland of some 7,750 jobs, which is 1.1%, between September 2014 and September 2015. In the manufacturing sector in particular, which we are told is a sunset sector and is on its way out, there was an increase of 3,162 manufacturing jobs over that one-year period, which is a 4.1% increase. Interestingly, the construction sector, again a sector that has struggled, was up by over 4% as well.

Notwithstanding the impact of job losses in Caterpillar, Bombardier and elsewhere, it is continued good news for Northern Ireland, especially in manufacturing. It is interesting to see that it is areas like mid-Ulster and the west of the Province that have the highest percentage of manufacturing jobs in the whole of Northern Ireland. Again, that belies an impression that many would have. We have to continue to work closely with our manufacturing sector to ensure that we can not only mitigate the impact of those job losses but actually continue to grow our sector in the way that we have been doing over the last number of years.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I welcome the positive news, irrespective of some of the negative, large announcements that have been made recently. What does the register say about the wider labour market in Northern Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: The overall picture is a good one. Data from September 2014 to September 2015 show a 1.1% increase in overall employment levels; that is a good thing and is to be celebrated. It follows more recent data that show that the employment levels continue to rise and are at the highest level since 2009.

One of the most interesting statistics that you can draw from the register this year is the public/private sector balance, or rather rebalance. The Member will be familiar, as a member of the Finance Committee, that the Executive have been focused in the last number of years on rebalancing our economy. It is good to see in the register that, over the year, there was a decrease in public-sector employment by 2.6% and a commensurate increase in private sector employment, also of 2.6%. The net increase was approximately 8,000 more jobs in the private sector rather than in the public sector; that is good news. It shows that the Executive's policy of rebalancing the economy is working.

It is in the news today, with the report on the voluntary exit scheme. The Member will know that I was involved in that. As Finance Minister, I helped to develop and implement that policy. It was new. It was novel. It was innovative. There are a lot of people in the House, and in the media, who want us to be bold and innovative, but then, when we are bold and innovative, they want to talk it down. This is a policy that worked.

I can remember sitting in TV studios and being asked, "What will you do when this does not work? What will you do when you don't get enough people coming forward?"

Here we are now with an Audit Office report coming forward saying that this has been a success and it has worked. We will have to continue to be bold and brave in the public sector over the next number of years in government. I will certainly do that, and I know that my Executive colleagues will continue to be innovative in dealing with the many challenges that we face.

Employees: Private Companies

T3. **Mr Kearney** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the safeguards that are in place to protect the rights and conditions of workers who are employed by private companies such as Concentrix that attract multimillion pound contracts and grants from our job creation agencies to secure public-sector contracts. (AQT 318/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am obviously aware of the particular issues that there have been with Concentrix. Concentrix has been successful in growing its company in Northern Ireland over the last number of years. It is putting down roots in Belfast through the redevelopment of the Maysfield site, and I want to encourage that company to continue to grow. It is facing particular issues, as the Member knows, around tax credits and payments. I have been in contact with the company and its head here in Northern Ireland. It has been following the instructions given to it by HMRC. It is the unfortunate victim, I believe, of the fallout of some political criticism of the contract. That does not take away from the impact that it has had on individuals. I certainly dealt with the impact in my constituency, and I am sure that the Member has dealt with the impact as well.

On the particular issues that the Member raised in respect of safeguards, I will take that away and will write back to the Member. I do not want to give him a half-hearted or indeed a wrong answer here now. I would rather give him a comprehensive and full answer on the issues that he has raised.

Mr Kearney: I would appreciate that feedback, Minister, and thank you for that. As you know, it is a matter of very serious public interest. Staying in that vein, will you support the call from the Public and Commercial Services Union for an official inquiry into the established failings of the contract that you mentioned between HMRC and Concentrix?

Mr Hamilton: It is very much a matter for HMRC to decide what it wants to do. It is a stand-alone Department in terms of governance within the United Kingdom Government. It is doing various inquiries and inspections into the overall contract. I know Concentrix; I know the company. The Member's party colleague the Finance Minister attended the official launch of the new development down at Maysfield.

It is a company that has gone from strength to strength in Northern Ireland, and I want to see that continue. Obviously, it has borne the brunt of the issue that it had with the HMRC tax credit contract. I want to work with the company to see that it comes through that and continues to put down firm roots in Northern Ireland and grow its employment here.

Community Facilities

T4. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for the Economy what support he is providing to increase the provision of community facilities, given that he will be aware that

community classes that are offered in church halls, Orange halls and community halls by our six local further and higher education colleges are a lifeline to many who live and work in isolated rural areas. (AQT 319/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I entirely agree with the Member about the very important role that community providers play in learning and skills development in our community. I saw that quite early on in my term when I visited the Shankill Women's Centre at the invitation of Diane Dodds and William Humphrey. I saw for myself the fantastic work that they are doing there. What struck me were the stories that I heard from participants in a wide range of courses. These were people who had not perhaps had the best experience in formal education, who felt that they were pushed outside of the system and who found it difficult to come back inside. It was a big step for them to go back into any form of education. One story in particular shone through for me. It was from a young lady who had a family of four but had gone back into education. Having had very few qualifications, she had picked up more and was now applying to study midwifery at Queen's. It is that sort of community-based education story that we do not hear enough of, and, having seen it at first hand, it is an area that I want to support through the Department.

I am aware that colleges provide services in the various settings that the Member mentioned, and I want to see more of that happen. I do not think that enough of it happens. We have perhaps not been as supportive of community-based educators in recent times as we should have been.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Given that, without those courses, many, as he said, would be unlikely to enrol on campus-based education courses, does the Minister appreciate the stepping-stone effect that community education can give to further study? What help is he providing colleges with to measure the impact of community courses and better target provision for rural areas?

Mr Hamilton: I will write to the Member specifically about the levels of support, impact and positive benefit that it has produced, and I am sure that it will be positive. I accept that it does not always show up that easily in a lot of the measurements that we use, but the real benefit is in exactly what the Member and I have been talking about: hard-to-reach people in hard-to-reach communities who are able to take the first step back into education, with confidence, in their own community setting and with their peers. Clearly, it is a first step. If they want to reach a certain level, particularly degree level, they cannot do all their education in a community setting, but it certainly breaks the ice for them to be able to do some of their early-stage qualifications there. I want to encourage more of that to happen and use all available funding measures at our disposal to ensure that there is more going on in a community setting than is currently the case.

NIE: East Londonderry Outages

T5. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for the Economy to raise with NIE the case of a business in the East Londonderry constituency that is experiencing regular outages and has made very little progress with NIE to resolve the issue. (AQT 320/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I appreciate that the Member may not want to go into detail in the House, but if he writes to me with details of the case, I will be happy to take it up with NIE on his constituent's behalf. The Member asked me — a couple of weeks ago, I think — about BT and has raised the issue of NIE. He knows that they are both regulated industries so they are not directly accountable to me. They are not my responsibility. Even so, I hear a lot about them from Members such as him and in direct correspondence from businesses. I am currently hearing from landowners in different parts of Northern Ireland, particularly in County Tyrone, who are experiencing difficulties with NIE working, or wanting to work, on their land. When he had me in the west of the Province, in Omagh, Mr Buchanan took the opportunity to take me to some landowners who were experiencing some difficulties with NIE. It was not that they had objections to what was being done; it was the manner in which it was being done. I am meeting NIE this week, and I want to raise some cases that Mr Buchanan, and other Members, have raised with me. I am happy to raise the Member's issue as well, if he brings it to my attention in more detail.

2.45 pm

Mr Speaker: We have time for a quick supplementary and a quick response.

Mr McQuillan: Minister, can you update the House on your plans to ensure energy security for Northern Ireland in the future?

Mr Hamilton: I look at all the issues facing the economy in Northern Ireland, and there are many challenges facing Northern Ireland and our business community, but perhaps the biggest is energy, not just the price, particularly for higher users, but the security of supply. It affects our competitiveness, and it is particularly affecting our manufacturing businesses. I do not want to be alarmist and start talking about the lights going out, but I have concerns about future generation capacity in Northern Ireland.

We have to have a big, open, honest conversation about future energy policy in Northern Ireland, a conversation that has to touch on grid infrastructure, generation capacity, interconnection, storage and future renewables policy. In answer to the Member, who is behind me, all of that must be wrapped in an envelope of what we can do to make it as affordable as possible, particularly for big energy users in Northern Ireland. There are some potentially tough decisions within all of that, but we have to have that big, open, honest conversation about future energy policy, and I want to kick-start that in the not-too-distant future.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. We now move to questions to the Minister of Education. Before I call Mr Harold McKee, I inform the House that question 14 has been withdrawn.

Education

Teachers and Ancillary Staff

1. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Education to outline what role his Department has in the employment of teachers and ancillary staff in schools. (AQO 446/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): I thank the Member for his question. The Department of Education is not the

employer of teachers or ancillary staff in schools. The role of my Department in the employment of teachers relates to their terms and conditions, which are negotiated through the forum of the teachers' negotiating committee, at which my Department is represented. Teachers' terms and conditions, including pay, are negotiated through that committee. That applies to all teachers in grant-aided schools. My Department is responsible for approving the teacher appointment schemes of the Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

My Department has no role in the employment of ancillary staff. Arrangements for the terms and conditions of ancillary staff employed by the Education Authority (EA) are negotiated through the joint negotiating council. We have a smaller role on that council — my Department has observer status — than on the teaching side.

Arrangements for the terms and conditions of other ancillary staff are a matter for the individual boards of governors, and my Department has no role.

Mr McKee: Thank you, Minister, for your answer thus far. According to the DUP manifesto, the party is committed to ending the article 71 exemption for teaching in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order. What plan does the Minister have put this into action?

Mr Weir: Strictly speaking, that would lie outside my direct jurisdiction. I agree that article 71 needs to be removed. The legislation responsible for that does not lie within the Department of Education, it lies within the Executive Office. There is ongoing work to deal with that. It has previously been highlighted by, for instance, the Equality Commission. The legislation to repeal that — to try to ensure that we have a level playing field in teacher employment — lies within the Executive Office rather than the Department of Education. However, it is important that we reach a situation in which we move on any artificial barriers to employment, particularly an exclusion that is, I think, a relic of the past.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. Will he update the Chamber on what actions he has taken to address the lengthy precautionary suspensions of staff that are costing the Executive millions of pounds a year?

Mr Weir: It is important to note that, as the Department does not employ teachers directly, it is not directly involved in employment matters, including precautionary suspensions. Teachers are employed by the relevant boards of governors, and employment decisions, such as precautionary suspensions, are taken by individual boards of governors. We monitor all cases of precautionary suspension, paying due regard to the role of the employer. From February of this year, accounting officers in the employing authorities have been asked to provide the Department's chief accounting officer with governance and accountability reviews. That means that all such cases have been subject to monthly case review and that necessary action has been taken. It is an ongoing issue.

Decisions on precautionary suspension are not taken arbitrarily; they are taken by employers, which is the board of governors in consultation with the relevant employing authorities. Again, the Department is not the relevant employing authority, so we do not have a role or a power to intervene directly. We can try, where possible, to influence. Suspensions here tend to be a lot less frequent compared with other jurisdictions; there is greater security of tenure

of positions. Ultimately, it is up to individual boards of governors and employing authorities. At best, we can try to be an influencer for progress and for good rather than having a direct intervention role.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. What is his Department doing to tackle long-term staff suspensions and their cost to school budgets?

Mr Weir: There is a potential cost to school budgets on that basis. We all have to ensure, particularly as schools are under a high level of pressure with the aggregated schools budget, that those are kept to a minimum. As I said, our problem is that the terms and conditions lie outside the control of the Department, so we are trying to influence and send a positive signal to schools about the need to deal with precautionary suspensions, in particular, as swiftly as possible. When talking about precautionary suspensions, while due process always has to follow in those circumstances, it is in nobody's interest, whether it is the school, the budgetary position or the teacher who has received a precautionary suspension, for that to drag on any longer than is necessary. To be fair to schools, I do not think that they would take the significant step of precautionary suspension — there may be circumstances in which children need to be protected — very lightly. Most schools act in a very responsible manner. When there is a precautionary suspension, that decision is weighed very carefully before action is taken.

Mr Kearney: Thank you, Minister, for your answers so far. Will you give us an update on the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme, please?

Mr Weir: The scheme has received Executive approval. The previous Minister mooted something quite similar. The Executive have agreed that it will go forward on the basis of a pilot scheme for 2016-17, with about 120 eligible posts. There has been an indication from at least one person of a potential legal challenge. We will have to see whether that comes forward. There is a great opportunity. To be fair, it has been welcomed by the teaching workforce and, in particular, the trade unions as a positive way forward. The principal aim is to refresh the teaching workforce, but it will also benefit school budgets.

There is a longer-term issue with the profile of our teaching workforce and a concern as to whether the number coming through teacher training exceeds the number of posts available. That will need to be tackled in a wider context. Even if the Executive were in a position today to announce any change on that, you would be talking about people entering teacher training who would potentially graduate in a few years' time. It would be five to 10 years before you would see any benefit. I am acutely aware of the situation where we have a large number of recently qualified teachers who are not able to gain posts, and this is a potential win-win opportunity to enable some more newly qualified teachers to enter the profession while being able to release, on an entirely voluntary basis, some teachers who are between 55 and 59. That not only has to be applied for by that individual but has to be approved by the school, because some schools will take a view that they do not want to let particular members of staff go.

Schools: ETI Ratings

2. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Education how many schools are rated by the Education and Training Inspectorate as either very good or outstanding. (AQO 447/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for the question. The Education and Training Inspectorate, which is more commonly referred to as the ETI, has a statutory function to monitor, inspect and report on the standard of education in schools on behalf of the Department of Education, to promote the highest standards of education in the interests of the pupils. Inspection ensures that best practice is highlighted and shared and poor provision is identified, supported and improved, and it contributes to building capacity for ongoing improvement.

The current inspection data shows that, over a seven-year period from 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2016, 504 schools, 428 of which were primary schools and 76 post-primary schools, have been rated by the Education and Training Inspectorate as either “Very good” or “Outstanding”. I also note that, from 1 September 2015, ETI changed its “Overall effectiveness” reporting model from a six-point scale to a four-point scale, which, hopefully, will make it more accessible. The descriptors for overall effectiveness of “Very good” or “Outstanding” were amalgamated and became a new conclusion for overall effectiveness known as “High level of capacity for sustained improvement”.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. I take the opportunity to congratulate a school in my constituency — Bocombra Primary School in Portadown — which recently received an “Outstanding” rating from the Education and Training Inspectorate. What is the Department’s approach to raising standards in our schools?

Mr Weir: First, I join with all schools that have received good reports. As MLAs, we are glad that there is no training inspectorate for us to rate whether we are good, outstanding or otherwise. I am sure that all Members would fly through with flying colours in that regard.

The Department’s school improvement policy, Every School a Good School, sets out an overarching approach to raising standards and tackling underachievement in all schools. It focuses on promoting factors that local and international evidence tell us are the core characteristics of a school. It aims to support school leaders, boards of governors and teachers in implementing good practice in their school, to address any barriers to learning that pupils might face and to improve outcomes for all pupils. One of the things that we sometimes forget when the focus is very much on delivery in schools is that the ultimate goal of all this is to ensure that we get good results for all our pupils. They should be the ultimate focus.

Alongside the work of teachers, school leaders, boards of governors and the managing authority, inspection, I believe, is a critical component of school improvement. The Department’s school improvement policy and inspection service are already closely aligned, with both being focused on promoting improvement in the interests of all learners. That alignment is not just something that is written in documents; its procedures have been introduced to follow up on all published inspection reports so that outstanding or very good practice can be shared,

areas for further improvement identified and addressed and, where provision is less than satisfactory, additional support provided. Every School a Good School states that sustained improvement comes from within a school, and inspection is really a catalyst and enabler for improvement. There is a strong link between internal self-examination and external assessment undertaken through inspection so that, hopefully, an inspection becomes a continuum of improvement; it is not something that simply sits apart from the work that is ongoing in the school.

3.00 pm

Mrs Barton: Thank you, Minister, for your answers so far. Will you indicate how schools in the formal intervention process are being supported to achieve the standard expected by the inspectors and needed by our young people, when a large number of the support staff have exited the EA by the voluntary exit scheme?

Mr Weir: In terms of the support available, and mention has been made of the EA and the voluntary exit scheme, at the end of the day, we have to have a financial regime that is as beneficial as possible to all schools. In many ways, if the choice is between making some level of cuts within the EA or ensuring that money goes to the front-line services, I think that is what has to happen.

I think all schools should be receiving support, but there is, obviously, a limited level of resources. However, the focus has always been on providing post-inspection support to schools that are eligible for it through the formal intervention process. In the formal intervention process, we try to focus in those finite resources. They are prioritised to where the need is greatest and the capacity for self-improvement needs support. I think it is about having a working exercise between the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the individual school to raise those standards and address the individual problems. To slightly adjust a previous line, you can say that:

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

Where there are any problems in schools, they can sometimes be for a myriad of reasons. Different problems may need to be addressed, so it is about addressing those individual problems.

We should always focus on the fact that, in formal intervention — I appreciate this from the school’s point of view — a school will have a feeling that it is damaging to its reputation, so it is difficult on that basis. But the focus always should be about providing help to pupils. If help is needed, it needs to go in by formal intervention, but that is obviously very much a last step in self-improvement.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Education Committee, Mr Barry McElduff.

Mr McElduff: Mr Anderson’s question relates to how schools are rated by the inspectorate. My question is this: who rates the inspectorate? Who inspects the inspectorate — the ETI? Is there an argument to be made that the Education and Training Inspectorate could perhaps be independent?

Mr Speaker: That is three questions, Mr McElduff.

Mr Weir: With testing in schools, sometimes we are faced with multiple-choice questions, and you can give a range

of answers. I appreciate that the Chair has given me a range of questions.

I think the ETI has held up to strong scrutiny. If we are simply to have bodies monitoring other bodies that are monitoring others, there is a danger of having the situation you sometimes see in films of gazing into a mirror in the funfair, with images stretching into infinity. A report was brought out — I am not claiming credit for it; it was largely before my time or the Chair's — that had recommendations on one of the areas on which the ETI is held to account by the Education Committee. In the last mandate, the Education Committee brought out a report on inspection and training with a large focus particularly on the ETI. It brought into place 16 recommendations, I think, of which 11 were directly for the ETI itself. I understand that all 11 recommendations have been implemented. I could list the 11 key changes, but shortage of time would preclude such an answer. The other recommendations fall to the Department, and I think they are being implemented as well. There is a key role for the Department and, in particular, the Committee, on this. Given the educational and financial constraints, I do not believe it would be particularly good value for public money to be setting up an additional body to scrutinise those who are scrutinising the schools, because we might be moving into a situation of observation ad infinitum.

Entitlement Framework

3. Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education for an update on the future of the entitlement framework. (AQO 448/16-21)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his question. The entitlement framework remains an important component of the statutory curriculum. It is designed to ensure that all learners in Key Stage 4 and post-16 have access to a broad and balanced range of economically relevant and individually engaging courses. The majority of schools are meeting, or are very close to meeting, the entitlement framework requirements in full. That is a significant achievement in challenging times, and I am anxious that we retain and build upon the benefits that have been accrued so far. I will be considering the way forward for the entitlement framework over the coming weeks, including the statutory requirements.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he be more specific on the current rate of compliance with the entitlement framework?

Mr Weir: OK. Currently, to give perspective to this, schools are required to offer at least 24 courses at Key Stage 4, and 27 in the post-16 category. In addition, at least one third of the courses offered must be general and one third applied; that is the minimum figure. The most recent figures available are that 66% of schools fully meet the requirements at Key Stage 4 and 48% do so at post-16. Full compliance requires schools with post-16 provision to be compliant at both phases. Using that measurement, 40% of schools were compliant in 2015-16. On the numerology of the schools that are not compliant, 59 fell short on total course numbers, and 51 of those fell short by a smallish amount of four courses or fewer — ie they offered between, for instance, 20 and 23 courses. So, there is not full compliance.

To be fair to the schools, they are operating under a very tough financial and budgetary regime. It seems to me that one of the potential ways forward on this, without prejudging any examination of it, is greater collaboration between schools. That is already beginning to happen, particularly with the shared education agenda. If we are talking about the delivery of courses, the key aim is to try to ensure that the maximum opportunity is there for pupils. That will not always be the case when we are talking about subjects that attract a relatively small number of pupils. However, cross-work between schools is vital for the way forward to ensure that maximum opportunities are provided to all our children.

Mr Smith: While the Ulster Unionist Party welcomes the development of economically relevant courses, does the Minister not agree that we need a fit-for-purpose curriculum that allows for more flexibility in its implementation?

Mr Weir: I do not disagree with the Member. We are in a situation where, even if we believed that everything in the curriculum was perfect at present, and I think that there is some criticism that we are not at that stage, it has been, I think, 10 years since there was a wider curriculum review. So, it is certainly my intention, during the lifetime of this Assembly, to do a review of the curriculum. There is a wide range of aspects to that, and while some aspects will be particularly relevant to primary schools, the focus will, obviously, be principally on post-primary provision.

Within that, there is the issue that we do have a great deal of success with our academic courses in Northern Ireland, and we have consistently led the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of our success rate. There may be a question, therefore, about the extent to which we value vocational courses to ensure that all our children are prepared for life outside the classroom on that basis. When some Members have raised that — I appreciate that the Member is not guilty of this — it has almost been put as an either/or, in that you must reduce the quality of academic courses to bring up the quality of vocational courses. It is important that we ensure that we protect our academic standards and, at the same time, give that greater degree of strength to vocational subjects. I think that that will be a key component as we look ahead to a wider curriculum review. Economically — the Member, I think, raised this issue — that will be a key role, when we come to the review, not just for the schools or the Department but for all stakeholders, including, for instance, the Department for the Economy and the role that can be played in the cross-fertilisation with further education colleges and, in particular, business organisations, which I have already had some level of engagement with as we move forward. I think that it is important that developments on the skills barometer and the opportunities there are fed into the curriculum to provide different pathways for our children.

Ms J McCann: Does the Minister agree with me that the entitlement framework as it is currently defined gives pupils quite a lot of options and choices? Will he remain committed to the entitlement framework to provide equality of opportunity for all our children and young people?

Mr Weir: I want to ensure that we get the maximum amount of opportunities for all our children. As I indicated, some good work has been done in this field, particularly around the entitlement framework, and it is about trying to build on that success. This is where it is important to

share within and between sectors. I am aware of a number of schools, particularly with the money that has been available from shared education, that have focused some of their projects on ensuring that that takes place. For example, I was at the launch of a shared project in Bangor involving three post-primary schools in the north Down area. Some of that project concentrates on where there are minority subjects, ensuring that they open up and that access to courses is fully available to all students.

If you have a situation where, from a school's point of view, for example, there are only six or seven pupils who want to take a particular A-level course, with tight budgets, there is a danger that some schools will say that that is not economical for them. However, if they can work with other nearby schools to provide a class that creates an economy of scale, that can be helpful to the school economically and from a sharing point of view because that will be very much on a cross-community basis. It will be a situation that keeps open and opens up additional possibilities for opportunities for children. It is important that we recognise where there has been success and try to build on it rather than looking at this in a negative fashion.

Dr Farry: Building on the Minister's last but one answer, what plans does he have to work with his colleague the Minister for the Economy on the creation of a formal 14-19 strategy for Northern Ireland? As part of that, what steps can he take to ensure that there is a proper division of labour between schools and FE colleges to avoid the situation that we have seen recently where schools are trying to replicate some of the vocational areas in which FE colleges have a comparative advantage and where they have a financial incentive to hang onto students when it is in their interest to go somewhere else for their education?

Mr Weir: The Member raises a very pertinent point, which is that we should be seeing as much complementarity in our system as possible, particularly in the interface between further education colleges and schools when it comes to sixth-form provision. We should not have a situation where there is replication and overlap. I have already met some representatives from the further education side of things. I stand to be corrected, but I suspect that the Economy Minister may be with me next week when I visit the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) to meet its chief executive. I know that the Member is very familiar with SERC.

In education, it is about looking a little bit beyond silo solutions to see where we can produce a joined-up approach. That is why I said that when we come to the issue of curriculum review, we should have a situation where all the key stakeholders are involved, beyond simply the narrow confines of what had been the view in education and the schools sector, shall we say. Important though they are, it should not simply be confined to that. There is a key economic driver within that, and there is a key role for the Department for the Economy, the further education colleges and other outside bodies as well.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Miss Michelle McIlveen — I am sorry — Ms Michelle Gildernew, I remind Members that question 4 is a constituency-specific question.

St Malachy's Primary School, Glencull

4. **Ms Gildernew** asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's capital development plans for St Malachy's Primary School, Glencull. (AQO 449/16-21)

Ms Gildernew: Ceist uimhir a ceathair le do thoil.

Mr Weir: I suspect that the Member opposite's Irish may be a little bit better than that of the other Member who was mentioned in the introduction there.

There are currently no major capital projects planned for St Malachy's Primary School, Glencull. Given the substantial major capital investment programme that is under way, a further call for major capital projects is not anticipated in the near future. However, I am considering the merits of making a call in the relatively near future for new projects to be advanced in planning under the school enhancement programme (SEP). As the Member will be aware, the programme involves projects to refurbish or potentially extend current school buildings with a level of spend of between £500,000 and a maximum of £4 million. Therefore, while it will be particularly relevant to primary schools — the previous SEP call that was made earlier this year was ring-fenced purely to primary schools — it is not my intention to do that in the next call. SEPs are of particular advantage to primary schools.

A minor capital works application for the school to provide a new multipurpose hall and classroom is under review, and a scoping report has been undertaken by the Education Authority, identifying costs of around £500,000 for the scheme. That is being considered by the Department.

3.15 pm

Owing to the reactive nature and the volume of minor works, it is not possible to indicate future plans for further works at the school. At present, only minor works schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements, such as health and safety, fire protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery. For a lot of minor works and under the SEP, there is a vast estate out there that I would like to be able to help, but it is ultimately a question of prioritising and trying to ensure that we get the maximum out of the system.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Minister for his answer. As he said, there is an application in for a multipurpose hall that has a specific health and safety requirement. Do health and safety requirements attract a high priority when his Department determines such spending projects?

Mr Weir: They do. The scoping report has been undertaken by the Education Authority, and, from that point of view, health and safety is one of the key aspects that we look at with minor works. Again, because of the current financial position, the problem is that, although capital budgets are a little bit looser than the resource side in the Department of Education, the amount that can be done is limited. I therefore cannot give a direct commitment, given the sheer volume of minor works. However, obviously, health and safety tends to be given the highest priority and will be critical in the consideration of any minor works for this or any other school.

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

Rossmar School: New Build

T1. **Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Rossmar special needs school and to state whether building is likely to start on the date proposed initially. (AQT 326/16-21)

Mr Weir: I do not have the detail on that particular new build to hand. We always hope to ensure that any new build occurs as swiftly as possible. We try to ensure that the capital flow happens and that we hit targets. I will get back to the Member on the specifics of the case. It is pertinent because, although all sectors are important when it comes to providing the right facilities, there is a particular onus on us when we are looking at special needs schools. I have had the opportunity to visit a number of schools that are in progress or have been completed for pupils with special needs.

Some of the provision is remarkable. I appreciate that this is outside the Member's constituency, but as part of the Strule campus, Arvalee, which was the first one built and was effectively fast-tracked on that basis, is a school specifically for special needs pupils in the broader Omagh area. Some of the provision there is remarkably good. However, I will get back to the Member with details on the individual school that he mentioned.

Mr Mullan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Considering the fact that a huge number of people have expressed concerns about the very limited provision during the summer and other holiday periods, can you give me a guarantee that you will consider extending extracurricular activities at the school to ensure that the children get the additional support that they need?

Mr Weir: I will certainly look at any proposals that are brought forward. One of the things that is useful in any new school build is that there is a much greater awareness nowadays of the need for provision outside the normal school hours, not simply for the children who use the school but for the wider community. I am talking in general terms, but I can look at the specific case that the Member has raised.

Going back a number of years — maybe 40 or 50 years — there was a tendency for schools, I am tempted to say, to discourage communities from using them. Barriers were put up. One thing that struck me about the new builds that I have been around and those that I have seen in progress is that the thinking is very much about how to make the school accessible beyond simply the classroom hours. I hope that that is something that can be borne in mind.

As I said, the specifics of the use of the school, particularly during the summer period, can be looked at. I am sure that, if there is a specific proposal, it can be considered. It may well be that the arrangements for such use will depend on what the board of governors in the school and possibly the Education Authority say.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Tandragee Primary School: Traffic Congestion

T3. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Education for an update on an important issue that has been raised with the Education Authority (EA) around traffic congestion at Tandragee Primary School and the impact that it is having

on residents in the vicinity of the school and to outline any measures that the EA is pursuing to alleviate the problem. (AQT 328/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Member has been very proactive on the issue, and I welcome his involvement. From a practical point of view, it is not an issue that directly involves the Department, but we will monitor the situation to ensure that there is delivery.

The Education Authority has informed me that, following discussions with the school's board of governors and Transport NI, a revised planning application was submitted on 27 September. One can never prejudge a planning application, but, if it is accepted, the new, revised scheme, once implemented, will ensure that adequate traffic management systems are in place and, hopefully, that congestion around Tandragee is alleviated.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his response. Is there a time frame for that?

Mr Weir: There appears to be a suggestion that no particular concerns have been raised about the planning application. As with any of these things, an attempt was made to ensure that what was put forward was broadly acceptable before it reached that point. The direct involvement is with the Education Authority, and it has informed me that, subject to its internal processes to make funding available and subject to planning permission being granted, it intends to have the works completed by the end of March 2017. We are talking about it being five months away, by the end of this financial year. It will certainly be in place for the next school year.

Buddy Bear Trust

T4. **Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Education whether he agrees that it is a most unusual situation that while his Department, under article 26 of the Education Order 1996, recognises the Buddy Bear Trust, the Education Authority does not seem too keen to send pupils to it, in that it states that the evidence to support that type of education is inconclusive. (AQT 329/16-21)

Mr Weir: I am aware of the good work being done by Buddy Bear and have met Brendan McConville on a number of occasions. The issue will be the placement of individual children and what is best for their needs. At times, some Education Authority officers have taken a view on where the best placement was. It is about trying to ensure a mix of children in order to be able to provide the best quality for an individual child

In that sense, Buddy Bear is not a formal school in the system, but there is provision, where there has been an educational placement — as has happened at Buddy Bear and other schools that lie outside the formal education process — for funding to follow the event, which is right and proper. We have to ensure that we get the best possible setting for every child. The Department cannot micromanage that, because placements for children with special needs lie directly with the Education Authority. There will also be a pertinent view from the Health Department and health workers, in particular, on the best way forward for conductive education. It is about trying to get a mix of views to face in the right direction.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Minister for that answer. Would he agree to officials from his Department meeting their

counterparts in the EA and representatives of the school, if only to try to sort out that confusion and allow everybody to know where they stand?

Mr Weir: It can be made very clear that the power lies with the EA. Interestingly, there are opportunities for Buddy Bear, and a bit of thought needs to be given to this. The Education and Training Inspectorate produced a report on Buddy Bear in 2013. It recommended — no pun intended — a sort of buddy arrangement with Sperrinview Special School to look at structures to establish informal links. While it was not taken up at the time, that is a good opportunity. While Buddy Bear is independent of the system, building stronger links between its provision and what is already in the system will be helpful. I have spoken to my officials to see whether that can be explored. Ultimately, that will require choice for the schools to ensure that we give the maximum help to these very special kids.

Children and Young People's Strategy

T5. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Education to explain how his Department is bringing forward the children and young people's strategy through consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders. (AQT 330/16-21)

Mr Weir: We will be working on the strategy for children and young people. As part of the strategy, we will seek to outline how the Executive will work cooperatively. I am aware of the Children's Services Co-operation Act, and, as regards timescale, the intention is to lay the strategy before the Assembly for scrutiny in the second week of December. I hope that these things will move reasonably quickly. It is important that the strategy aligns with the Programme for Government. Obviously, we are waiting for the final draft of the Programme for Government to ensure that it is aligned. There is a concern that that might lead to a slight delay, but, if it is not possible to meet the December deadline, we will look for the final strategy to be laid in the Assembly early in the new year. It is important that any of the strategies that emerge from the Departments align with the overall global position of the Programme for Government.

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I have just come from a meeting with Conradh na Gaeilge. It welcomes the fact that children from Irish-medium education have been consulted by the Department. Will the Minister ensure that his Department continues to consult and engage with children from Irish-medium education so that they can gain an understanding of the expectations for the future in terms of accessing goods and services and dealing with Departments and public bodies through the Irish language?

Mr Weir: It is important that consultation takes place in a wide range of sectors and with children from a wide range of backgrounds. Obviously, as was mentioned, we cannot have the absolutely final position until the strategy is laid. However, while there has not been formal consultation, an informal co-design of the strategy has already taken place between the Department and a wide range of stakeholders. That directly includes children and young people from all backgrounds. It is important that all backgrounds are part of that. We sometimes get hung up on the processes of direct formal consultation — they are important — but, if we can use informal consultation to inform the final strategy, that will hopefully ensure that

the final strategy is very much fit for purpose. I assure you that consultation with the widest range of stakeholders and individuals, particularly children and young people from every conceivable background, will continue.

Nursery Education: East Belfast

T6. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education what support his Department has given to nursery provision in East Belfast. (AQT 331/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education funds the preschool education programme, which aims to ensure that at least one year of preschool education is available to every family that wants it. That provides one year of non-compulsory education and builds on learning and experience. Some 99.9% of target-age children of parents who engaged fully with this year's admissions process were offered a funded place.

It is also the case that, following the publication of Learning to Learn, the Department introduced a new procedure to have a greater level of flexibility for a classroom. The level of provision available in the East Belfast constituency also increased recently when a development proposal for additional preschool places at Dundonald Primary School was approved. From September 2016, the number of part-time preschool places at that setting has doubled from 26 to 52.

3.30 pm

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. Have any of the nursery units in East Belfast been successful in obtaining temporary flexibility in nursery places?

Mr Weir: There has now been provision in nursery units. Up until a couple of years ago, a very rigid approach was taken to the numbers, and that did not necessarily accommodate the opportunities and pressures that were there. That was changed a couple of years ago, and two nursery units in East Belfast — Knocknagoney Primary School and Dundonald Primary School — have used that process to request temporary flexibility. That led to additional places being approved in each of those settings, although a further place in Knocknagoney was not approved as it was not considered necessary to meet the needs of the area.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. That ends the period for questions to the Minister of Education. I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

Private Members' Business

Healthier Lifestyles for Children

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly encourages schoolchildren to live a healthier lifestyle; acknowledges that following the introduction of a levy on drinks with a high sugar content, an estimated £18 million will be allocated from the Treasury to the Executive's Budget in 2018; and calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the health service. — [Ms Lockhart.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out from "2018;" and insert

"notes with concern that only approximately 6% of pupils in each primary year are accessing two or more hours' physical education per week; calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the health service; and further calls on the Minister of Education to improve the monitoring and reporting of physical education hours per week accessed by primary pupils and to issue a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory obligation on schools to facilitate an appropriate minimum amount of physical education hours per week for primary-school pupils." — [Mr Lyttle.]

Mr Smith: Eighty per cent of children who are obese between the ages of 10 and 14 will become obese adults, with all the resulting societal impacts. Twenty-five per cent of children in Northern Ireland are classified as overweight or obese, with 21% of girls and 15% of boys overweight and 7% of both genders obese. According to the health survey in Northern Ireland in 2014, there has been no change in these figures since 2005. The Department of Health's 'A Fitter Future for All' has set targets for reducing childhood obesity by 3%, with a 2% reduction in overweight children and obesity by 2022. While there has been marginal improvement in recent years, a target of having 25% of our children overweight or obese is unacceptable. The number of children classed as obese or overweight is also related to deprivation. The Northern Ireland social care inequalities monitoring system showed that the number of P1 children classified as obese rose from 3.1% for boys and 4.5% for girls in the least deprived areas to 5% for boys and 6.3% for girls in the most deprived areas.

Diet obviously plays a key role, and the national diet and nutrition survey showed that 96% of 11- to 18-year-olds in Northern Ireland did not meet the five-a-day recommendation for fruit and vegetable consumption. The other key element, of course, is exercise. Northern Ireland schools, as has been said, have a target of providing at least two hours of PE per week, yet the NHS recommends at least 60 minutes of moderate exercise each day for children and young people between the ages of five and 18. Less than a quarter of five- to 12-year-olds in Northern

Ireland achieve that target. We all know that poor diet and a lack of exercise amongst children builds up future health problems for the child and, in turn, wider society. We also know that Northern Ireland is especially struggling to improve its performance in these areas.

It is welcome that we have the opportunity to invest £18 million in awareness and physical education programmes, and I support the motion, in as far as it goes. It is good to see that the DUP sees the value of hypothecation now that it has given control of finance over to Sinn Féin but, frankly, this £18 million is a drop in the ocean. Public health awareness is very much the poor relation, and we fail to invest significant funding in prevention programmes. To provide proper context, let me indulge in a few sums. There are 1,180 schools in Northern Ireland serving just over 328,000 pupils. That large figure of £18 million becomes just £15,254 per school. In fact, it would probably fund a third of a PE teacher. That is good, and I welcome the opportunity it brings, but I just seek to put it all in context.

What we need, as ever in Northern Ireland, is to be more radical, set more challenging targets and move that bar higher and quicker. This is about the future of our children, our health service and our public finances. Eighteen million pounds is certainly a start, but we need to commit to at least one hour's exercise per day for each child, drastically improve our diets, particularly in our most deprived areas, and at last halve the number of obese and overweight children by 2022. I call on the Health and Education Ministers to use this funding as a stimulus to develop a strategy that will transform our performance on those issues. This is too important to be left to what is essentially a budget that will, by design, reduce as the consumption of sugary drinks falls. I support the amended motion but as a first step rather than a destination.

Mr McGrath: I support the motion. We can invest in our manufacturing industry, our economy, our infrastructure and our communities, but, fundamentally, if we do not invest in our children, we have something wrong with our priorities, and our finances are simply papering over the cracks.

Our children face many obstacles to a healthy lifestyle that we did not. They have access to sweets, sugary drinks, energy drinks laced with caffeine, and crisps. You name it: what was once for us the preserve of a treat bought once a week with pocket money is now available to children on tap. You can couple that with the fact that the lifestyle is promoted by IT, smartphones, gaming and social media. When we wanted to know something, we had to go out there and find it out, and we had to go into the community to kick a football. Now, children, with just a click of a finger or a roll of the thumb, can get the information they need. We have increased calorie intake on one side and reduced movement and exercise on the other. That imbalance is certainly going to lead to problems in the future.

What I like about the motion is that it is not about punishing the child or overt legislation to manage the issue. It is simply saying that a small levy will be applied to those companies and that we will take that money and put it into schools to see whether we can encourage young people to become involved in education and fitness programmes to help their health. We are not saying in the motion that we want to reduce intake or prevent kids from having sweets; it is just about the levy being used and the finances that are there to help motivate children to move and get exercise. I would ask, as ever, and I will continue

to do so, that consideration is given to how some of that money might be used within youth service. They have access to over 150,000 young people each year and are ideally placed to work with some young people schools cannot reach. Some of those who do not engage in school or in PE at school are happy to engage in activities within youth services that could help them.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Ireland has written to express its support for the motion and to encourage the Northern Ireland Executive to actively combat the problem of childhood obesity in the North. With 25% of children in Northern Ireland being classified as overweight or obese, early intervention is crucial if we are to prevent the causes of serious illness. With one in five children in the UK starting school overweight or obese, and with that increasing to one in three by the age of 11, we need to address health problems and do all we can to ensure that children are active and as active as they can be.

What is shocking is the number of children living in poverty in Northern Ireland. Nearly one quarter of all children in Northern Ireland are living in poverty and in households that cannot afford what is defined as an ordinary living pattern. With a recent study revealing the stark reality of the cost of healthy eating, it is clear that children from low-income families are the ones who will be hit the most.

The study reveals that a healthy food basket for a two-parent, two-children household costs £115, while a one-parent, two-children family needs to spend £99 to eat healthily each week. That equates to nearly half their weekly income, and it is easier for them to fill up on cheaper junk food than it is to have a healthy lifestyle. We are literally killing our children in the long run.

I support the motion and any other initiative that helps to give children and young people the best start in life, the best preparation for their future and, above all, access to a healthy lifestyle.

Mr Agnew: When Carla Lockhart opened the debate, she talked about not wanting to waste money and not wanting to waste an opportunity. Undoubtedly, putting £18 million into children's physical education would not be a waste of money, but my fear is that it would be a waste of a much bigger opportunity.

I have worked on children's issues a lot since I have been in the Assembly, and one thing has come up time and time again: if you want to make a real difference, invest in early years. That is something that we have singularly failed to do; certainly, previous Executives have failed to do it. In their defence, it is difficult to take resources away from other aspects, such as youth services, which Mr McGrath mentioned, schools or whatever it might be and say to them, "Well, all the evidence shows that we will get a better return in the early years". However, what we are talking about here is £18 million of new money that we do not have to take from anywhere else. That is why I sought to table an amendment calling for the investment to be put into early years provision, before a child even enters school.

There is a challenge for us. All too often we see children almost as if they existed solely in schools and all their ills can be addressed through the school system. Children exist before school, and they exist before and after school even when they are of school age. We have to look at how better to support children and families in those circumstances; otherwise we risk treating the symptoms

and not the cause. We need to change and to support the families and the communities in which the children live if we are to make a real difference. The evidence is there. The work of Professor Heckman has been referenced in a number of debates in the Assembly. He has shown that £1 invested in early years can save £9 in later life by tackling social disadvantage, educational underachievement and everything that comes with that. One programme in Bournemouth that invested in under-twos helped to tackle obesity further down the line. It also helped to improve language ability and educational outcomes. Undoubtedly, if we put £18 million into physical education it will have benefit, but I believe that we can have much more benefit by investing earlier and, in my view, more wisely.

Look at the provision of Sure Start in Northern Ireland. That early years service is woefully underfunded. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) estimates that it would cost £37 million to make that a universal service, as it was before the Tories got hold of it in England. I think of my situation as a parent and the support that we get as a family from our health service. I do not want to be critical, because I know that things are stretched. It came to my daughter's review on whether she was able to move on from the health visitor provision. I was about to catch a train when I got an unexpected phone call. I was told, "I am your daughter's health visitor. I am just calling to see if everything's fine". This was as I was about to buy my train ticket. "Yes," I said, "she has had a bit of a cold, but things are fine". "That's OK," came the reply, "I am just looking to sign her off my books". I have no criticism of the health visitor — I suspect that she had quite a lengthy caseload, and my family had flagged no problems — but, as a parent, I would much rather have had properly resourced services that meant that I could have had an interview with the health visitor to discuss all aspects of my daughter's development. I have sympathy with those who have reservations about ring-fencing the money —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Would the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Agnew: I believe that there are better ways in which we can invest to get a better return for children.

3.45 pm

Mr E McCann: I listened to the debate this morning and when it resumed this afternoon. I have to say that I found little in it to object to. I agreed with practically everything that was said by every Member who contributed to the debate. I would say that that has not been an unvarying experience of my time in the House. It was very welcome.

I approve when people say that it is a disgrace that we lag far behind Scotland, for example, when it comes to timetabled and actual time spent in schools on physical exercise and sport. That is a disgrace. I agree with everybody who said that, and something should be done about it and all the other things that have been said. But it seems to me that, when almost everybody can agree with almost everything that has been said, you have to wonder whether there are any sharp-edged points to be made in the debate at all. An awful lot of it seemed to me to be motherhood and sugar-free apple pie. That is absolutely fine except that it does not contribute much to deepening our understanding of these matters.

It seems to me that we have to look for the key variable at a statistical level that helps us to understand where childhood obesity comes from. What is it? Is it the colour of our eyes or hair? Is it the religious community that we come from? Is it the colour of our skin? No, it is none of those things. By far the most decisive aspect or factor is poverty. It is overwhelmingly more important than anything else that has been mentioned today. Every survey shows it. A Fabian Society survey published just last year shows that, in our society, the poorer a family is, the more likely it is that the children will suffer from obesity and a great number of other things. That is true over a range of problems that we have in society: sickness at all ages, cardiac problems, respiratory problems or educational attainment. Take any of those matters, which are frequently debated simply on their own terms in the context of that particular issue, and look at it deeply — not all that deeply do you have to look — and you will discover that income is the most important thing. Do you want to predict the chances of people going to university and so forth? Again, the simple fact is that it is the disposable income of the family that you are born into that is overwhelmingly more important than anything else.

Ms Lockhart: Thank you for giving way. I agree to a degree about poverty and the links with obesity, but I have to say that I represent a constituency that has both poverty and affluence, and I can assure you that there are the same health issues in the affluent areas as there are in the areas of poverty.

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

Mr E McCann: I take the Member's word for it that that is the experience in her constituency. I will point out two things to her. Statistics can be misleading at times when you consider them at constituency level or even at local government ward level. You can have constituencies where very wealthy people live — that is absolutely fine, and I have no objection — and very poor people live. Depending on the proportion of one and the other, you will find that the same area can be defined as doing better than average economically and doing less well depending on the way in which you look at it. Every survey that measures differences in income between families shows that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Could the Member be careful with the mic?

Mr E McCann: Sorry?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The microphone, Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: Am I hitting it? Sorry about that.

Everything shows that. There are a couple of specific reasons for it. One authoritative survey shows that, when we are dealing with high-value, healthy foods, the price per calorie can be three times as high as that of junk food and foods that cost very little.

Therefore, if you are poor, there is an economic incentive. You are pushed towards buying food that fills your children's stomach and stops them from feeling hungry but that is at their expense, as it is very unhealthy food. That is one of the factors, and there are many others.

All the evidence suggests that I am right about that, and not because I understand these things better than anybody

else. Look at the statistics and the surveys, and you will see that I am right in general terms about poverty being the main predictor of obesity in children. If I am right about that, and if we want to deal with the problem, we have to look at joblessness, low pay and cuts in benefits. All those things that plunge families deeper into poverty are directly relevant to the question.

I will illustrate one other truth, and it is this: the main divide in our society on this issue, as on so much else, is not between one community and another but between the rich and the poor. We are characterised by class differences not community differences. To that extent, we are not particularly representative here of the community as a whole. It is meaningless to talk about the subject without factoring in the income difference and class difference —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr E McCann: — between different families.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Iarraim ar an Aire Airgeadais chun freagairt.

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Tá an-áthas orm bheith anseo leat inniu, go háirithe agus Conradh na Gaeilge ag stocaireacht ar an taobh eile den bhóthar.

There is much that is laudable and admirable about the motion brought forward by Ms Lockhart and the amendment brought forward by Mr Lyttle. In fact, some might say it is a very sweet deal for the Education Department. However, as we heard from other Members, it would be a bitter blow to the Department for Communities, to the Department for the Economy, which deals with jobs, to our friends in the Health Department and even to our friends in the Department for Infrastructure who deal with cycling if we were to accept the motion or the amendment, as we would be accepting that the money that will come by and by from this sugar tax will go only to Education.

I listened to all the Members, finishing with Mr McCann, and everyone accepts that the problem that we face around obesity, ill health, the excessive use and intake of sugar and sugar-fuelled drinks and foods is multifaceted and that we should have a holistic response to it. If I were to accept that, I would be able to ring-fence money, which would be a great power to have, although I do not actually have that power. However, if we were to accept that we should ring-fence money for Education only, we would be saying that we do not believe that there is a role for some of the great work that Mr Givan in the Department for Communities is doing on sport promotion and the park runs on a Saturday morning. We would be saying that there is no role here for an intervention by the Health Department for adults through the women's and community groups that we have in places such as the Village or the Shankill Road, where people are making real efforts to combat ill health and obesity. The Department for Infrastructure is making progress with the cycling revolution that Mr Kennedy, who is not with us in the Chamber, ushered in and that is continuing with events such as Ciclovía and other efforts to get people on their bike.

For that reason, to have the money go to Education only is to have a silo mentality. I am not suggesting for a minute that, because the DUP holds the Education portfolio, the proposer was suggesting that we should ring-fence the money for Education only. My colleague John O'Dowd, who fully opposed the motion, said that, even if he were

still the Education Minister, he would have opposed it. I leave Members to make up their own mind on that matter.

Certainly, the days of the silo mentality are gone. We are committed to a Programme for Government — all the parties. No doubt we will have a good discussion around the final draft, but we are all committed to having an outcomes-based government and strategy. That means that we will cross-cut against many Departments, so the day for saying that one Department alone can resolve societal issues is gone.

For those reasons, I am obliged to oppose —

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I very much welcome his assertion that the days of the silo mentality have gone. This predates the Minister's time in the Executive, but I recall the Department of Education's budget having to be ring-fenced last year, or perhaps the year before, in order for Sinn Féin to support the Budget. It would do so only with that proviso.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I welcome Mr Durkan's intervention. It is a matter for the Executive, as you should know as a former member, to agree to ring-fencing. I want that power. If anyone here wants to give me the power to ring-fence money on my own, I will accept readily in the morning, but it is a matter for the Executive. I do not think that this Executive, united in common purpose, will agree, when we face massive issues such as obesity, that only one Department should get the money to deal with that.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. Notwithstanding what he said about the need for a multi-departmental response to childhood obesity, does he agree that physical education in schools is clearly a particularly acute problem, given that, on average, only 4% of primary-school pupils get the recommended amount of physical education? Does he agree that very strong investment and a strong message are needed in response to that?

I should thank the Minister for coming to the Chamber today. He seems to be breaking a tradition, but he is very welcome.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his intervention, which may be the last. If he listens to his own speech — I can quote it back — he will see that, as he went on, even he accepted that it is not through education alone that we should tackle this. Of course, it is a serious issue, and that is why we are here today.

The other key point is that heretofore we have accepted as an Assembly, and as an Executive, that the Barnett consequential should not be dedicated to any area before they arrive. It is a tradition that the money comes back to the centre, and the Executive decide how it should be divvied up. I stand by that principle; I think that it is the correct way forward.

There is just one other thing, and this used to happen with my student grant. I always assumed that my grant was coming in and that it would be more than it was. It was always spent within a week, when I had planned three months of spending. We do not know whether £18 million or £14 million will come from the sugar tax, so I suggest, Members, that we do not get too far ahead of ourselves. The sugar tax will come in, I think, in 2018, and I noticed Mr Noonan's announcement today that it will be the same year south of the border. It could be 2019 before revenues come in. Before you spend the entire £18 million,

£14 million or £10 million, we should hold our budgetary horses. I agree with Mr McElduff that this is not the correct budgetary approach to the Barnett consequential.

I will refer to some of the points made by Members. Mr McCann made the point that I also make: this is not an issue that can be dealt with by education alone. He pointed out the crucial role of jobs and made a point that goes without contradiction: poverty and ill health are linked. Obesity is a plague on many different sectors of society, but there is no doubt that poverty and ill health are linked.

Mr Agnew — I do not know how he will vote — made the point that this is also about families, communities, preschool and children of above school age. The point is that the issue is much wider, and it would not be wise for us to limit ourselves to education when tackling it.

The SDLP health spokesperson, Mr Durkan, said that the key to reducing pressure on the health system lies elsewhere. That is, I think, a very strong point: we do not spend enough on prevention and do not have enough strategies. We are more likely to tackle the effects of unhealthy lifestyles than to intervene at an early stage. That also means that our approach must be broader than education.

John O'Dowd — *mo chomrádaí, mo chomhghleacaí*; my comrade, my colleague — talked about setting the social agenda through taxation. That is what is happening, although it is happening over our heads, and I would much rather that we introduced the sugar tax, decided how it would be implemented and, of course, how it should be spent. I agree with him that it is a matter for the Executive how the tax levy and dividend should be used in the time ahead. He made a strong point, repeated by many Members here, that there is not enough physical education in schools. However, as parents, grandparents and people involved in our communities, we should be going to schools that we think do not fulfil the curriculum obligation rather than addressing it here. I do not know how accurate the statistics that were quoted are, but I see evidence in many schools of very strong physical education elements in the curriculum.

4.00 pm

Mr Smith appealed to the Health Minister to focus on health interventions, and he viewed obesity as a health issue. I do not know whether he will vote no, but that seems to be wider than the motion or the amendment. As you say, it should be a first step — I agree with that — rather than a destination. You said that it was a sort of stimulus, and I will come back to that. Mr McGrath said that we should invest in our children, and we all agree with that. I see that investment in many areas. I presume that Mrs Dobson will vote no as well, because she said that it is not a stand-alone issue, and I agree with that. It is an effort across government, yet the motion and the amendment focus on just one area. I agree with her that, if we can work now with young people, it will add years to their lives and save the health service money later on. Mr McElduff did something that we do not do enough of: he pointed to the great work of the IFA and the GAA, with their 61 coaches, 571 schools and 39,000 pupils. We should not lose sight of the great work going on to tackle the problems and to rise to the challenges.

Mr Lyttle's amendment states that we should ring-fence money for education, and he said that it is a multifaceted

problem. We finished off with Mr Lyttle's intervention, which contradicted what he said. It is a multifaceted problem, but the solution that I am being told to implement — if I had the power and the authority — is to focus on education only. I agree with him when he talks about a fitter future for all and partnership.

The last Member whom I will reference is Ms Lockhart, who talked about £18 million of new money. We will see what it is. If it is not money from America, it will, hopefully, be an addition to our Budget. I suggest — I am sympathetic to this, Ms Lockhart — that we should have an opportunity to discuss holistically how the money could be used to make an impact. Even if we accept that Barnett consequentials go to the centre, perhaps an initiative could be fuelled by the money — a stimulus, as Mr Smith says — to make a real step change in our effort to tackle obesity, especially obesity in children. We can return to that, and I will keep an open mind.

In other countries, a sugar tax has been used for different purposes. In some countries, it is used to help welfare programmes, and, in others, it is used to tackle health issues. I want us to craft how a sugar tax is used and not to ape or follow the lead of other jurisdictions. As an Assembly, as an Executive and as Committees — four Committees are interested in this — we could bring forward good proposals and solutions for how the money might be used to tackle the issues that we talked about. At the core of that is wanting our people to live and enjoy healthier lives. As Mrs Dobson said, your health is your wealth.

I will oppose the motion and the amendment, but, at the same time, I am sympathetic to the overall thrust of the debate and hope that we can return to it. I hope that, when we do that, I will have money in the purse to help to deliver the outcomes that people wish to see.

Ms Bradshaw: I thank all Members who spoke today. For the first time in the Chamber, I will not read from a speech, because the debate has been so good, with so many important points being raised. I do not want to repeat them, but I want to knit them together a bit.

First, I come to the Ministers points around ring-fencing. The Minister will know, as a colleague in South Belfast, that I come from the community sector and worked in community health projects. It is rather naive to say that the schools would act in silos, because, when we look at the after-school programmes, the Active Communities coaches who went into the schools, the mums and young girls projects and the lads and dads projects they often emanated from the schools and were not necessarily within school time. Others in the Chamber today have referenced the after-school programmes, the youth clubs and the sports clubs, and there is great partnership between them. We support the motion, in terms of going into the schools, because it is a mandatory time that children are there. Not all children go to every sports club. Not every child goes to Sunday school or an after-school programme. We feel that, while the children are in a learning environment, that is where the money should go.

I reference Steven Agnew's comments about Sure Start. While I have experience of working with them, especially in South Belfast, not all children are eligible for that. For example, children from asylum-seeker families who live on the Lisburn Road, because of their postcode, are not eligible to go to their local Sure Start. Do not tell me —

Mr Agnew: I appreciate the Member giving way. Just for clarification, my point was about making Sure Start a universal service, as it should be, and using the money for that.

Ms Bradshaw: I appreciate the point, but my point is that not all children who are at the lowest ebb in terms of poverty actually access Sure Start, and that is to do with the structures through which that programme is run out. We feel schools are the best vehicle for that.

Going forward, in terms of the Programme for Government, most of the debate has come from the Sinn Féin corner around ring-fencing and whether it is the right way to go. Our amendment proposes a consultation process whereby we would inform. We would start with the stakeholders in the schools — the head teachers — and make our way down but also with the parents and the stakeholders in that community to look at a structured programme that children of all ages and backgrounds could access. That would provide a comprehensive response to inform how the money would be spent. My colleague Chris said today that Alliance is usually very reluctant to sign up to ring-fencing of any money of this kind because there are other good causes out there, but again we come back to the schools as the main vehicle for this.

The other point I would like to end on has been raised a few times. It really started with Carla's comments about the "bubbly children", which I thought was a lovely word to use for children. As we all know, they are so full of life, and we would call them "sponges", for example. This is really about supporting our children from the start of their educational career and investing in them as children but also investing in the long-term health and wealth of the nation as they grow into the future.

The other way we would invest the £18 million would be through teachers, volunteers in the school and leaving resources behind — educational resources but also footballs, goal nets and stuff like that. A lot of schools, as people will know, really struggle with their budget for things that are probably called "luxuries" but should really be essentials. There would also be investment in the wider community where there are collaborative projects.

When I was working in community health projects we used different venues to educate the young men, especially those in danger of educational underachievement. For example, we took them to Windsor Park to do maths lessons with footballs. This may be about education and physical activity, but again it is a wider education process that we would be asking people to engage in. Obviously, it is through health, food, healthy eating and lifestyles and stuff, but the lessons of taking them outside their classroom for two hours a week and getting them active, while also getting their minds active, is something we really need to consider.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I call Paula Bradley to wind up on the motion. The Member has up to 10 minutes.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to wind up the debate today. I thank my colleague, Carla Lockhart, for asking me to countersign the motion. I also thank Chris Lyttle and Paula Bradshaw for the amendment, which we will also support.

I will say at the outset that it is clear from the debate today — this is certainly unanimous — that everyone in the

Chamber wants to support some way of tackling obesity, especially the problem of childhood obesity, in Northern Ireland. I know we had ideas of varying degrees about how to choose to fund and do that that may differ slightly, but I think there is consensus in the Chamber that this needs to be tackled. We know that cardiovascular disease and cancer are still two of the largest killers in Northern Ireland. We also know that both are very much determined by obesity. The increased prevalence of type 2 diabetes is a problem too. We hear time and again about the number of people every year in Northern Ireland being diagnosed with that. Although not all the time, obesity can quite often be attributed to diabetes.

I, like others, believe that, to reduce it in years to come, we need to tackle not only obesity in children but lifestyles in general. This is where I might get myself into a little bit of trouble: I am of the generation that was encouraged to go outside and play and to be members of every club going. Of course, I arrived here at Stormont and put on not only the Stormont stone but possibly the Stormont two stone, so maybe —

Ms Lockhart: So did I.

Ms P Bradley: Yes, Carla; I can see that on you. *[Laughter.]* So maybe I need to declare a little bit of an interest. I was certainly of that generation. I grew up in a family that was not affluent in any way, shape or form — I grew up on a housing estate — but I had a mother who was a wonderful cook, and, even worse, she was a wonderful baker. I was used all my life to eating healthily and having healthy food. I see Mr Ford laughing; he knows my mother very well from his social work days. That is how I grew up and how we were. I believe that, as a parent, I have shared that experience with my children; they know full well where their food comes from. They are quite used to having to go into my garden to pull up garlic, carrots or potatoes. That is how I was brought up, and that, in turn, is how I have brought my children up. There is a greater societal issue as well as one to do with physical activity and things like that.

I do not intend to repeat all the statistics that have been stated here today; they have been well versed. It is rather stark to see the lack of physical activity amongst our children and grandchildren. Turning to some of the comments, my colleague Ms Lockhart talked about a legacy for children and adults for the future. She said that the aim of the motion is to promote early intervention. I fully understand that and think we are not always best prepared in here for some of the motions and the actions we bring forward. Sometimes we need to plan a little earlier. She also mentioned that bad habits are hard to break and that so many of them begin in childhood. Many Members touched on that. She spoke about the project in Upper Bann called Healthy Kids. We had a similar project that ran in Rathcoole Primary School in my area. It brought children and parents together. The parents were taught how to cook healthy meals, and children were taught where the food came from. Parents and children sat down and ate food together. For some of those parents and children, that was not a regular occurrence. They talked about where the food came from and the preparation of it. I understand that all those initiatives, albeit they are not the be-all and end-all, will form part of a healthier lifestyle here in Northern Ireland. It was stark to hear that Northern Ireland is the least active part of the UK. When

we look at all the sporting greats we have and the produce we develop here in Northern Ireland, we see that that is sometimes quite hard to believe.

Mr Lyttle said that this issue was one of the greatest challenges facing us. I have to agree with that. It is something that we see increasing year-on-year, and it is certainly something we need to address. He also talked about the vital importance of tackling the problem. That should be multifaceted. It came out time and again during the debate that this is not just an educational issue; it is a cross-departmental and multifaceted issue.

I thank Mr McElduff for his contribution. He agreed — as I said earlier, there is consensus — with the tone and sentiment of the motion, although he did not agree with how we should fund or approach the issue. I understand and respect those issues as well.

4.15 pm

Mrs Dobson made quite a good point about skills and knowledge that will stay with our children into adulthood. That is my experience. That is where I came from, and I think that she had the same type of experience as I did growing up. Those skills stay with you for a very long time, and they are skills that we pass on to our children. Societal issues are also part of it, and we need to look at those.

I do not know whether she touched on this issue, but I think that I linked it in with how many of our children actually know where their food comes from. I have been working with a couple of our schools in North Belfast, and I can think of one — Abbots Cross — which has a fruit and vegetable garden and a compost heap. That is really important for some children because they may not be high academic achievers, but they want to be outside working in the garden. That needs to be part of our education system so that children have opportunities to be outside in the open air working and looking at where produce comes from. Those are all good points.

I am conscious of time, so I will move on to Mr Durkan. He raised the good point about promoting good mental health through healthy eating. That also includes the increasing pressures into looking perfect. So, when we look at the issue of obesity —

Mr Durkan: *[Interruption.]*

Ms P Bradley: Mr Durkan, I think that you look nearly perfect. It is not just obesity that we have to look at; we have to look at the other issues where we have people with eating disorders and issues with emotional and mental health. We know that bullying takes place in our schools, we know that our children are under immense pressure to conform and to be a certain way, and we do not want to see any aspect of this being put upon them that they have to conform to that way.

He made several points and said that he believes that some people in his area have never eaten fresh fruit or vegetables. Every one of us in the Chamber could say that we have constituents whose children may not have had that. That is shame on us as well. That is something that we need to address and get that learning out there of the health benefits and understanding of how to use fruit and vegetables to make something that is appealing for children. I know that, as a parent, it can often be difficult to do.

Mr O'Dowd agreed with the principle and the intentions of the motion and said that they were very good, although he expressed that it was foolish to ring-fence money, given that we did not know the amount and that that would be an Executive decision. I understand and respect that point of view. I welcome Sinn Féin's general support on this issue, albeit that I know that it will vote against it. However, I note that it is generally supportive of the principles.

Mr Smith talked about obese children becoming obese adults. That is absolutely correct. It is a hard habit to break, and that is why we need to start early.

I will move swiftly through because I am coming to the end of my time. A lot of Members raised the same issues. I want to finish off with Eamonn McCann and the Minister. When Mr McCann said that he had listened to the debate and had very little to object to, I knew at that stage that we were ready for a "but". I am glad that that "but" came because I am of the same general opinion as he is when it comes to deprivation and health inequalities. We have seen time and time again that your outcome and how long you live depends on your postcode and where you live in Northern Ireland. So I fully understand that "but". I agree with that, I think that there is absolute merit in that, and I also understand the disposable income issue. For families on a lower income, it can sometimes be cheaper to buy fast food than to fill a basket and prepare a fresh meal. We need to look at that and look at ways to combat that because there are ways with a wiser knowledge of cooking.

Just to finish, on the Minister's point, the motion called for an educational programme. We are not saying that that money has to be poured into education. That is not what we are saying. It is not a silo. We are saying that every Department — *[Interruption.]* — needs to form part of an education programme.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 61; Noes 22.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Ms Hanna, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mrs Long, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCausland, Mr McGrath, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Mr McQuillan, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Bradshaw and Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Dillon, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr Milne,

Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Archibald and Ms J McCann.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 58; Noes 23.

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Ms Hanna, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mrs Long, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCausland, Mr McGrath, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Mr McQuillan, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Bradshaw and Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Dillon, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Archibald and Ms J McCann.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly encourages schoolchildren to live a healthier lifestyle; acknowledges that following the introduction of a levy on drinks with a high sugar content, an estimated £18 million will be allocated from the Treasury to the Executive's Budget in 2018; notes with concern that only approximately 6% of pupils in each primary year are accessing two or more hours' physical education per week; calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the health service; and further calls on the Minister of Education to improve the monitoring and reporting of physical education hours per week accessed by primary pupils and to issue a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory obligation on schools to facilitate an appropriate minimum amount of physical education hours per week for primary-school pupils.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone).]

Adjournment

Education Services: West Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Ms Jennifer McCann to raise the matter of education services in West Belfast. The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes.

Ms J McCann: I am delighted to have the opportunity tonight — it is not really “tonight”, it is the afternoon — to open the Adjournment debate. We have been talking a lot in the Assembly about our children and young people. I want to say first of all that all our children and young people not only deserve but are entitled to equality of opportunity to whatever career path they decide to follow or life choices that they make. We have often heard that having a good experience in our educational lives from nursery provision to further education contributes to our overall personal development and growth and that having a bad experience can often have a negative impact right through into our adult life. I have spoken to many people who have had an experience at school that has followed them and had an impact throughout their life. Therefore, it is important that we have positive experiences in our formative years, particularly in our time at school and other places of learning.

4.45 pm

We see more and more evidence linking deprivation, poverty and social exclusion to underachievement and poor educational outcomes for our children and young people. However, when that is recognised and focused learning interventions and support mechanisms are put in place, educational attainment can be enhanced even in areas of high social and economic deprivation. We need to see those intervention programmes at an early stage of a child or young person’s life. It is very important to say that we can then raise the educational attainment of that child or young person.

The west Belfast community education programme is an innovative project that works closely with local schools, teachers, parents, community providers and the children and young people themselves. The main driver of that programme is the West Belfast Partnership Board. I commend the partnership board for the work that it has done for years in this field across West Belfast. The board has given real life experiences and turned around not only children and young people’s educational attainment but their personal development. It has changed the lives of some of the young people and their families. The programme supports a shared learning approach that sees the importance of a child-centred approach to education as a way of making a real difference to the educational outcomes that we all need to aspire to. It incorporates key priorities identified by the Department of Education and the West Belfast Partnership Board together, including early years development and the importance of family and parental engagement that focuses on developing increased aspirations of the family for their child. For me, that is a very important and key element. We have

to ensure that the parents or carers of a child or young person have that aspiration for the young person as well. Nothing will make a child get on in life and do their best more than encouragement and support from parents or peers, so it is very important that we increase that.

The programme looks at raising literacy and numeracy standards and provides support for post-primary pupils to improve GCSE attainment. My party colleagues and I have witnessed that for several years at the Easter and summer schools that the West Belfast Partnership Board puts on in St Mary’s University College in West Belfast. We have seen hundreds of kids, initially kids from the west Belfast area but now kids from all over Belfast, coming to those and giving up free time over their Easter and summer holidays to try to do better in their exams. There is also a transitions programme that makes the transition period much easier for children who are transferring to post-primary school. We have all seen at first hand how it works.

A report by the Department of Education in September 2014 looked at children and young people who attended schools in West Belfast and identified the area as one of deprivation where children are disadvantaged in their educational opportunities.

The report went on to say that, following a number of intervention programmes, there were increased levels of school attendance and improved GCSE results. I want to give a flavour of the way those results increased. There was an increase of 11.4% in pupils in West Belfast achieving five GCSE grades A* to C from 2011 to 2015, and there was a 12.3% increase in pupils achieving five GCSEs, including maths and English, from the figures released in 2013 in comparison with the results in 2015. Among pupils who are eligible for free school meals, the increase in attainment is even greater. There was a 12.2% increase in students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C from 2013 to 2015. There was a 14.3% increase in eligible students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including maths and English, from 2013 to 2015. There was a 17.3% increase in students eligible for free school meals achieving seven or more GCSEs at grades A* to C from 2013 to 2015. That is a spectacular improvement right across the piece.

While there are a lot of different drivers in getting that educational attainment up, one of the key drivers was the partnership approach that was driven by the West Belfast Partnership Board’s education programme. I want to make it very clear that that was one of the key drivers.

I mentioned earlier the Easter and summer schools that take place and that see hundreds of young people giving up their free time. The programme also puts an emphasis on a joined-up approach to look at the consistency of the transition from nursery to primary and to post-primary. That is not just about the West Belfast Partnership Board’s part in this but about all stakeholders in education, including the Department of Education, all the schools, the teachers and the parents and, as I said earlier, particularly the children and young people themselves. It takes that holistic approach. Going forward, we want to see that very clear holistic approach to delivering improved educational outcomes and a focus on effective interventions and interventions that are measured and evaluated. This is where it works.

We hear about all the efforts that we make to get to the root causes of underachievement. We rehearse them in the Chamber and have talked about them in the community as well. We know that, if you are from a socially or economically deprived area or, for whatever reason, your family is not as affluent as another family, those issues impact on your education. They impact when you are at school and on your achievement. We need to have that holistic approach. It goes back to my central point: in my view, it is the entitlement of every child to have the same lifetime opportunities as another child. It should not matter what that child's social or economic background is; they all have that entitlement, particularly in education. They should have it right through, not just in getting ready for school but in going through nursery school, primary school, post-primary and to further education.

I wanted to illustrate the way in which that partnership approach to education, which involves the whole community and involves everybody, has benefits and leads to the positive results that I have just outlined. I have to emphasise that it is not just about kids getting their exams and about getting that educational attainment up. It is about the confidence that it gives those young people. I see it myself. I see them coming in and they are so full of confidence when they have achieved this. Their social exclusion goes down; their sense of themselves and their confidence goes up; and we all aspire to that for our children.

I say to the Minister that I am very happy to see him here, and I will be listening to what other Members have to say. I ask him what his intentions are for continuing such programmes. You have something that is a good model of practice. We have seen it working in an area of social and economic deprivation, so we appeal to you to make sure that those programmes continue, not just in West Belfast but across wider Belfast, and even beyond, to give that sense of achievement to our children and young people.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): All Members who are called to speak will have up to five minutes.

Mr Attwood: I thank Jennifer McCann for bringing the topic to the Chamber and welcome the fact that the Minister is here. The reason that I say that is because the debate is very timely. We are now closer to the eve of the publication of the Programme for Government. In my view, when it comes to West Belfast and other areas of need and disadvantage, the PFG has to be a paradigm shift. It has to be a paradigm shift when it comes to education provision and support for those who are about to go to school and those who are at school.

I concur with Ms McCann that the achievements of our schools and other educational interventions in West Belfast are immense. There are great schools, great results, great interventions and great community initiatives when it comes to education. At the same time, if you go through West Belfast — this was my experience in April, May and June on the lower Shankill and other parts of West Belfast and in the months before and since — there are areas and communities where too many people believe that the power of the state, the work of political parties and the interventions of all ranges of public bodies will not change their objective experience. They feel that, whatever the state and others may do, it will not work for them. That is a sad narrative this long after the ceasefires and the devolution of government.

When it comes to education provision, I want to put some questions to the Minister. In that regard, I anticipate the meeting that I will have with him next Tuesday afternoon, at which these are some of the issues that we will need to touch on. If we do not shape a paradigm shift, there is a risk that those people in those communities who feel the way that I have outlined will feel that more intensely. Here are the measures that, in my view, when it comes to education provision in West Belfast, will define the future as something different from the past.

The first point to make is that we need a comprehensive strategy for those who are brought to six that embraces the child and takes care of the child, the family, the parents and the grandparents up to the point that the child enters nursery and formal schooling. If we do not have a paradigm shift in that regard in educational and other family and child supports, we will not be able to change more fundamentally the circumstances that are experienced in communities in West Belfast. We need to borrow from the Scandinavian model or, more accurately, from the New Zealand model, when it comes to provision and support for those who are newly born up until when they enter nursery education and primary school, across the range of all those who interface with those children. As part of that, my second point is that, if you are not making adequate provision for childcare for a parent or parents with young children when they are in school or about to go into school, you will not be able to deal comprehensively with the needs of that family and maximise the opportunities for those children when they go into education or are going through education, not least in West Belfast. My questions to the Minister are these: will there be a paradigm shift when it comes to the 0-6 strategy and will there be a paradigm shift when it comes to childcare?

I have a third challenge for the Minister, and this is where he will have to join up with other Ministers. The most mature economic development policies on these islands have targeted strategies that bring entrepreneurship and enterprise into the school estate. There are enterprise programmes whereby pupils in the school system, including in West Belfast, are given all sorts of opportunities —

5.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Attwood: — to develop an enterprise and an entrepreneurial culture. Those are some of the measures of a paradigm shift. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

Mr Carroll: I thank the Member for bringing this to the Floor. It is an important issue. In our constituency, one of the issues in educational services that we hear about most is that of classroom assistants for statemented children. Increasingly, we hear about the devastatingly long waiting times for children who need statements to receive them. Those waiting times have a detrimental effect not just on the children's educational needs but, as we hear from parents in West Belfast, on the well-being of the children and their families, because of the undue stress that they are forced to endure. Too often, we hear that, even when eventually statemented, children face barriers to getting the assistance that they need. Children with special needs and autistic students have to fight to get the educational assistance that they need and deserve.

People Before Profit thinks that that is a shocking state of affairs. The journey that parents face to get their children the warranted amount of help is a long one riddled with undue stress.

The blame does not fall at the feet of the classroom assistants employed to help the children. As often as we hear from parents of children with learning difficulties, we hear from classroom assistants how under pressure they are. Indeed, a recent UNISON trade union article articulates just how under pressure, undervalued and underfunded they are. They have to fight to secure a permanent contract, now a pipe dream for most classroom assistants. They are understaffed in a way that affects their already huge workload. The lack of job security and the lack of hours, coupled with an increasing workload, can have harmful effects on schoolchildren, as we heard from Members from the constituency.

Most Members here will be aware that, in the past, classroom assistants have had to take industrial action against the Executive in their fight for better working conditions and job security. They may well be forced to take industrial action again to fight for better working conditions and, as a result, better learning conditions for children, who are being let down and left behind. If the classroom assistants choose to take industrial action, they will have the full support of People Before Profit and, I hope, of others in the Chamber.

I do not raise those issues simply to highlight them. If I am inundated with horror stories, I am sure that others in the Chamber and from West Belfast are as well. We need to look at the other issue of impending amalgamations and further cuts, which will have a drastic effect. People across constituencies are concerned about those, particularly in West Belfast. I repeat that I do not raise the issues simply to highlight them; I raise them as a stark warning to the Executive that, if they do not get off their hands, listen to those on the ground and alleviate the situation, those on the ground will no doubt be forced to make the changes themselves by taking action. If they are forced to do so — I encourage them to do so — I will be there supporting them. Unless something is done, classroom assistants, vulnerable children and the community of West Belfast as a whole will continue to be let down.

Mr Humphrey: I speak as a Member for North Belfast, but I am a governor of two schools in the greater Shankill. I declare an interest in respect of both of them. I welcome the debate and thank the Member for securing it.

Before coming here, I spoke to the principals of some of the local primary schools. I pay tribute to the principals' group in the greater Shankill for the work that it has done and the leadership that it has given. I commend teachers, governors, parents and, of course, the young people themselves for the results starting to emerge from the area. Clearly, improvements are happening there that I very much welcome. They told me the three things that they see as important: the continuation of funding for targeting social need, the effects of social deprivation and social difficulties. Of course, I agree with that. All those are linked to the socio-economic difficulties that prevail: paramilitarism, deprivation and social exclusion.

I think that, as other Members have said, the key is early intervention not just in education but in all aspects of government. I welcome the joined-up approach in the

Shankill. Local representatives have joined together with the Agreed Agenda group, with Jackie Redpath, the chief executive of the Greater Shankill Partnership, taking the lead on that along with Nicola Verner. Until recently, the partnership was led by Thomas Scott. Leadership has been given by the partnership board and Integrated Services, again led by Nicola Verner.

The Minister will know that there could be three new primary schools in the greater Shankill: one in the upper part, which would involve Springhill Primary School and Black Mountain Primary School; one in the lower part that could involve Edenbrooke Primary School and Malvern Primary School; and the new Glenwood Primary School. I very much welcome the development and the funding that has been provided. Construction at the school comes to a conclusion with the new Edenderry Nursery School at Lanark Way, which is the first phase of the new Glenwood Primary School. I look forward to the Minister making an early decision on funding for Glenwood and a new school there.

I want to look at Springfield Primary School as an example. I attended a meeting in Springfield in 2005 when I was a councillor for Court. The school had 74 pupils, it was failing, and educational achievement was not great. Last year, I had the honour of opening an extension to the school, which now has 176 pupils. That school is doing tremendous work with young people who are progressing to secondary education, many of them to grammar schools. That is good news. Of course, that is all in the primary sector.

I also want to talk about the secondary sector. In recent times, only a few weeks ago, I was invited to go back to my old school, the Boys' Model, for its presentation day, and I was amazed at the standards and the improvements that there have been. There were five days of presentations, and I was able to attend only one: the senior school presentations. I have to say that the advances that have been made there, the uplift in educational achievement and the confidence and competence of those young people were absolutely amazing. I also attended the Girls' Model presentations and was delighted to see such great forward movement there. The leadership of Alan Logan and Emlyn Wright respectively in those two schools has to be commended. Unfortunately, I was invited but was unable to go to Hazelwood Integrated College a few weeks ago because of a public meeting that I had organised in my constituency, but I know that you, Minister, attended and were greatly impressed.

I have to say that, as we go forward, many of the challenges that face North Belfast and West Belfast, which are the same challenges right across the constituencies, which are divided by the Shankill Road, are faced by those young people. When I speak to principals and those in leadership, such as the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and see the work that is going on in schools in North Belfast, I am encouraged to see general improvement. I commend the Department for its work in the area, but, in particular, I commend teachers. Teachers are often criticised. As I said, I am a governor of two schools. Governors are hugely indebted to the hard work of dedicated teachers. When a school is led by a very good and dedicated principal who is determined to turn a school round, that makes a difference. I pay tribute to the work that has been done. I pay tribute —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Humphrey: Yes. I pay tribute to the Agreed Agenda group, where the parties meet, for the action zone that has been established, which has made a great difference. That sort of joined-up governance really is the key and solution, in my view, to dealing with the problems in West Belfast and North Belfast.

Mr Allen: I thank the proposer of the Adjournment topic for bringing this important debate to the House. Indeed, I enjoyed having the opportunity to speak in a previous Adjournment debate that was secured by the Member in January.

I declare an interest as a voluntary trustee of an organisation that provides community-based and alternative education packages to individuals. Also, my wife is a teaching assistant in a local primary school, so I know only too well, and at first hand, the difficulties that teaching assistants and teachers face on a daily basis. I commend and pay tribute to those teachers — not just in West Belfast, North Belfast or my constituency of East Belfast, but right across the Province — who day and daily go above and beyond to support our children.

As a father of two young children in the early days of their primary-school education, I think it is important and imperative that we involve parents centrally in the education of our children. Indeed, I very much welcome the opportunity when I can go to the school for my children's review and be able to complement the work of the teachers and classroom assistants in supporting my children. I hope that the Minister will continue to look at that because those reviews, with parents involved centrally in their children's education, are a cornerstone of going forward.

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercising of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. It is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalised adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens. It is well documented, however, that not all of our citizens do well in the educational setting, whether primary school, secondary school or college. I place on record my admiration for those community-based and alternative education programmes that have set up and gone out of their way to support those who have not been able to fit into the education setting in school in the way that they had perhaps hoped.

The proposer of the topic made mention of bad experiences in school, and I am testimony to that. I was an individual who, through my own fault — I will not attempt to place the burden upon anybody else — found myself slipping down a path that I did not necessarily want to. However, when it became evident that I did not want to go down that path, I had slipped down that slope too far. I am very grateful to the Link Centre, which encompasses the Open Doors programme. It got me back on the path and the journey that I needed to be on to achieve a degree of proper educational attainment. That is what led me to choose a career in the military. Some might say, "Look at you now. That wasn't the right career or the right path," but I would not hesitate to do it all over again. I would do it in a heartbeat because it has created and shaped me into the person I am today.

In finishing, I offer my support. Things can get slightly hot and heavy in the Chamber at times between the Opposition and the Executive parties, such as yesterday. However, my party leader said that we will be a constructive Opposition and work with the Executive where we can. This is one area that I feel passionate about, and I will work with the Minister in any way that I can to support our young people.

Mr McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this Adjournment debate as second-generation West Belfast and as the education spokesperson for the party. Whilst the issues that affect West Belfast are maybe more acute there, they do have an impact on other constituencies as well. So, whilst the issues that are being raised here today are constituency-specific, they do reach out to other places across the North.

I was shocked by the statistic that 38% of people in West Belfast hold no qualifications at all. We are doing a bit of a disservice if we have that amount of people being educated only up to a certain level. We do need to review it, take that step back and say, "What could we be doing better and in a more joined-up approach to try to deal with the issue?"

5.15 pm

To take my particular slant in looking at this, I do not think that the issue lies solely with the schools. There really are some very good schools in West Belfast; some leaders in education in that area. If we look at the inspections, we can see that all of the post-primaries in the constituency have achieved a satisfactory rating or higher and all but one of the primary schools were deemed satisfactory and higher. Schools are being rated very highly in the area for the work that they are doing. Let us look at the wider picture, at some of the other things that are happening in the constituency that are negatively impacting on the education of our young people in an area that has 39% of children living in poverty. That is a stark contrast to the Northern Ireland average of 21%. It is a constituency where the life expectancy of men is 74 and women is 80, which are among the lowest in Northern Ireland. It has some of the highest rates of people on disability benefit, and I think that we can assume from that that there is a significantly higher proportion of children undertaking caring responsibilities in the home as well.

We need to support and improve health services in the constituency to try to restrict the negative impact that this is possibly having on children and their education. I would always say that we could invest in youth services and youth clubs in West Belfast, which would greatly enhance the opportunities for children in the area; it would give them good positive role models and positive engagement. There are lots of services there, and I am sure that, if they were enhanced and strengthened, it would support the social and personal development of young people, all of which would help to raise self-esteem and, as was referred to earlier, could contribute to improvements in the classroom environment. We should not underestimate the impact of breakfast and homework clubs. Evidence shows that breakfasts clubs set young people up for a good day at school and help with their concentration. Homework clubs can help some young people, who maybe cannot get support at home with homework, by giving them support, getting them into the classroom and giving them the pride that their homework is completed. If there are initiatives

like that in the area, they should continue to be supported and, if possible, rolled out a bit more. There are many issues, but there are lots of solutions. If we do all that we can to draw them together, we should hopefully be able to make an impact and reduce the underachievement that there is in West Belfast.

Mr Sheehan: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate tonight. West Belfast gets a lot of bad publicity, and the previous Member who spoke mentioned some of the issues, including, for example, the highest rates of child poverty, lowest life expectancy, highest unemployment at various times, and all of that. It is one of the most deprived constituencies.

Yet, if a stranger arrived in Belfast and asked to be directed to the top-achieving school at A level in the North, where would they be directed to? Straight to that area, right to the Falls Road in the heart of West Belfast, St Dominic's — the top-achieving school at A level. Also on the Falls Road in West Belfast, you have Coláiste Feirste, which is bursting at the seams. It is undergoing a £14 million refurbishment and redevelopment and, when that development is complete, it still will not have room for all the children who want to go to that school. It is already one of the top achieving non-selective schools in the North; it is also the largest post-primary Irish-medium school on the island of Ireland.

I have talked about this before in the Chamber: a piece of research was released in the Long Gallery just before Christmas last year called 'School Inspection in a Polycentric Context'. The theory behind it is that individual schools on their own can only reach a certain level of achievement, but, when schools collaborate and cooperate and there is an overarching inspection, all results can increase. The research was carried out at the behest of ERASMUS, under the auspices of the West Belfast Partnership Board, and was conducted by academics from Dublin City University.

Jennifer McCann referred to the results of such an approach: an increase of 14.3% at GCSE level among children on free school meals. The district inspector from the Education and Training Inspectorate, Dr Paddy Shevlin, described that as spectacular, and it is spectacular. I defy anyone to point me to anywhere else in the North where such a leap in attainment has taken place.

What have we got in West Belfast? First, the children and young people are no more and no less intelligent than children anywhere else, but it is clear that something different is taking place. There is a template there, and it is all in the report on the polycentric inspection. Area learning communities have been established at nursery, primary and post-primary level, where schools work and cooperate on problems that are identified in the system. There are problems in transition years from nursery to primary level and from primary to post-primary, so the area learning communities are working to ameliorate those problems. The teacher from the local primary school comes to the nursery school for a few weeks before the end of term and the children get to know her or him, and it makes the transition all the easier. Similarly, projects are carried out at transition years from primary to post-primary.

Of course, there are the Easter schools. We all know how important English and maths are at GCSE level. Without English and maths, it is difficult for kids to move on to

third-level education. What do the Easter schools do? They identify children who are sitting on a borderline C/D grade for English and maths, and those children get a week of intensive tuition at St Mary's University College. The children are brought into a university setting and given intensive tuition for a week, and the results are phenomenal: a 78% pass rate for maths, 82% for English. That is what is happening in West Belfast.

I know that the Minister is aware of it; I know that he was Chair of the Education Committee when the partnership board came in and presented on it; and I know that he was impressed by what he heard. I ask the Minister to continue to fund the cutting-edge work that is happening in education in West Belfast —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Sheehan: — and help to have it rolled out elsewhere. I thank Jennifer McCann for bringing the debate and ask the Minister to continue the funding.

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): I thank Jennifer McCann for bringing the issue to the Floor today. It is an opportunity to discuss educational issues and to highlight the important role that all of us have as a community in ensuring that our children and young people achieve their full potential. As Pat Sheehan indicated, there have been tremendous successes in changing academic achievement, and that is very much to be celebrated. As the proposer of the Adjournment debate also indicated, in addition to the academic successes, it goes beyond that and is about ensuring that children can reach their full potential.

I welcome the tone of the debate, which has been positive. It is right that, while we highlight the issues — a number of Members have highlighted important issues that I hope to address — we take a little time to celebrate the achievements and the efforts of the people who are working on the ground, be it in schools or in the wider community. We should embrace that positive note.

Generally speaking, all the contributions were fairly positive. I appreciate that, possibly slightly playing to stereotype, there was something of a call to the barricades by People Before Profit. I am sure that it is glad to know that the solidarity will always be there for People Before Profit on all occasions.

It is the case that, if we are looking to achieve full potential, evidence of securing that outcome can be particularly challenging where there are areas of high deprivation, particularly, as has been highlighted by Members, in areas such as West Belfast. We also know — it has been highlighted here today — that, where there is appropriate and timely support, positive outcomes can be achieved. I am encouraged by the improvement in attainment of our young people resident in that area and, indeed, across Northern Ireland. As Education Minister for the last four and a half months, I take complete credit for that, rather than in any way suggesting that there was any good work done prior to my appointment. In all seriousness, though, education can be beneficial to the economy and to the community, but it can be particularly beneficial to the individual. It can be that one great, life-changing experience.

Mr Allen made a very positive contribution, for which I thank him. At one stage, I thought that he was going to warn that, if you did not study hard at school, you were

in danger of ending up as an MLA. Maybe that should be a warning across our education system. On a range of issues that Mr Allen raised, there can be good work done across the Chamber.

I am determined as much as possible to take action to break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement. While recent statistics demonstrate a continued upward trend in the performance of school-leavers, there will always be a need to address low performance where there are significant gaps between our most and least deprived pupils. I am totally committed to targeting resources wherever they are needed most.

Members sought assurances that we intend to continue funding the projects. It is certainly something I am supportive of, particularly when it comes to the roll-out. That will also be very useful. Looking at some of the Members opposite, I ask that, if there are any good words that they can have with the Finance Minister, their intervention would be appreciated.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Weir: I am happy to give way.

Mr Sheehan: I am glad to hear that you are willing to look at the continued funding of the projects. I did not have enough time during my contribution to mention nurture units. They are not unique to West Belfast, and I am not sure whether there has been an official evaluation. Certainly, anecdotal evidence coming back is that they have been a phenomenal success, and I ask the Minister to consider funding for them.

Mr Weir: I am happy to deal with that issue and will come to it in a moment.

Mr Attwood raised the issue of early intervention for those who are nought to six. It is undoubtedly the case that the best intervention is where you get early intervention, particularly with the 0-6 strategy. Looking at two priorities for funding in what are difficult times, I say that it is, first, about getting the maximum amount directly to the front-line service in our schools, but allied to that is getting as much protection and, where possible, expansion of funding for early intervention as possible.

I have visited both the West Belfast Partnership Board and the Children and Young People Zone in the Shankill. One of the things that very much struck me is the building of work that happens from year zero upwards in both areas. There is an acceptance that there needs to be that early intervention.

Specifically — this is an area in which West Belfast has been a leader — Mr Sheehan mentioned the nurture units. There was a recent evaluation by Queen's University that indicated the high level of success there, not simply for the children going through the nurture units but in a whole-school improvement where it happens. I will look to mainstream that funding and see what expansion can take place. I have given an assurance to the 32 nurture units across Northern Ireland that, until we are in a position to announce any degree of new nurture scheme, their funding is secure. West Belfast has been at the cutting edge there. There have been five nurture awards UK-wide that affect Northern Ireland, and two of the five recipients have been Holy Trinity Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School on Slate Street. Shortly before I became Minister, I was at Slate Street, and Mr McCann was there

as well. It was tremendous to see the spirit of pastoral care that has been developed by nurture units. It is about having that level of intervention.

The Department has made funding available to early years providers and schools throughout the area, and specific mention has been made of some of the direct interventions in West Belfast. There are a total of 56 schools that currently qualify for extended schools programme funding. Mr McGrath made reference to some of the good work that happens through the breakfast clubs and homework clubs. There has been specific mention, through the West Belfast Partnership Board, of the focus on Easter examinations on that basis.

5.30 pm

Mr McGrath made the very valid point that it is not simply about what happens in the classroom. Mention was made of the levels of educational attainment in West Belfast. There has been an issue of too many in the adult population being without qualifications, and there are two answers to that. First, we need to try to ensure that we do not have that problem with the next generation. Secondly, when looking at further education and intervention work on a multi-departmental basis, you do not simply write off those who do not have qualifications. Intervention is needed there.

In West Belfast, £385,000 has been made available to support the full service community network programme, and £340,000 has been awarded to nine childcare settings through the school age childcare grant scheme. Mr Attwood raised the issue of the children and young people's strategy, which we hope to bring forward reasonably soon. That has to be aligned with the PFG. He is right that it is a major challenge for the Executive as a whole because, realistically, if there is to be a step change, it will not be funded directly by the Department of Education; there has to be a wider commitment.

Mr Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Weir: Yes, I will give way briefly.

Mr Allen: This does not relate directly to West Belfast, but an issue that has been brought before me recently is the difficulty that Employers for Childcare Solutions has encountered as a result of now having to pay VAT on childcare services. Will the Minister give an undertaking to work with the Department of Health to look at that issue? I know that it is also involved.

Mr Weir: I am certainly happy to look at that issue, even if it is outside my Department. I suspect that the VAT issue may be a result of national decisions that lie outside our control, but I am certainly happy to look at that.

Mr Attwood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way briefly.

Mr Attwood: You raised the point about interdepartmental work. Given the opportunity to pool funds, further to Steven Agnew's Act, are you indicating that, across Departments, there will be pooled funds to deal with children's needs and services?

Mr Weir: An active group, concentrating on the Department of Education and the Department of Health, is looking at how we can improve outcomes. That group

arose from that Act and other legislation. When the Special Educational Needs Bill was going through, for example, a range of amendments was proposed to try to secure that.

There is also — this touches on one of the Member's other main points about entrepreneurship — a strong need, particularly when we look at the curriculum, for work between the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy. We should not have a silo mentality when it comes to schools; we should also look to further education colleges. There is support from the Department for productive relationships between schools and employers. We fund the young enterprise scheme, and I was at a session of Business in the Community last week. I have seen, particularly in West Belfast, very strong linkages between employers and local firms and schools. Recently, I was at the Aisling awards — I thought at one stage that they were going to be called the Ó Muilleoir awards — and the strong commitment seen there was a tremendous example to other communities of buy-in to entrepreneurship. That is also an important issue.

I had the opportunity to visit the partnership board before I became Minister. I was a DUP Chair visiting in a private capacity, so the visit had a slight element or quality of Nixon in China. I was incredibly impressed by what was happening there. I have also had the opportunity to visit the children's zone on the Shankill. There is very good work in both communities on transition, which is an important, sometimes neglected, issue.

Mr Humphrey raised the issue of early intervention and how support for that can be provided by way of a new school build. I am glad that the Department has pushed ahead with that. It is clear from the contributions to the debate that this issue goes well beyond the boundaries of West Belfast, even if we have some of its sons and daughters contributing.

The greater Shankill zone is not the first initiative to have taken place in the area. The interpretation of those directly involved is that the quality is higher when it is focused on the grass roots and driven from there up. The same is true of the West Belfast Partnership Board: it was there that we got the highest level of buy-in. From that point of view, I am keen to see those developing. As Pat Sheehan said, there are very positive outcomes, and we are seeing collaboration and coordination not only between schools but between educational achievement and the rest of the community. As the proposer of the Adjournment topic realised, it is vital that there is not only buy-in from the community in general but buy-in from parents in particular. It is a considerable advantage when parents have aspirations for their children to try to deliver, which we see in West Belfast.

I am keen to support the ongoing work. I intend to work closely with schools, early years, childcare providers, the Youth Service, which sometimes has a Cinderella quality, and educational stakeholders to ensure that we meet the needs and aspirations. As with a lot of things, I have that commitment. To a certain extent, the opportunity to do this as well as possible will be driven by finance and the greatest support that we can get from the Executive as a whole. There is much good innovative practice, and much of what is happening in West Belfast can serve as a role model for what is happening elsewhere, even in sharing practice.

I see that time is counting down against me. Overall, in West Belfast, between communities and education sectors, within education sectors and across the board, we

have to continue to work collaboratively to share expertise and support teachers and school leaders because school leadership can be absolutely vital. We should all aspire to do that and to raise overall standards of attainment. I welcome the collective spirit that Mr Allen spoke of, with Government and Opposition working closely together, at least on this issue.

Adjourned at 5.37 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Communities

Consultation on the Exemption Under Article 85(8) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 for Listed Places of Worship from the Requirement to Obtain Listed Building Consent

Published at 12.00 noon on Thursday 29 September 2016.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I am writing to advise members of my decision following a public consultation on this matter.

Under Section 85(8) of the Planning (NI) Act 2011, listed places of worship are exempted from the need to apply from listed building consent for alterations that might affect their architectural and historic interest.

On 18 March 2016 the Department of the Environment issued a public consultation on the exemption. The consultation closed on 13 June. 122 groups and individuals responded to the consultation

Background

In 2014, the Historic Buildings Council (HBC) of Northern Ireland wrote to the Minister of the Environment on this issue. They were concerned by the unnecessary loss of detail on some places of worship which had led to their delisting, and of proposals for significant change to others which would remove much of their architectural and historic interest. The Minister asked for a subcommittee of DOE officers and HBC members to be set up to review the current situation. The sub-committee's recommendation that the exemption be removed and replaced with clear guidance formed the body of the consultation.

The key change proposed was that the Department exercise its power under Section 85(9) to issue an 'order' that the exemption be removed. In parallel, guidance would be produced for owners and planning authorities. The proposals were listed in the consultation as follows:

- Develop best practice guidance on the alteration and adaption of Northern Ireland's listed places of worship;
- Clarify within this guidance that listed places of worship do not enjoy permitted development rights and that external changes, such as removing and replacing windows and doors, taking off render or changing roof details are 'development' and require planning permission

- Issue an order that the Ecclesiastical Exemption is removed in Northern Ireland; and
- Advise councils that styles of worship or liturgical requirements should also be considered when assessing Listed Building Consent applications for places of worship.

Responses to the consultation

In summary, while there was widespread support among groups concerned with the protection of the historic environment and among the majority of district councils (seven of which responded) for the removal of the exemption, almost all of the responses from churches were opposed to the removal of the exemption.

A number of concerns coalesced in the responses opposed to the removal of the exemption. Flexibility was seen as key to dealing with future challenges and the responses demonstrated little confidence that requiring permission from the local authority will help in this regard. This was associated with a strongly held conviction among some that intervention by the state is potentially an intervention in how worship can be conducted and therefore an assault on religious liberty. For many, as well, their present internal system, administered by people intimately conversant with their faith, works perfectly well.

Some were of the view that a few extreme cases should not cause upset to this system, while others were unconvinced by the evidence presented by the Department. Another concern raised was in regard to the definition of liturgical requirements. It was argued these are subject to change and doubts were cast upon the suitability of Departmental and district council officials to evaluate these.

Way Forward

In principle, these concerns could be addressed in a system which removed the exemption. Listed Building Consent procedures for secular buildings have proved very flexible in their 42 years of operation in Northern Ireland. As part of this, significant changes have been approved for many redundant churches. The principle of government intervention has already been established through health and safety and building control requirements. Easements in both cases can be achieved based upon reasonable argument. The idea in the Department's proposals of introducing liturgical requirements as a material concern was to ensure similar flexibility. While the responses have made clear that the definition of such requirements is potentially very difficult, the point was that the principle of

flexibility to accommodate such concerns be enshrined in any new approach.

It is, however, clear that there are major concerns among many church bodies and congregations in regard to the impact of the proposed change. As they are the principal custodians of listed places of worship, this has to be taken into account.

There was general agreement in the responses to the proposed development of best practice advice. Responses also expressed general agreement on the benefits of clear guidance regarding planning legislation relating to the exterior of listed church buildings

Three of the main churches, the Church Leaders Group and a number of others also proposed discussions with denominations to refine their current internal processes as an alternative way forward. They argued that this would help ensure that the concerns set out in the consultation responses are understood and addressed.

One concern that the Department had in regard to such and approach was that, while some denominations have procedures, others do not; and that ecclesiastical groups are not defined or listed in the legislation. I acknowledge, however, that the majority of listed ecclesiastical buildings are owned by the main churches.

I have therefore decided, taking account of all of the consultation responses, that discussion with church representatives fully to explore the potential of refinements to their systems, and the development of suitable systems for smaller churches, is an appropriate way forward. District councils as planning authorities also need to be involved in the discussions.

The ecclesiastical exemption provided for in Section 85(8) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 will therefore remain in place.

My Department will work closely with those responsible for listed places of worship in Northern Ireland, and with district councils as planning authorities, to support effective decision making as regards changes to places of worship, taking account of legislative provisions and of developing knowledge and insights as regards such works. This close working will take two forms:

- For larger organisations, my Department will put in place partnering arrangements, governed by a Memorandum of Understanding or similar, which will enable structured engagement with governing bodies at a Northern Ireland level to review developing best practice in this and other jurisdictions, and agree appropriate changes to Departmental, planning authority and governing body guidance and processes in light of this and of any relevant specific examples of changes to listed places of worship
- For smaller organisations and individual self-governing places of worship, my Department will provide appropriate guidance on changes to places of worship which enhances the advice already available. This will provide for access to the Department's conservation architects to discuss proposed developments, and for access to the expertise in larger organisations as to how best to manage and codify processes for approving changes to places of worship which take account of liturgical and

architectural matters and the appropriate balancing of these

I believe, having considered the representations made in the responses to the consultation, that such an approach is proportionate in addressing the issues raised and will continue to allow worshipping communities to adapt their buildings in response to their mission whilst taking account of architectural considerations and community association with these important buildings. My Department, working closely with those responsible for listed places of worship, will monitor the effectiveness of these arrangements.

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 30 September 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Mullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the progress made in implementing the recommendations contained within the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Fifth Periodic Report.

(AQO 131/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights published its concluding observations on the UK's Fifth Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2009. Progress on all issues raised in the UN Committee's concluding observations was included in the UK's Sixth Periodic Report under ICESCR which was submitted to the United Nations in June 2014. A copy of the Sixth Periodic Report can be viewed at the following web address:-

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/172/74/PDF/G1417274.pdf?OpenElement>

Mr Allen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the rationale for six special advisors being employed in their Department.

(AQW 2308/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Special Advisers carry out a range of functions in supporting and providing advice to Ministers.

Their role is particularly important given the joint nature of our office and the wide range of complex responsibilities we have as First Minister and deputy First Minister and joint chairs of the Executive.

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many Freedom of Information requests their Department has have received since January 2011; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by their Special Advisers; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, their Special Advisers.

(AQW 2340/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The department has answered 803 valid requests since 1 January 2011 to date. 792 of these requests have been answered leaving 11 still within the 20-day statutory time limit.

There would be a disproportionate cost to checking the status of the 803 requests as the information is not held in a readily accessible format.

Mr Beattie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister , pursuant to AQW 1389/16-21 and given that two local authorities have signed the Community Covenant and that £500k has been awarded to local charities in the last round of Armed Forces Covenant Fund allocations, (i) whether they wish to revise their answer; and (ii) what assurances they can give that the Executive will (a) take up the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Groups invitation to attend Cabinet Office meetings; and (b) promote the Covenant Fund to community groups.

(AQW 2437/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We are aware that a number of local groups were successful in receiving grant funding in the first year of funding under the Armed Forces Covenant Fund. While there is no joint agreement to appoint a representative to the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group we do not believe that this inhibits local community groups from applying to the Covenant Fund for grant funding.

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister , pursuant to AQW 1109/16-21, to detail the process applied to applications.

(AQW 2532/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: In keeping with the partnership approach adopted to manage the SIF, the Department did not centrally administer a process for applications.

As we stated in answer to AQW 1109/16-21, the Social Investment Fund is community led with local Steering Groups established to develop and prioritise projects to address needs, in consultation with local communities. The local Steering Groups took forward the prioritisation of projects; submitting the final projects proposed for delivery to the Department. The method of prioritisation and final decisions on projects to be submitted was a matter for each Steering Group.

In respect of the submitted projects, the Department then ensured that they aligned with the SIF criteria, were deliverable and represented value for money. Consequently, each project has been subject to an economic appraisal and a robust approvals process within the Department, prior to funding being committed.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how they will ensure that the needs of all Section 75 groups are represented in the Programme for Government.

(AQW 2572/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We are committed to ensuring that, in tracking progress through the Programme for Government Framework, we will, wherever possible, disaggregate the evidence that we use on Section 75 grounds.

For each of the outcomes in the framework, we will produce and analyse data and other evidence in relation to the different experiences of people of different religious belief: political opinion: racial group: age: marital status: sexual orientation: men and women generally: persons with a disability and persons without: and persons with dependants and persons without.

By doing so, we intend to enable the particular needs, issues and inequalities experienced by different groups to be identified and addressed, and the impact on each of those groups to be assessed.

We intend, where possible, to use official statistics to monitor and report on the Programme for Government, both because these statistics are tested for robustness and reliability, and because they are available publicly. This will ensure that reporting and monitoring is as transparent as possible.

We are aware that fully disaggregated data will not be immediately available in all areas. We are committed to working to develop data over the course of the Programme for Government period to expand the areas in which this disaggregation is possible.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how regard is being paid to the UNCRC concluding observations in the formation of the Programme for Government.

(AQW 2573/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government Framework contains the outcome: 'We give our children and young people the best start in life'.

This reflects the Executive's commitment to building a society that values young people and enables them to fulfil their potential. It also reflects our commitment to promote early intervention as the most effective means of delivering wellbeing in later life.

The plans, policies and programmes that the Executive develops and implements to deliver on this outcome will pay due regard to the UNCRC and the concluding observations.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what indicators other than academic achievements are being considered for the Programme for Government to assess outcomes for children.

(AQW 2576/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A number of indicators in the draft Programme for Government Framework examine the experiences of children directly:

- Improve support for looked after children;
- Improve educational outcomes;
- Reduce educational inequality;
- Improve the quality of education; and,
- Improve child development.

In addition, the draft Programme for Government Framework describes the conditions of wellbeing to which the Executive aspires for everyone in society, including, where appropriate, children.

Progress on many other indicators will make a significant contribution to increasing the wellbeing of children and young people, for example:

- Improve mental health;
- Improve the supply of suitable housing;
- Reduce poverty;
- Increase respect for each other;

- Improve cultural participation; and,
- Increase quality of life for people with disabilities;

We will collect and analyse evidence on the particular impact that we are having on children and young people, and on other groups in society, to enable us to understand the particular needs and issues that they experience, and to inform the development and implementation of the plans, policies and programmes that we put in place.

Mrs Palmer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions have taken place to redevelop the Maze/Long Kesh site.

(AQW 2592/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There is no current agreement on Maze/Long Kesh. We recognise the potential of the Site and hope to find a resolution that will see the site developed.

Mrs Palmer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what discussions have taken place to improve access arrangements to the Balmoral Show complex at the Maze/Long Kesh site.

(AQW 2593/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Traffic management and access arrangements for the Balmoral Show are a matter for the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society.

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have given consideration to seeking the devolution of local electoral and boundary review matters.

(AQW 2664/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We keep under review the powers reserved to the UK Government to determine whether any benefit would accrue to the Executive in seeking their devolution. We also intend to meet with the relevant NIO Minister in the near future to discuss a range of electoral matters.

Mrs Palmer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether discussions have taken place to enable the Ulster Aviation Society to promote its open days.

(AQW 2681/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There is no current agreement on Maze/Long Kesh Site issues. Requests for meetings and access to the site are considered on a case by case basis.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why older people are not explicitly represented in the Programme for Government's high level outcomes, measures or indicators.

(AQW 2684/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Programme for Government Framework sets out the Executive's ambitions for improving the wellbeing of all of our people, expressed as a set of high-level outcomes.

These outcomes describe quality of life conditions to which we aspire for all citizens, regardless of their age, or other aspects of their identity.

The single exception to this approach is in respect of young people, where we have included an outcome about giving people the best possible start in life. This reflects our commitment to delivering improvements in wellbeing through early interventions, and is an aspiration supported by the vast majority of respondents to the public consultation.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will propose a high level Programme for Government outcome to value, respect and protect older people.

(AQW 2685/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The consultation on the draft Programme for Government Framework closed on 22 July. Among the 810 responses received, were representations for the inclusion of additional outcomes in a range of areas, including in respect of the needs of older people, but also in respect of a range of other groups experiencing particular needs or issues, such as women, black and minority ethnic people, and people with disabilities.

While we agree that the wellbeing of older people is of huge importance, we consider that the most effective course is to ensure that older people, and other groups in society, share in the progress that we make on each of the wellbeing outcomes that we have set out.

Doing this will require us to understand and to take particular account of the needs of older people and other groups in the development and implementation of our policies and programmes.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the total cost of the panel on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2710/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Panel report provides the opportunity to address comprehensively the crucial and challenging issue of tackling paramilitary activity. The overall cost of the Panel was £110,290 and includes remuneration, travel and subsistence costs and secretariat salaries.

The Panel report makes 43 recommendations and we accept the valuable contribution it makes to tackling this issue.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Refugee Crisis Fund.

(AQW 2766/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Following a recent tendering exercise, the Red Cross has been awarded the contract to run the Crisis Fund up until the end of this financial year. The overall budget for the 2016/17 Crisis Fund is £100,000.

The money is distributed through a network of organisations, most of whom are supported by the Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF).

The Crisis Fund was established to assist not just refugees, but the broader groups of:

- Vulnerable Migrants – EU and non-EU nationals;
- Destitute Refugees and Asylum Seekers;
- Those who have been subjected to trafficking; and
- Other identifiable vulnerable groups e.g. Roma.

The small amounts of money made available under the Fund will help people - who through no fault of their own have fallen on hard times – avoid destitution.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline a timeframe in publishing the Programme for Government.

(AQW 2767/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We intend to publish the Programme for Government for consultation in the coming weeks, with a view to securing Executive agreement of a final document around the end of the year.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the transfer of Goods, Facilities and Services policy to the Department for Communities.

(AQW 2768/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There are no plans to transfer policy responsibility for bringing forward legislation to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services to the Department for Communities.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the plans the Executive Office has to ensure that the Victims and Survivors Service can meet demand for their services.

(AQW 2769/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We are committed to ensuring that victims and survivors continue to have the best services possible available to them. In this financial year over £14m has been allocated to victims' services. Our Department, in conjunction with the Victims and Survivors Service and the Commission for Victims and Survivors, continues to take forward a collaborative design programme of work to identify and develop a sustainable, comprehensive and responsive service which will meet the needs of all victims and survivors.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors has recently submitted advice on how services could be improved to ensure that the changing demands of victims and survivors can continue to be met in future years.

We are currently considering the details of this advice.

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Racial Equality Strategy.

(AQW 2838/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 was published last December with an ambitious but achievable programme of proposed actions. One such action is the establishment of the Racial Equality Subgroup. This Subgroup is intended to function as a strong voice within government on issues specifically affecting minority ethnic people, migrants and race relations and we attended the inaugural meeting of the Subgroup on 14 September.

Other key actions include the establishment of Departmental Racial Equality Champions and an associated shared learning forum. This will facilitate a cohesive approach to establishing appropriate ethnic monitoring. These Champions have been identified and will liaise directly with the Subgroup.

Ms Armstrong asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales on the increase in the number of refugees and racial tensions.

(AQW 2967/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We are pleased to be playing our part in assisting with the humanitarian crisis in Syria by participating in the Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme. The initial reception and settlement of the refugees who have come to live among us has gone well and we have been heartened by the positive reaction to their arrival and that they have been made to feel welcome.

The impact of the refugee crisis was considered last year in the 25th summit meeting of the British Irish Council. During this meeting we discussed the efforts across the eight BIC Member Administrations and internationally to help refugees, and the value of joint working and cooperation on the domestic resettlement of refugees.

Our officials hold monthly discussions with colleagues from the Home Office in London, and the Scottish and Welsh Governments in relation to the Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme. They are also in frequent bilateral contacts, including with officials in Dublin. These discussions provide a valuable opportunity to share best practice and raise any common issues or areas of concern.

We are pleased that recent statistics from the PSNI have shown a reduction in both racist incidents and racist crime. While there have been a few isolated incidents, the majority of people have been very welcoming of refugees. However, there is no room for complacency.

The Racial Equality Strategy contains the commitment that we will work with the Department of Justice to develop our approach to tackling race hate crime and we are working to progress the implementation of this Strategy. It is our view that there is absolutely no place for racism or intolerance of any kind in our society.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the process for the recruitment of a new Press Secretary for the Executive and the terms of the appointment including (i) the advertising process; (ii) the length of the contract offered and accepted; (iii) the salary scale of the new post; and (iv) whether the new post is conferred Special Adviser status.

(AQW 3102/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The appointment was made in accordance with the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, as amended by prerogative order made by us acting jointly under section 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on 8 September 2016.

Under the terms of the order there was no requirement upon us to advertise the post. The length of the contract is governed by the terms of the prerogative order and will end, therefore, on a date terminating on or before the date of the poll for the election of the next Assembly under section 31 or 32 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Press Secretary has been appointed to a salary of £75,419. The order introduces a new category of person to provide specialist support to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and therefore, the new post is not conferred the status of Special Adviser.

The prerogative powers in section 23 (3) were first used in 2001 by Seamus Mallon and David Trimble in relation to The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001.

Mr Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Programme for Government will be finalised.

(AQW 3185/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We intend to publish the Programme for Government for consultation in the coming weeks, with a view to securing Executive agreement of a final document around the end of the year.

Ms Mallon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the (i) draft Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategy; (ii) draft Economic Strategy; and (iii) draft Investment Strategy will be published.

(AQW 3188/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We intend to publish the Programme for Government and the accompanying Social Strategy, Economic Strategy, and Investment Strategy for consultation in the coming weeks, with a view to securing Assembly agreement around the end of the year.

Mr Mullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the land set aside for community projects at the former army barracks at Ballykelly; and who is responsible for funding the projects.

(AQW 3192/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The conditions for sale of the Shackleton Site require the new owner to provide community facilities on the Site. The new owner, MJM Group, undertook to provide an existing building for community use, subject to appropriate planning approvals, and to discuss other potential benefits with the community. It is now a matter for MJM Group to engage with community representatives on the details.

Mr Mullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the decontamination costs at the former army barracks at Ballykelly; (ii) who is responsible for meeting these costs; and (iii) when decontamination will be completed.
(AQW 3193/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Decontamination was not undertaken by the Department prior to the sale of the Shackleton Site. Decontamination of the Site is now the responsibility of the new Site owners who must bear any costs incurred. The extent and timing of decontamination will depend on the future uses of the Site.

Mr Mullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the costs to date in relation to the former army barracks at Ballykelly; and what is the estimated final cost.
(AQW 3194/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Expenditure on the Shackleton Site from 7 October 2011, when the site was transferred from the Ministry of Defence, is detailed in the following table.

Shackleton	11/12 (from 7/10/11)	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16 Estimated	16/17 Estimated
Total	£345,174	£598,049	£476,236	£423,198	£428,326	£72,000

Invoices for 2015/16 are being finalised and are estimated. Costs for 2016/17 are also estimated. This will have a bearing upon the final cost.

Mr Mullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans are in place to improve transport infrastructure at the former army barracks at Ballykelly.
(AQW 3196/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Shackleton Site transport infrastructure development is a matter for the new site owners. Infrastructure developments will be subject to normal planning processes and approvals.

Ms Bailey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding they have awarded under equality stream funding in each year since 2007, broken down by section 75 category.
(AQW 3220/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office provides funding under a wide range of programmes. While these funding programmes assist people across all nine section 75 categories, the Executive Office does not hold information on the amount of funding delivered to each section 75 category.

Mr McGrath asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Age Goods, Facilities and Services legislation.
(AQO 307/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Public consultation on proposals to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services closed on 8 October 2015. When agreement is reached on the policy content of the proposed legislation we will then consider the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly.

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 2175/16-21, to detail the monetary breakdown and number of awards made by the Victims and Survivors Service through the Individual Needs Programme for the 2015-16 (i) Support for the Bereaved; (ii) Support for the Injured 1; (iii) Support for the Injured 2; (iv) Carers; (v) Financial Assistance; and (vi) Disability Aids schemes, broken down by postcode area.
(AQW 3256/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The information requested has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the new Executive press secretary is subject to the Official Secrets Act.
(AQW 3361/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The new Executive press secretary is subject to the Official Secrets Act.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many times in the last twelve months have the prerogative powers under S 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 been exercised; and for what purposes.
(AQW 3377/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The prerogative powers under section 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 have been exercised once in the last twelve months for the purposes of appointing the new Executive press secretary.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the decisions made under the powers conferred on them by section 23 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQW 3395/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: In addition to the appointment of the new Executive press secretary the prerogative powers in section 23(3) have been used by the then First Ministers and deputy First Ministers as follows:

- The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001;
- The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008; and
- The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010.

Details of these orders can be found at: <https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/our-role>

Dr Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why their letter to the Prime Minister of 10 August 2016 regarding Brexit made no reference to the challenges being faced by local universities.

(AQW 3397/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Our letter to the Prime Minister was intended to draw attention to a number of strategically significant matters. It was not an exhaustive list, but did specify the criticality of competitiveness, of which higher education would be a factor. The letter also made clear that we expect to be fully involved and represented in negotiations on the terms of our future relationships with the EU and other countries. The challenges faced by our universities are being considered by the Department for the Economy and will feature in more detailed engagement with the UK government over the coming months.

Dr Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why their letter to the Prime Minister of 10 August 2016 regarding Brexit made no reference to the need to provide reassurance to existing EU Nationals living and working in Northern Ireland on their entitlement to remain following an exit from the European Union.

(AQW 3398/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Our letter to the Prime Minister was intended to draw attention to a number of strategically significant and, to some extent, unique matters. It was not an exhaustive list, but did endorse the stated determination of the Prime Minister that the border should not become a barrier to the free movement of people, goods and services. The letter also made clear that we expect to be fully involved and represented in negotiations on the terms of our future relationships with the EU and other countries. The implications for EU nationals will be considered as part of this process.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how often, and for what reason, the Royal Prerogative has been used by a First Minister and a deputy First Minister since May 2007.

(AQW 3404/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Since May 2007 the Prerogative powers have been used by a First Minister and deputy First Minister on three occasions, including the order used to appoint the new Executive press secretary. The other occasions were the Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, and the Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010, the details of which can be found at:

<https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/our-role>

Mr Chambers asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to outline the criteria for outside organisations being permitted to use space at the Maze/Long Kesh site to hold events; and (ii) how the Ulster Aviation Society failed to meet these criteria with their recent application to hold an open day under the auspices of European Heritage Open Days.

(AQW 3405/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Ulster Aviation Society (UAS) is permitted under Licence from the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation (MLKDC) to store its collection in, and provide access for small groups of visitors to, one of the WWII Hangers on the MLK Site.

Site access for larger events, such as European Heritage Open Day events, which would require additional outdoor exhibition and car parking space, requires Ministerial approval to proceed and are considered on a case by case basis.

The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) has a lease agreement with the MLKDC which allows it to hold events on the leased area of the Site without requiring further agreement. The hangar used by the UAS does not fall within this area.

Mr Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the timeline and process used for the appointment of the Executive press secretary.

(AQW 3411/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The appointment was made in accordance with the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, as amended by prerogative order made by us acting jointly under section 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on 8 September 2016.

Under the terms of the Order there was no requirement upon us to advertise the post. Prior to the appointment, and in consultation with Corporate HR and Departmental Solicitor's Office, a job description and person specification were drafted. In considering a range of potential candidates as well as the job description and person specification, we concluded that the individual best suited to the role was David Gordon.

Mrs Palmer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the restrictions on the Ulster Aviation Society opening to the public's impact on social, economic and tourism projects at the Maze/Long Kesh site.
(AQW 3438/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There is no current agreement on Maze/Long Kesh Site issues.

The Ulster Aviation Society (UAS) has a licence agreement with the Maze / Long Kesh Development Corporation (MLKDC) which permits it to store its collections at the MLK site. By agreement with the MLKDC it can give limited access to small groups to view its collection. More general access to the site is a matter for agreement on a case by case basis by Ministers.

There is no impact on the wider development of the site. This remains a matter for discussion by Ministers.

Mr Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any engagement they have had with the Minister of Finance to ensure that the Executive implements a transparent and accountable budgetary process.
(AQO 241/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Through the existing Executive structures, we continue to engage with all Executive colleagues on the implementation of transparent and accountable budget processes.

Mr Wells asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's strategy for addressing social exclusion in isolated settlements in the Mourne Mountains.
(AQO 245/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office does not have a specific strategy for addressing social exclusion in isolated settlements in the Mournes, however there are a number of key initiatives that this Executive is taking forward to address need in this area and elsewhere.

The draft Programme for Government Framework, consulted on earlier this year, contained a number of indicators which, if adopted, would positively affect social exclusion, such as improved internet connectivity, improved transport connections, improved cultural participation.

A final Programme for Government will go out for consultation later this year detailing how Executive departments will work together, and with key partners, to deliver better outcomes for people here.

The Executive will also publish a Social Strategy for consultation later this year. This will outline the Executive's collaborative approach to addressing a number of social issues, including social exclusion. The Department for Communities is working with other partners and stakeholders to produce a Strategy that meets the needs of all, including those living in geographically isolated areas.

In addition, DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework aims to tackle financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation in rural areas through organisations working effectively together. In particular it seeks to address social isolation in rural areas through support for groups identified as being at risk of social isolation, by increasing opportunities for social engagement and by promoting positive mental health and wellbeing.

The TRPSI Framework operates across Northern Ireland and is supported by a budget of £4.3m for the year 2016/17.

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with the Minister for the Economy regarding European Union migrants currently employed in Northern Ireland.
(AQO 247/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: While there are no immediate changes in the circumstances of EU nationals currently living here, we, along with our Executive colleagues, are working together on the practical implications of any new arrangements as they are negotiated and take effect.

We have also been in touch with representatives of European Union migrants to stress that they are valued and respected. We have also reaffirmed our commitment to the vision expressed in the Racial Equality Strategy of a society which is strengthened by its ethnic diversity, free from racism, and where we can share a common sense of belonging. This vision is unaffected by the result of the referendum.

Mr Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress made on barrier removal at interfaces.
(AQO 248/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive is committed to the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Headline Action to reduce and remove all interface barriers by 2023. While this is challenging work, progress is being made by engaging with, and seeking the consent and support of the people who live near the interfaces.

The Department of Justice is the lead Department for delivery of the T:BUC headline action for the removal of interface barriers and has advised that of a total of 59 interface barriers, work to date has reduced this number to 50 with sections of five other structures removed. Engagement has been initiated on 40 of the remaining 50 structures. Specific action plans have been developed covering 24 structures.

The Housing Executive is also making progress – having recently removed an Interface Barrier on the Crumlin Road. This is complementary to the excellent support being provided by the International Fund for Ireland's Peace Walls Programme.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many times since the restoration of devolution have the prerogative powers under S 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 been exercised; and for what purposes.

(AQW 3479/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: In addition to the appointment of the new Executive press secretary the prerogative powers in section 23(3) have been used three times since the restoration of devolution for the following purposes:

- The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001;
- The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008; and
- The Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010.

Details of these orders can be found at: <https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/our-role>

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what specific targets and actions aimed at reducing segregation in education will be included in the Programme for Government 2016-21.

(AQW 3480/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Programme for Government 2016-21 is being developed using an outcomes-based approach based on delivering improved well-being for citizens. Consultation on the Draft Programme for Government Framework concluded in July, and a further consultation on a full draft Programme for Government is planned over the autumn period.

Outcome 9 focuses on developing as a shared society while outcome14 focuses on giving our children and young people the best start in life. Delivery plans setting out the actions to be taken in support of these outcomes will be published as part of a new draft Programme for Government in the coming weeks.

Ms Mallon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the proposal to the Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan Urban Village Project for public realm works at the Twaddell Roundabout; and whether improvement works to the shop fronts on this part of Crumlin Road will be included in that transformative work.

(AQW 3537/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: In the Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan Urban Village Area, we plan to invest £300,000 this year on a range of public realm and environmental improvements.

We are also engaging with the local community, key stakeholders and statutory bodies to develop plans to address dereliction and vacancy in the Twaddell Roundabout area. This could result in the production of a localised masterplan to inform the potential for investment and transformation in this area. Dereliction and vacant shop fronts will form part of these considerations.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of what impact the result of the EU referendum will have on the Programme for Government.

(AQW 3567/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government Framework sets out, in outcome terms, the improvements in wellbeing to which the Executive aspires for everyone in society.

Clearly the landscape within which we are developing the PfG has evolved following the EU Referendum. It is more important than ever that the Executive can present a compelling and coherent vision for the future. Work therefore continues on finalising a draft PfG for further consultation during the autumn period.

The economic, social and investment strategies are being advanced in the same timescales and will complement the PfG. Delivery Plans, containing specific actions in support of the PfG are being developed, and we expect those plans to be ambitious but achievable, taking into consideration all relevant prevailing circumstances.

Ms Mallon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the problem over the June monitoring round referred to by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on Monday 19 September 2016.

(AQW 3584/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: As a result of time constraints within the 2016/17 budget process following on from the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in May 2016, there were limited opportunities for newly formed Statutory Committees to consider Departments' June monitoring proposals in advance of the Department of Finance deadline for returns.

Mr McKee asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff are employed in their Department; and how many were employed in September 2015.
(AQW 3691/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: At 1 September 2016 there were 284 staff employed in the Executive Office and at 1 September 2015 there were 351 staff employed in OFMDFM.

Mr McKee asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many times their Department has (i) appealed determinations made by the Information Commissioner; and (ii) been unsuccessful in appealing, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3765/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Department has to date not appealed any determinations made by the Information Commissioner.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list any of their Special Advisors that resigned before the end of the 2011-2016 Assembly mandate and were subsequently re-appointed at the beginning of the current mandate.
(AQW 3799/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: None of the Department's Special Advisers that resigned before the end of the 2011-2016 Assembly mandate were subsequently reappointed at the beginning of the current mandate.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the cost of changing the name of the Fisheries Protection vessel Banrion Uladh to Queen of Ulster; (ii) the rationale for the decision; and (iii) any consultation that took place.

(AQW 2327/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):

- (i) The change of lettering was carried out at a scheduled annual maintenance event involving repairs, repainting and antifouling.
- (ii) DAERA is a new Department with a fresh identity and logo and adopts a single language policy, there have consequently been some necessary adaptations to assets transferring to the new Department.
- (iii) The name of the patrol vessel was a matter for the former DARD Minister Michelle Gildernew and was not an issue for consultation.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the impact of Brexit on Animal and Plant Health, Policy and Research; both locally and in a cross-border context.

(AQW 2594/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is too early to make a meaningful assessment of the impact of Brexit on Animal and Plant Health, Policy and Research.

Since the announcement of the referendum result on the 24 June, I have held a series of meetings with both Ministers from the UK government and Devolved Administrations as well as with our own rural stakeholders to consider the potential implications of Brexit. The meetings included discussions on the need to ensure that future trade and policy frameworks take account of the importance of Northern Ireland's agri-food and fishing industries, rural communities and environment sector.

A significant amount of work has been also undertaken within the Department to establish the necessary governance arrangements and scoping out the programme of work that lies ahead.

I intend to be closely and directly involved in the domestic agricultural, environmental, fisheries, and trade policy agendas as they unfold in order to maximise the opportunities that will come from leaving the European Union.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the implications of Brexit on the fishing fleet; and to detail her Department's plans to implement a new fisheries policy.

(AQW 2595/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I believe that Brexit will have a positive impact on the local fishing fleet. The UK will need new arrangements to manage relationships between it, the EU and other coastal states to effectively manage fishing opportunities and secure

access to resources. It is too early in the process to outline what these new arrangements might be, as they will be a part of the future negotiations with the EU.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the impact of Brexit on the operations of Loughs Agency.

(AQW 2596/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is too early in the process to provide a meaningful assessment of the impact of Brexit on the operations of the Loughs Agency.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, the Loughs Agency's business will continue as usual.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has had any discussions on the implications of Brexit with her counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 2628/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I have undertaken a number of engagements including meeting with Whitehall, Devolved Administration Ministerial colleagues and my counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

I look forward to further collaboration with them and between our Departments, in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the prevalence of Japanese Knotweed.

(AQW 2699/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The biological records of Japanese Knotweed in the public domain, obtained from CEDaR (Centre for Environmental Data and Recording), NI and NBDC (National Biodiversity Data Centre), RoI, suggest Japanese Knotweed is widespread across Northern Ireland with a concentration in the Greater Belfast Area.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to the young farmers that achieved the grade 2 qualification in Agriculture over the last two years, to detail (i) what proportion applied; and (ii) were successful in their claim for support from the Young Farmers Scheme.

(AQW 2703/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department does not hold the information in the format requested. However, I can confirm that:

- The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) delivers a Level II Agricultural Business Operations qualification which meets the eligibility criteria for farmers wishing to apply for the Young Farmers' Payment;
- The training offered by CAFRE has resulted in 3,001 people gaining the qualification in the last two years (2,451 in 2015 and 550 in 2016);
- A total of 2,881 unique applications for the Young Farmers' scheme were received in 2015 and 2016; and
- Of these, 1,780 applications for the Young Farmers' scheme were successful in 2015. Applications in 2016 are currently being assessed.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many applications to the Young Farmers scheme were; (i) successful; (ii) unsuccessful; (iii) unsuccessful and appealed; (iv) were approved after going to appeal; (v) went to second stage appeal; and (vi) were approved after going to second stage appeal.

(AQW 2716/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The number of applications to the Young Farmers' Payment in 2015 was as follows:

- i. successful, 1780;
- ii. unsuccessful, 355;
- iii. unsuccessful and sought a Review of Decision, 261;
- iv. approved after going to Review, 64;
- v. applied for second stage Review, 46;
- vi. 44 are currently awaiting a decision on second stage Review.

Young Farmers' Payment applications for 2016 are still being assessed.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many applicants to the Young Farmers Scheme were invited to interview based on their application.

(AQW 2717/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: 75 applicants to the Young Farmers' scheme in 2015 were interviewed as part of the assessment process. Selection and Interviewing of Applicants of the Young Farmers Scheme.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the guidance her Department received to confirm that the selection of and the interviewing of applicants to the Young Farmers Scheme was compliant with European Union guidance.

(AQW 2718/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Young Farmers' Payment and the Regional Reserve are aimed at providing assistance to young farmers and new entrants in the initial years of their business. The schemes require applicants, among other things, to be exercising effective and long term control in terms of decisions related to management, benefits and financial risks in respect of their business.

In order to safeguard and ensure the appropriate distribution of EU Funds, EU Regulations permit Paying Agencies to exercise their own discretion to seek appropriate supporting evidence and carry out appropriate checks and interviews as deemed necessary to substantiate each application.

The Department, as a Paying Agency, is satisfied that its processes are compliant with these requirements.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, regarding the Young Farmers Scheme, to outline the part of the application form and at what part of the process that applicants were made aware that they may be called for interview.

(AQW 2719/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Young Farmers' Payment and the Regional Reserve are aimed at providing assistance to young farmers and new entrants in the initial years of their business. The schemes require applicants, among other things, to be exercising effective and long term control in terms of decisions related to management, benefits and financial risks in respect of their business.

In order to safeguard and ensure the appropriate distribution of EU Funds, EU Regulations permit Paying Agencies to exercise their own discretion to seek appropriate supporting evidence and carry out appropriate checks and interviews as deemed necessary to substantiate each application.

The Department, as a Paying Agency, is satisfied that its processes are compliant with these requirements.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he will place in the Assembly Library a copy of the report into employee and management relations at Ballinamallard Rivers Agency Sub-Office (or any other name by which previously known) following an investigation in 2008.

(AQW 2735/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As the report is confidential in nature and contains information about internal staffing matters it will not be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) how air quality is monitored in Holywood; (ii) to detail any data on air quality in Holywood in each of the last five years; and (iii) to outline what is being done to reduce air pollution in Holywood.

(AQW 3073/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department has responsibility for monitoring air pollution at six sites in Northern Ireland (Armagh, Ballymena, Belfast (2), Londonderry, Lough Navar), which are part of the UK's Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN), as well as sites which are used for monitoring levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, certain organic air pollutants, and metals. These sites are used for reporting compliance with Air Quality Directives to the EU Commission. There are no such sites in Holywood.

Under the Environment (NI) Order 2002, district councils have a statutory duty to review and assess air quality within their districts against objectives which are set out in the UK Air Quality Strategy, and prescribed in the Air Quality (NI) Regulations 2003. Where objectives are exceeded or are likely to be so, then councils must declare an Air Quality Management Area and draw up, with appropriate relevant authorities (such as Transport NI), an Action Plan. There is currently no AQMA in Holywood, although Ards & North Down Borough Council does currently operate an automatic air quality monitor there. Data recorded at this site is available to view on the Department's website: www.airqualityni.co.uk

Details of air quality monitoring carried out in Ards and North Down Borough Council area are also available in the council's latest Progress Report, which is available on the Department's website:

<http://www.airqualityni.co.uk/laqm/district-council-reports>

The Progress Report will also highlight any trends in air quality, the presence of any Air Quality Management Areas, and accompanying Action Plans to improve air quality.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the level of farm borrowing in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 3114/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The table below details averages of the quarterly (point in time) figures for the total level of farm borrowing by the agriculture, hunting and forestry sector in Northern Ireland published by the British Bankers Association (BBA) across the financial year in each of the past three years is as follows:

Four quarter average for the Year ending 31 March	£ million
2013	817
2014	793*
2015	907

*Note that there was a methodological change in the collection process between 2013 and 2014. From Quarter 2 of 2013 all borrowings to Northern Ireland Agriculture was collated from banks based on the postcode of the borrower as opposed to the registered headquarters of the lending organisation. This change should provide more accurate figures, though the figures for 2014 and 2015 are not strictly comparable with the figures for the previous year.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the Farm Business Improvement Scheme.

(AQW 3126/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Farm Business Improvement Scheme is a package of measures, aimed at improving the competitiveness and sustainability of our farming sector. This package of measures is being rolled out in a phased way.

The first phase of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme is already underway, with the Business Development Groups and Farm Family Key Skills training providing advice and support to help farmers clearly identify their needs and make the right decisions about developing their business.

The next phase will be the Capital Scheme, which will offer tiered grant support linked to the needs in the farmer's business plan.

I am pleased to have launched the Preparation Stage for the capital scheme on 20 September 2016. Its purpose is to provide information to farmers to allow potential applicants to start to prepare in advance of the Scheme opening formally next month.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a breakdown of the number of spot checks carried out by NIEA at tyre companies in each of the last 3 years, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) Local Government area.

(AQW 3184/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) began specific inspections of tyre retailers in February of 2015 as one of the actions listed in the Used Tyre Action plan. These inspections are prioritised on a risk basis and they are based on both intelligence and through discussions with local Councils on where they perceive the greatest risk of tyres ending up on bonfires.

The Table below shows the number of inspections carried out at tyre retailers per calendar year since 2015. The information is only available per Council area and town name.

Appendix 1

Inspections at waste tyre facilities

Council Area	Town	Number of inspections	
		2015	2016
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	Ballyclare	-	4
Ards and North Down Borough Council	Bangor	4	-
	Donaghadee	2	-
	Newtownards	3	-
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	Lurgan	3	2
	Portadown	9	2
Belfast City Council	Belfast	18	12

Council Area	Town	Number of inspections	
		2015	2016
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	Ballymoney	2	5
	Coleraine	3	5
	Dungiven	1	-
	Limavady	1	2
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Artigarvan	-	1
	Castederg	-	1
	Killaloo	-	1
	Londonderry	1	5
	Newtownstewart	-	1
	Strabane	-	3
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Enniskillen	3	4
	Fivemiletown	1	2
	Irvinestown	-	2
	Lisnaskea	2	3
	Omagh	5	8
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	Lisburn	4	1
	Moira	1	-
	Ballymena	-	10
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	Carrickfergus	6	-
	Cullybackey	-	3
	Larne	-	10
	Portglenone	1	-
Mid Ulster District Council	Clougher	-	2
	Cookstown	1	-
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	Castlewellan	2	-
	Crossgar	1	-
	Downpatrick	2	-
	Dundrum	2	-
	Newcastle	2	1
Total		80	90

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of whether the issuing of a marine licence for the proposed Greencastle ferry is in conflict with the need to protect wildlife in the area.
(AQW 3202/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has completed a Habitats Regulations Assessment for both the planning permission and the Marine Licence associated with the development of the proposed Greencastle Ferry. A Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was undertaken and I am satisfied that the conditions on the planning permission (P/2013/0434/F) and Marine Licence will ensure that the project will not affect the integrity of the designated sites or impact on the protected wildlife in the area.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to the Environmental Farming Scheme, to outline what reason has the Chancellor given for his decision not to provide a guarantee of future government funding.
(AQW 3309/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: On 13 August 2016, the Chancellor issued a statement about EU funding beyond the date the UK leaves the European Union. In relation to agri-environment schemes, the Treasury statement gave an assurance that any agri-environment schemes agreed before the Autumn Statement will be fully funded, even when these projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.

This assurance does not cover the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) as individual EFS agreements with farmers will not be in place and signed off by the Autumn Statement in November.

A well funded and targeted EFS has to be an important part of our domestic agricultural agenda moving forward. Therefore, we have agreed a process with the Department of Finance and Treasury to consider future funding implications for schemes on a case by case basis and we will continue with our plans to roll out the EFS.

Department for Communities

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline the discussions that his Department has had with the European Union in regards to Peace IV Funding of departmental projects.

(AQW 2657/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): The Member States role for the Peace IV is exercised by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in the ROI. The Minister for Finance with his counterpart in the ROI, has written to the European Commission requesting a meeting to discuss Peace IV and INTERREG VA.

The Department for Communities, along with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) in ROI carry out Accountable Department responsibilities for the Shared Spaces (Capital Development) element. My Department is involved in discussions with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and the Department of Finance on an ongoing basis in relation to Programme implementation.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities (i) for his assessment on the impact that leaving the European Union will have on Foras na Gaeilge, the Ulster Scots Agency and any other cross-border responsibilities under his remit; and (ii) whether he or his officials have met with these organisations to discuss these issues.

(AQW 2658/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department will continue to meet all its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which is a convention under the Council of Europe, an organisation separate from the European Union.

As such, there have been no formal discussions with Foras na Gaeilge or the Ulster-Scots Agency to consider the implications of leaving the European Union.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the number of people receiving Housing Benefit that will be affected by Welfare Reform; and (ii) for his assessment of the impact welfare reform will have on social housing providers.

(AQW 2709/16-21)

Mr Givan: The aim of the current welfare change programme in Northern Ireland is to make the system fairer, more affordable and to better assist people into work, thereby helping reduce levels of poverty. The programme will change benefits for people of working age.

At March 2016 there were 161,000 recipients of Housing Benefit of which 124,000 are Working Age.

The Benefit Cap, with a household limit of £26,000, was introduced in Northern Ireland on 31 May 2016 and 313 households were impacted. The Benefit Cap only applies if someone in the household receives housing benefit. From 7 November 2016 the Benefit Cap threshold will be reduced to £20,000. It is currently estimated that potentially 2,636 households will be impacted.

The Northern Ireland Executive has put arrangements in place to provide financial support for those people impacted by the Benefit Cap. An additional supplementary welfare payment may be available up to 31 March 2020 for households with children.

The Social Sector Size Criteria will introduce under-occupancy restrictions to housing benefit entitlement for working age claimants resident in the social rented sector, based on the number of people in a household and the size of accommodation. This is similar to how housing benefit is calculated for claimants in the private sector and it could mean that housing benefit payments could be reduced for current and future claimants occupying a larger property than their household size warrants.

It is currently planned that the Social Sector Size Criteria will be introduced in Northern Ireland in January 2017. Data provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) concluded that as at May 2015 an estimated 33,916 households in the social rented sector were under-occupying.

The Northern Ireland Executive has put in place arrangements to ensure that no household is negatively impacted in financial terms or has to move house as a result of the introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria. A supplementary welfare

payment will be made to Housing Benefit claimants who have their Housing Benefit reduced as a result of the Social Sector Size Criteria, will be available to 31 March 2020.

In addition to other benefit changes Universal Credit will replace housing benefit for all working age claimants. The implementation of Universal Credit will begin in September 2017 and during the next number of years all existing working age housing benefit claimants will be migrated to Universal Credit Housing Component.

There is a robust evaluation strategy in place to monitor the impact of the Welfare Changes programme in Northern Ireland. My department has published an extensive range of analyses of the main reforms, estimating the number of individuals and households that could be impacted along with the financial impacts. These booklets contain information on: • Size restrictions within the social rented sector;

- The introduction of Universal Credit and Support of Mortgage Interest;
- Additional Support for Housing Costs;
- The Housing Benefit Caseload.

Assessments can be found at the following link.

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/welfare-changes-briefing>

More recently the Department for Work and Pensions with support from the Department for Communities have produced a range of impact assessments to support the passage of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 and the Welfare Reform and Work (Northern Ireland) Order 2016 legislation through Westminster and these can be found at the following link

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia?title=northern%20ireland>

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline his Department's investment in social housing over the last ten years, broken down by year and location.

(AQW 2714/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below provides the Department's outturn figures for the last seven years and the current year budget figure, which are taken from the Department for Finance's Budget Database. This record is only held for the past seven and is not available by location.

Year	Budget Line	Outturn (budget for 2016-17) £'000
2016-17 (Budget)	New Build Funding	103,800
	TBUC	2,200
Total 2016-17		106,000
2015-16	New Build Funding	95,511
	TBUC	3,030
Total 2015-16		98,541
2014-15	New Build Funding	86,969
	TBUC	3,150
	TBUC	5,970
Total 2014-15		96,089
2013-14	New Build Funding	75,433
2012-13	New Build Funding	85,083
2011-12	New Build Funding	143,100
2010-11	New Build Funding	162,815
2009-10	New Build Funding	153,439

The following table details the capital investment in Housing Executive stock funded by the Department for the last seven years. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested i.e. by location, or for the full time period requested.

	2016-17 £'000	2015-16 £'000	2014-15 £'000	2013-14 £'000	2012-13 £'000	2011-12 £'000	2010-11 £'000	2009-10 £'000
Stock Investment	21,000	7,715	16,129	2,339	3,864	14,300	3,500	18,730
Disabled Adaptations	6,022	4,300	4,817	4,925	4,234	6,652	6,000	9,640

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline what measures his Department is taking to ensure that GPs supply medical evidence for Disability Living Allowance / Personal Independence Payment and Employment Support Allowance appeals. (AQW 2732/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department does not require medical evidence to be supplied by GPs when preparing an appeal response for Disability Living Allowance / Personal Independence Payment and Employment Support Allowance as the gathering of evidence, including medical evidence, takes place earlier during the decision making stage of the process.

There is a contractual obligation on any GP who has issued a Med3 (fit note) to provide medical reports, free of charge to the Department for Communities (DfC) in relation to Employment and Support Allowance on a form called an ESA113.

For Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment there is no contractual obligation therefore where DfC or their Medical Assessment Provider requests a report from a GP a payment of £33.50 is made when the report is returned. The same arrangement applies across Great Britain.

The Department has also published guidance for GPs, available on the Departmental website, on how to complete medical reports.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 1701/16-21, to outline the support provided by HM Treasury for fraud investigation, including any financial support. (AQW 2779/16-21)

Mr Givan: HM Treasury does not provide direct funding to the Department for Communities for fraud investigation. Financial support for fraud investigation is allocated to my Department from the Northern Ireland Executive.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the range of assistance available to improve, renovate or replace private sector housing aimed at addressing housing unfitness; (ii) the sources of financial help available to owners for the purpose of removing asbestos and (iii) the eligibility criteria for such support. (AQW 2816/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the range of assistance available to improve, renovate or replace private sector housing aimed at addressing housing unfitness includes, the Renovation Grant, Replacement Grant and Home Repairs Assistance Grants. These grants are currently available only in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances are deemed to exist where there is an imminent and significant risk to the occupier. Such a risk may exist, for example, where there is a dangerous electrical wiring system or where a roof is leaking into the electrical system. These grants are only available for the house being occupied, or intended to be occupied, as the only or main residence.

The Repairs Grant can also be made available when the Environmental Health Officer from the local District Council has served a Statutory Notice on a dwelling.

They have further advised that the discretionary Renovation Grant may be considered as a source of financial help available to home owners for the purpose of removing asbestos. This would only be available in exceptional circumstances.

In terms of the eligibility criteria for such support, this varies from grant to grant, however in general an applicant must be aged 18 years or over, the property to be assisted may be occupied or vacant but must be a primary or sole dwelling, and access to grants is means tested. The nature of the works may also be used to define eligibility.

If you require further information or detail I would be happy to put you in touch with one of my officials or an appropriate member of the Housing Executive.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the current provision of one-bedroom, wheelchair-accessible residential accommodation in South Belfast. (AQW 2849/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, is currently undertaking a rolling programme to classify wheelchair accessibility of their housing stock to produce an Accessible Housing Register for Northern Ireland.

The Housing Executive has 336 one bedroom properties located in South Belfast, only one of which is classified as fully wheelchair accessible.

For the stock in Housing Association ownership a direct geographical comparison is not possible. However, of the one bedroom properties in areas within postcodes BT7 and BT9 considered to be located in South Belfast, 51 are fully wheelchair accessible and 24 are partially wheelchair accessible.

Work to complete the Accessible Housing Register is ongoing. Therefore, the data available at present on wheelchair accessible properties is limited to those properties that have been classified to date and does not include the remaining stock still to be classified.

My Department has been working with the Housing Executive and Housing Associations to put the necessary tools in place to enable more wheelchair standard accommodation to be built where the need exists. It is the intention that housing associations will include more wheelchair standard accommodation in their future new build plans. New wheelchair design

standards have been introduced from 2016/17 and will be fully integrated into the 2017/18 Social Housing Development Programme.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans for future stock transfers from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to Housing Associations.

(AQW 2861/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has undertaken to transfer 2,000 homes to housing associations in order to deliver £100 million of investment to the stock. Any such transfers as part of this process of small scale stock transfer require tenant agreement. This is currently being taken forward by the NIHE.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities (i) whether all construction projects and proposed construction projects related to the Casement Park redevelopment project been put out to public tender; and (ii) if not, to outline which procedure was used to award construction projects to date.

(AQW 2911/16-21)

Mr Givan: The construction contract for the main construction project for the redevelopment of Casement Park, for which DCAL/DfC are the main funder, was procured under a public tender process and in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2006.

Any future, proposed construction projects for which DfC will be the main funder, will be procured under a public tender process and in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2006.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail any tower blocks of flats that have implemented the over 35's allocation policy.

(AQW 2917/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the following Tower blocks have a designated over 35's allocation policy:

Belfast

- Divis Tower
- Mount Vernon House
- Grainne House
- Eithne House
- Maeve House

Castlereagh

- Woodstock House
- Willowbrook House

Dundonald

- Carnet House

Newtownabbey (Rathcoole)

- Monkscoole House - there are no allocations being made in this block as the Housing Executive is awaiting the outcome of an Economic Appraisal.
- Carncoole House
- Abbotscoole House
- Glencoole House

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the future development of St. Patrick's Barracks.

(AQW 2919/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department's planning consultants have prepared a preferred option that maximises the development opportunities on the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena. This option has been endorsed by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and will be subject to public consultation before an outline planning application is submitted. The consultation period is expected to commence in October.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Communities to outline the job roles that an Administrative Assistant has within his Department in relation to Welfare Reform.

(AQW 2961/16-21)

Mr Givan: The process to determine the different roles and responsibilities across all grades brought about by the changes in the welfare system is on-going. However, with increasing digitalisation of public services to improve customer services

and access channels across government, including those within Welfare Reform, it is recognised that the current role of the Administrative Assistant will be impacted. I am not in a position to provide detailed analysis on how many Administrative Assistants will be impacted but early indications suggest there will be a reduced number of Administrative Assistant posts required. If there are insufficient posts in my department then officials will look to redeploy only surplus Administrative Assistant staff to other departments.

In effecting the redeployment of staff, Departments take into account the mobility obligation of the grades concerned and, in doing so, they must also take cognizance of the equal opportunities dimension. For non-mobile grades, such as the AA grade, redeployment will be to a location within reasonable daily travelling distance.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans to implement a scheme for community groups to apply for an AED device, similar to the recent Sport NI scheme for sports groups.
(AQW 2981/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- 1 My Department has encouraged increased AED provision across the sports sector and supporting the mapping of AEDs to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) database. However, there are no plans to implement a scheme for community groups to apply for an AED device.
- 2 Public access to defibrillation is primarily a matter for the Minister for Health under the terms of objective No 6 of the Community Resuscitation Strategy 2014.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the future status of the North West Development Office.
(AQW 2989/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department's North West Development Office has responsibility for delivering regeneration and community development in Londonderry, Strabane and Limavady. As the extension of regeneration and community development powers to local government did not proceed under the last mandate, the North West Development Office will continue to carry out these responsibilities.

Ultimately, any decision to extend powers to local government is a matter for the Executive. The timing of any extension would be subject to the successful completion of the legislative process.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to detail what legislation he intends to bring forward for Executive approval between now and June 2017.
(AQW 3020/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Executive is currently considering the legislative programme which will be published in due course. The Programme will be sent to the Assembly once approved.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities whether has he requested an audit of all public land owned by other Departments in light of the urgent need to identify land for new build social housing.
(AQW 3021/16-21)

Mr Givan: In response to the ongoing need for land for social housing my Department has commenced the Public Land for Housing Project.

Through this project, my Department seeks to explore and address the supply of public land for housing with a view to preparing a digital spatial catalogue of all (material) public sector assets held by all Government Departments and their Arms Length Bodies that may be suitable to re-use for housing.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities, in light of the acute housing shortage, to (i) outline the rationale for the closure of the NIHE Empty Homes Unit; (ii) provide an update on the review of the Empty Homes Strategy; and (iii) outline the actions being taken to address the problem of empty properties while the review takes place.
(AQW 3022/16-21)

Mr Givan: The NIHE Board, at its January 2016 meeting, considered its interim review of empty homes work, particularly in the context of budgetary constraints and the need to ensure priority of their statutory functions. In light of the Board's decision, the Empty Homes Unit was scaled back but continues to operate the Empty Homes website through which empty homes can be reported and manage a matching service which allows prospective buyers to view potential properties with a view to purchasing.

The review of the empty homes strategy is ongoing. The review is examining best practice from other jurisdictions and will consider options for a more targeted partnership approach to bringing empty homes back into use. The review will be completed by the end of the financial year.

In the meantime, the Department has provided loan funding to Clanmil and Apex Housing Associations with a target of bringing over 300 empty homes back into use. In addition, the Housing Executive has vesting powers to address blight that

risks wider housing areas and recently used these powers to vest and demolish a block of flats in the Rathcoole area which will be replaced with 12 social homes.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail the plans to redeploy staff working on Universal Credit; and what support can be given to people that may be impacted by any delay in receiving payments.

(AQW 3028/16-21)

Mr Givan: Universal Credit has not yet been implemented in Northern Ireland, and therefore there are no staff working on Universal Credit, nor any claimants receiving payments.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities to detail the financial assistance given to each National Museum in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3035/16-21)

Mr Givan: My department funds National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) as a single entity. It is the responsibility of its board and management to make funding allocation decisions to the individual museums under its control.

The attached table (annex 1) details these allocations in the last five years.

Annex 1

Museum	Resource	Capital
2011/12		
Armagh County Museum	229,572	0
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	10,095,025	0
Ulster Museum	2,951,495	0
Ulster American Folk Park	1,667,427	297,000
2012/13		
Armagh County Museum	268,032	10,000
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	9,231,078	1,514,381
Ulster Museum	2,592,130	1,875,782
Ulster American Folk Park	1,690,300	315,981
2013/14		
Armagh County Museum	248,294	5,000
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	8,499,359	1,047,219
Ulster Museum	2,687,972	116,475
Ulster American Folk Park	1,477,240	276,027
2014/15		
Armagh County Museum	243,600	0
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	7,802,945	1,805,954
Ulster Museum	2,638,270	221,543
Ulster American Folk Park	1,352,832	743,742
2015/16		
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	7,578,548	800,175
Ulster Museum	2,503,587	309,956
Ulster American Folk Park	1,313,526	253,320

Note: On the 1st April 2015 responsibility for the Armagh County Museum transferred to Local Government.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities to detail the total budget allocation from his Department to the NI Museums Council, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3037/16-21)

Mr Givan: The budget allocated to the NI Museums Council, in each of the last five years, is as follows:

Year	Budget Allocation (£)
2011/12	276,000
2012/13	264,000
2013/14	288,000
2014/15	273,000
2015/16	317,000
Total	1,418,000

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities for an update on plans for new social housing in the Strabane district.
(AQW 3060/16-21)

Mr Givan: The planned new social housing schemes programmed for Strabane are outlined in the table below. Housing associations are also currently developing further proposals for Strabane which will be considered by the Housing Executive as it formulates the draft Social Housing Development Programme 2017/18-2019/20. This new programme will be published early in the New Year.

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Type	Need Group	Units	Start Year	Completion Year
Habinteg	84 Bridge Street	New Build	General Needs	4	2016/17	2017/18
Habinteg	Adria Factory, Strabane Ph 1	New Build	General Needs	30	2016/17	2018/19
Habinteg	Newton Lane	New Build	General Needs	25	2016/17	2018/19
Rural	Sion Mills ESPs	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Ballymagorry ESPs	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Lismore Park	New Build	General Needs	4	2017/18	2018/19

Existing Satisfactory Purchases (ESPs) are existing dwellings purchased from the property market with little or no replacement or improvement work required to provide an acceptable standard of housing.

Please be advised that programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons such as delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the changes to benefits sanctions following the introduction of Welfare Reform.

(AQW 3089/16-21)

Mr Givan: The changes to benefits sanctions are contained in the Employment and Support Allowance (Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (S.R. 2016 No. 240) and the Jobseeker's Allowance (Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (S.R. 2016 No. 241) and will come into operation at the same time as Universal Credit comes into operation in Northern Ireland.

The Employment and Support Allowance (Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 revise sanctions for those claimants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who fail to attend a work-focussed interview (WFI) or to undertake work related activity (WRA) without good cause. The amount of the new sanction will be 100 percent of the personal allowance for a single person. The revised sanctions regime will have two parts – an open ended period and on top of that a fixed period:

- the open-ended part of the sanction is that the claimant will be sanctioned until they take part in the WFI or undertake WRA or agree to do so on a scheduled date.
- the fixed period part of the sanction will be an additional fixed period of 1 week for a first failure, 2 weeks for a second failure within 52 weeks of the first and 4 weeks when it is a third or subsequent failure which is within 52 weeks of the last previous failure.

When claimants re-engage within one week of the failure or before a decision to sanction has been made, only the fixed period will apply. In the case of multiple sanctions, they will run concurrently. If, after a sanction begins, the claimant is moved out of the work related activity group (WRAG) and therefore no longer subject to the requirements of WFIs and WRA, the sanction will end at that point.

The Regulations also change the effective date of a sanction, so that it takes effect from the first day of the benefit week after the one for which the claimant was last paid ESA. The aim is to make the link between claimants' failures to comply and the sanction clearer and swifter. A right of appeal against the decision continues to be available.

The new regime will include access to hardship payments for those who have a sanction imposed on their award. Hardship payments will be available from the beginning of a sanction period, providing the claimant meets the conditions for entitlement to income-related Employment and Support Allowance.

The Jobseeker's Allowance (Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 introduce a new three-tier regime of fixed period sanctions for Jobseekers' Allowance -

- higher level sanctions - for example for leaving a job voluntarily, or through misconduct, or failing to take up a job or mandatory work activity – those subject to a higher level sanction will lose all of their JSA applicable amount for a fixed period of 13 weeks for a first failure, 26 weeks for a second failure, and 78 weeks for a third or subsequent failure (within a 52-week period of their last failure);
- intermediate level sanctions - if not available for or actively seeking work the claimant will lose their entitlement – those subject to an intermediate level sanction will lose all of their JSA applicable amount for a fixed period of 4 weeks for a first failure, rising to 13 weeks for a second or subsequent failure (within a 52-week period of their last failure) to be applied following a period of disallowance; and
- lower level sanctions - for example for failure to attend an adviser interview or failing to attend a training scheme - those subject to a lower level sanction will lose will lose all of their JSA applicable amount for a fixed period of 4 weeks for a first failure, and 13 weeks for a second or subsequent failure within 52 weeks of the previous failure.

The amount of the sanction for all three types of sanction will not change under the revised regime. The current hardship provisions to protect the vulnerable will continue to apply to allow payment of income-based JSA, at a reduced rate, for the duration of the sanction period.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Communities to outline the capital funding opportunities that are currently available and are in the pipeline for sports clubs.

(AQW 3107/16-21)

Mr Givan: Neither my Department, nor Sport NI, have any capital funding programmes currently available for sports clubs to apply to, however, I intend to seek to secure funding to improve sporting facilities across Northern Ireland.

My officials are currently finalising their detailed consideration and analysis of the responses to the consultation on Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer, together with all other relevant information, to inform recommendations on the way forward. I hope to be in a position to make a decision on the programme going forward shortly and I anticipate the programme will be launched and open for applications in the next few months.

Sport NI is currently working with local Councils to develop a Sports Facilities Framework and associated Council Area Plans. Sports Clubs should engage with their local Councils to ensure that any sports facility needs are captured in each Council Area Plan. It is anticipated that these plans will be used to inform future investment in sporting facilities.

Sports clubs should also register with Sport NI to receive information on future funding programmes and potential funding streams from other sources.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the transfer of urban regeneration and community development powers to local councils.

(AQW 3109/16-21)

Mr Givan: The extension of Regeneration and Community Development powers to Local Government did not proceed under the last mandate. The new Department for Communities (DfC) has now been established with a much wider range of responsibilities, including responsibility for local government and it will be in that context that I will wish to consider the options for going forward. Ultimately, any decision to extend powers to local government is a matter for the Executive. The timing of extension would be subject to the successful completion of the legislative process.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) whether the Chief Executive of Sport NI is on paid suspension; (ii) how long has she been on such suspension; and (iii) the cost to the public purse.

(AQW 3111/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Chief Executive of Sport NI has been suspended from her post since March 2015. The terms of that suspension are a matter for Sport NI as the employer and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this.

The latest Sport NI audited accounts show that the annual salary for the Chief Executive is in the range of £80,000 to £85,000, with pension benefits of £13,000 (rounded to the nearest £1,000) and benefits in kind of £100 (rounded to the nearest £100).

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to outline what plans his Department has for the redevelopment of the Northside area of North Belfast.

(AQW 3122/16-21)

Mr Givan: In February of this year, my Department adopted Belfast City Council's City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (CCRIS), in part, as the policy basis for future regeneration activity in the City Centre. This established a shared city centre regeneration policy between the two leading regeneration authorities in the city.

Following the adoption of the CCRIS, a working group made up of officials from Belfast Regeneration Directorate and Council colleagues was established to discuss regeneration opportunities across the city centre and how best to bring these forward. This work has focussed on developing a set of agreed priorities around the scale, scope and location of any future major comprehensive scheme(s) within the context of the opportunities offered by other developments across the city. I expect this phase of work to complete early next year.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the regeneration plans for Royal Exchange, York Street and communities surrounding Belfast city centre.

(AQW 3123/16-21)

Mr Givan: In February of this year, my Department adopted Belfast City Council's City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (CCRIS), in part, as the policy basis for future regeneration activity in the City Centre. This established a shared city centre regeneration policy between the two leading regeneration authorities in the city.

Following the adoption of the CCRIS, a working group made up of officials from Belfast Regeneration Directorate and Council colleagues was established to discuss regeneration opportunities across the city centre and how best to bring these forward. This work has focussed on developing a set of agreed priorities around the scale, scope and location of any future major comprehensive scheme(s) within the context of the opportunities offered by other developments across the city. I expect this phase of work to complete early next year.

My Department will also be investing c£22m (with an additional £5m contribution anticipated from Belfast City Council) on the Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 project, which includes streetscape improvements to part of York Street and the adjacent Cathedral Gardens. Work on the Phase 3 project is expected to commence on site in May/June of next year.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Communities to outline the reasons for the displacement of approximately ten jobs from the Grants Office of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Enniskillen to Omagh.

(AQW 3140/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have been advised by the Housing Executive that they are currently reviewing their grants service across Northern Ireland as part of their operational responsibility. This review is taking in a number of factors, though the central part of the review is to consider grants customer requirements with a view to shortening the processing times and to deliver this service to our customers in their own homes, rather than requiring them to visit one of the Housing Executive's offices.

The review is taking into account wider local government changes across Northern Ireland. In this instance, the Housing Executive is proposing that we realign the boundaries of grants offices to make them coterminous with the Council boundaries. This would mean that grants offices in the West would undertake all of the grants work in the District Council areas of Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh.

The review has also considered whether some of our back-office services could be amalgamated into one office in Omagh. This proposal also includes offering a service for customers to meet grants officers or to drop off documents in our Enniskillen housing office. It would have had no impact on staffing levels but has the potential of changing travel arrangements for a small number of staff. This proposal is still under consideration, with a decision to be made following consultation.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities whether he will establish with HMRC; (i) how many people have been investigated by Concentrix over the last 3 years with regards to tax credit fraud; and (ii) how many of these people are from West Tyrone.

(AQW 3160/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities does not hold information on the number of people that have been investigated by Concentrix with regards to tax credit fraud, nor does it hold information on how many of these people are from West Tyrone.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Communities to outline what NIEA grant support (i) is available; and (ii) is under consideration to support built heritage projects in Newry and Armagh.

(AQW 3175/16-21)

Mr Givan: The responsibilities formerly carried out by NIEA were divided during Departmental restructuring between my Department, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Heritage Funding is now dealt with by the Historic Environment Division, within my Department.

I launched the Historic Environment Fund on 14 September 2016. There are four streams of funding as follows:-

- Heritage Research - this stream will not be open for applications this year following a consideration of responses from the public consultation, many of which argued that awards should be subject to an overall research strategy. This will be developed over coming months.
- Heritage Regeneration - this aims to strengthen and improve the physical environment and foster the positive identity of places among local communities. It also aims to support third sector capacity and regeneration initiatives. Applications are welcome this year for: Scheduled Monument regeneration projects; proposals from Building Preservation Trusts to carry out temporary works at heritage at risk; and those looking to provide strategic support to the community sector to realise the potential of our heritage.
- Heritage Repair - this aims to encourage sustainability and the preservation of the historic environment. Applications can be made for either Scheduled Monument or Listed Building repair schemes.
- Heritage Revival - this aims to promote the social value of our historic environment and the innate contribution this can make to wellbeing and sustainable employment. Applications are open this year to support community archaeology projects; District Councils to highlight Maintenance Week in November; schools to visit Monuments in State Care; and for those who want to highlight good practice through awards.

Applications will be considered from across Northern Ireland and funding will be awarded against qualifying criteria which are set out in the application forms and guidance. In most cases applications for this year must be received by 10 October.

Funds for future years will be subject to budget availability but I hope that we will be able to fund a range of projects. Other routes of support under consideration are outlined in the document 'Historic Environment Fund an Overview'. This can be downloaded from my Department's website at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/historic-environment-support.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what steps his Department has taken to upgrade outdated insulation in NIHE properties.

(AQW 3178/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that all its new build properties constructed since the 1980s have cavity wall insulation installed. The Housing Executive also carried out a major programme in the 1980s to install cavity wall insulation in its existing properties constructed with cavities but with no insulation material. However, it is acknowledged that there is a UK-wide problem with cavity wall insulation installed in the 1980s with the degrading or failure of this insulation now affecting all housing tenures.

The Housing Executive will carry out a representative sample of cavity inspections in the future as part of its Cyclical Maintenance scheme surveys to determine if the cavity has been filled and, if it has, what condition the insulation is in. Where specific problems are identified these are being addressed on a case-by-case basis either through the Housing Executive's response maintenance service or planned maintenance programme. The Housing Executive also continues to carry out a significant programme of loft insulation replacement or upgrading in its homes.

While the Housing Executive is committed to prioritising the insulation of its homes in its investment work, clearly this will initially focus on those homes which have no wall insulation whatsoever.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline what steps his Department has taken to address or implement the findings of the Saville report.

(AQW 3179/16-21)

Mr Givan: The DSD/ NIHE Joint Asset Commission – which is often referred to as the Savills report – produced a large number of outputs which fall broadly into two categories: informing the Social Housing Reform Programme and improving NIHE landlord services.

Social Housing Reform Programme

The DSD / NIHE Joint Asset Commission provided the basis for analysis of the future investment requirement of the Housing Executive stock. The Commission identified that £6.7 billion of investment is required over the next 30 years to maintain the stock to the expected standard. My Department's Social Housing Reform Programme is currently considering options to fund this requirement. This will inform proposals being developed for Ministerial and Executive consideration of the potential reform of social housing structures.

NIHE Landlord

On the basis of the information contained in the DSD/ NIHE Joint Asset Commission, the Housing Executive has produced an Asset Management Strategy, which incorporates an associated Tower Block Strategy. The Asset Management Strategy is based on active asset management principles and sets out the principles for managing the Housing Executive's stock and long term future investment. The Housing Executive is currently developing a 10 year investment programme that will be a practical reflection of the principles set out in the Strategy. It plans to start the investment programme from April 2017.

The findings of the Asset Commission have also assisted the Housing Executive to deliver a suite of revised policies, processes and procedures to ensure its continued compliance with its statutory and regulatory Health and Safety obligations. The Commission informed a number of other areas of the Housing Executive's work, including a more strategic approach to procurement, which should ensure that contracts deliver a better service to tenants.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to outline the contingency work he is undertaking with the Minister of Finance in anticipation of ONS reclassifying housing associations.

(AQW 3182/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have met with the Minister of Finance and his officials and discussed the potential impacts of an ONS reclassification in great detail. The most recent of these meetings was on Tuesday 13 September 2016.

This remains a key issue for the Finance Minister and myself. Ongoing work is continuing between our officials to ensure we have identified the key issues that are likely to arise if there is an ONS decision to reclassify housing associations as public bodies.

Once an ONS report has been published and the findings analysed the options to address the implications of a potential reclassification will be further developed and progressed.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities (i) for an update on the Social Strategy; and (ii) to outline when it will be published for consultation.

(AQW 3183/16-21)

Mr Givan: I plan to bring a draft Strategy to the Executive in the coming weeks with the intention of having it issued, subject to Executive approval, as part of the further consultation on the Programme for Government.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many properties have benefitted from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Multi-Element Improvement works in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3204/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that its Multi Element Improvement (MEI) Programme ended in 2008/09. As a result, there have been no works carried out to Housing Executive properties under this programme since then.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Communities to outline his Department's policy on right to purchase for tenants in a NIHE bungalow.

(AQW 3206/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Sales Scheme, which permits social housing tenants to buy their homes at a discount, includes a property exemption on the sale of bungalows/single storey dwellings. The policy rationale is that this stock is needed to meet the housing needs of an ageing population. The policy has been challenged on the grounds of equality and human rights through two judicial reviews but each time has been found to be both reasonable and lawful.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities to outline the measures his Department can introduced to address the flaws in the current system of establishing income for self-employed absent parents.

(AQW 3223/16-21)

Mr Givan: In 2012, my predecessor introduced a new Child Maintenance Service designed to support separated parents take financial responsibility for their children but underpinned by a new Statutory Scheme with greater assessment and enforcement activities.

In assessing the Child Maintenance liability, income details are taken directly from HMRC and an Annual Review is undertaken to ensure the maintenance liability remains accurate. Ultimately the maintenance liability whether for employed or self-employed parents, is dependent on HMRC data and when doubts arise regarding the accuracy of that income data, the Child Maintenance Service will liaise with clients to ensure any concerns or suspicions of fraudulent activity are raised directly with HMRC.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities to detail which recruitment agencies have received funding from his Department in the last five years.

(AQW 3224/16-21)

Mr Givan: No recruitment agencies have received funding from my Department in the last five years.

The Department has made payments in lieu of services received from the following recruitment agencies over the past five years.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ■ Apple Recruitment | ■ Dockland Ltd | ■ Premiere Employment Group |
| ■ Arthur Cox | ■ Grafton Recruitment | ■ Vanrath |
| ■ Brook Street (UK) Ltd | ■ Hays | |
| ■ Deloitte | ■ Kennedy Recruitment Ltd | |

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the plan for the proposed new library in Enniskillen.

(AQW 3236/16-21)

Mr Givan: Libraries NI has informed me that it has substantially completed the drafting of the business case aimed at securing resources for the development of a new and improved public library in Enniskillen. The business case is currently undergoing an internal check within Libraries NI to confirm the affordability and strategic fit of the project with a view to formal submission to the Department for Communities by December 2016.

The business case considers a number of options for delivery of library services in Enniskillen ranging from redevelopment on the existing site to potential relocation to an alternative location.

Libraries NI has stated that a delay in progressing the Business Case has occurred due to other competing pressures arising from projects in development and/or delivery.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities whether he has had any discussions with HMRC as to why they have not renewed the contract of Concentrix.

(AQW 3246/16-21)

Mr Givan: This is solely a matter for HMRC Ministers.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how many people on the housing waiting list are deemed to be in housing stress and/or homeless, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 3271/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive have provided this information in the table overleaf. Please note that some of the Common Landlord Areas (CLAs) used for administration purposes straddle two constituencies and this is reflected in the table and the explanatory note underneath.

Applicants in Housing Stress or Homeless at 30 June 2016

June 2016 Parliamentary Constituency	No. of Applicants	
	Housing Stress	Full Duty Applicant - Homeless
Belfast East	1,002	555
Belfast East/South	222	103
Belfast North	2,462	1,781
Belfast South	1,627	1,153
Belfast South/Strangford	49	32
Belfast West	2,712	2,026
Belfast West/North	67	46
Belfast West/South	41	35
East Antrim	762	465
East Londonderry	845	589
Fermanagh South Tyrone	917	519
Foyle	2,631	2,129
Lagan Valley	944	605
Mid Ulster	486	298
Newry & Armagh	1,299	810
North Antrim	1,218	932
North Down	1,306	810
South Antrim	907	644
South Down	1,103	765
Strangford	1,058	637
Upper Bann	775	295
West Tyrone	553	245

June 2016	No. of Applicants	
	Housing Stress	Full Duty Applicant - Homeless
Grand Total	22,986	15,474

Notes

The following Common Landlord Areas cross Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries:

■ NIHE CLA	Parliamentary Constituency
■ Bridge End / Rotherdam Court	Belfast East/South
■ Cregagh Castlereagh	Belfast East/South
■ Willowfield/Upper Castlereagh Road	Belfast East/South
■ Carryduff	Belfast South/Strangford
■ Ainsworth	Belfast West/North
■ Carrick Hill / Unity Flats	Belfast West/North
■ Twaddell/Upper Woodvale	Belfast West/North
■ Hamill St / John St	Belfast West/South

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how many people are on the housing waiting list, broken down by constituency. (AQW 3272/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive have provided this information in the table overleaf. Please note that some of the Common Landlord Areas (CLAs) used for administration purposes straddle two constituencies and this is reflected in the table and the explanatory note underneath.

Number of applicants on the housing waiting list at 30 June 2016

Parliamentary Constituency	Total Waiting List
Belfast East	1,806
Belfast East/South	408
Belfast North	3,680
Belfast South	2,639
Belfast South/Strangford	94
Belfast West	3,618
Belfast West/North	110
Belfast West/South	49
East Antrim	1,462
East Londonderry	1,364
Fermanagh South Tyrone	1,655
Foyle	3,491
Lagan Valley	1,713
Mid Ulster	952
Newry & Armagh	2,034
North Antrim	1,920
North Down	2,045
South Antrim	1,437
South Down	1,659
Strangford	1,770
Upper Bann	2,075
West Tyrone	1,366

Parliamentary Constituency	Total Waiting List
Grand Total	37,347

Notes

The following Common Landlord Areas cross Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries:

■ NIHE CLA	Parliamentary Constituency
■ Bridge End / Rotherdam Court	Belfast East/South
■ Cregagh Castlereagh	Belfast East/South
■ Willowfield/Upper Castlereagh Road	Belfast East/South
■ Carryduff	Belfast South/Strangford
■ Ainsworth	Belfast West/North
■ Carrick Hill / Unity Flats	Belfast West/North
■ Twaddell/Upper Woodvale	Belfast West/North
■ Hamill St / John St	Belfast West/South

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many new builds are planned over the next five years, broken down by property size.

(AQW 3276/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) is formulated on a three year basis, so information on new social housing schemes is only currently available for the period 2016/17-2018/19. Current plans for new social housing starts under the SHDP, subject to budget availability, are based on:

- 1,600 units for 2016/17;
- 2,000 units for 2017/18;
- 2,200 units for 2018/19

Housing Associations proposed mixes for new social housing schemes are supported by the Housing Executive based on housing need identified through the Common Waiting List. Housing mixes are subject to change and some will only be indicative at this stage, therefore it is not possible to collate the planned numbers of units by property size for the time period requested. For indicative purposes only, the typical balance for new social housing delivery is around 15% one-beds, 50% two-beds, 30% three-beds and 5% four+ beds.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities to detail what percentage of the total expenditure on the Affordable Warmth Scheme has been spent for the year 2015-16 on (i) the administration and support of the scheme; and (ii) measures installed under the scheme.

(AQW 3281/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) 33% of the total 2015/16 Affordable Warmth Scheme expenditure was for all administration costs. This includes both Housing Executive administration costs (23%) and payments to Councils (10%). The costs include direct and indirect administration as well as start up and programme costs for the commencement of the scheme.
- (ii) 67% of the total 2015/16 Affordable Warmth Scheme expenditure was spent on measures installed under the scheme.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the budget that was allocated for the Affordable Warmth Scheme for the 2015/16 year; and (ii) how much was actually spent.

(AQW 3282/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Affordable Warmth Scheme was launched on 15 September 2014. The 2015/16 year was its first full year of operation.

The budget allocated for the Affordable Warmth Scheme in 2015/16 was £16.5M and the actual programme spend amounted to £11.6M.

As part of my Department's routine monitoring round £4.2M was reallocated from the fuel poverty budget to further assist its Private Sector Grants (£2.6M) and the Boiler Replacement Scheme (£1.6M). This was to ensure that as much of the allocated budget as possible was spent on improving energy efficiency in low income households.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities whether he has given consideration to calls to increase the Supporting People budget by 10 per cent.

(AQW 3291/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am aware that a number of Supporting People providers are facing cost pressures as a result of changes in the law around pay, such as the introduction of the National Living Wage. I have asked the Housing Executive to quantify the extent of these cost pressures. In the meantime, I have managed to find £3 million of additional funding for Supporting People this year from within my Departmental budget. I am awaiting a proposal from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on how it plans to use this additional funding before formally allocating it.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive housing stock, broken down by (i) the total number of points under the Rent Scheme; and (ii) the number of properties in each Rent Scheme point band.

(AQW 3295/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executives Rent Scheme policy allocates a total points award for each dwelling depending on specified rent-related property characteristics.

Each individual property has its own allocation of points and these are not combined into bands. The table overleaf contains the number of total dwellings within each points award.

Rent Points Total	Dwelling Count
13	27
15	20
16	75
17	72
18	111
19	174
20	163
21	424
22	241
23	813
24	905
25	1299
26	1411
27	3446
28	1999
29	3570
30	3809
31	3765
32	2789
33	5619
34	3808
35	4734
36	6339
37	8462
38	3309
39	6347
40	5684
41	2140
42	1993
43	1423
44	6334

Rent Points Total	Dwelling Count
45	1984
46	877
47	604
48	393
49	324
50	148
51	94
52	58
53	44
54	24
55	14
56	7
57	3
58	7
59	2
60	4
61	1
62	1
63	2
65	1

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities , regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices, to outline what detailed equality screening has been carried out in relation to the delivery of services.
(AQW 3311/16-21)

Mr Givan: On 20th September 2016, my Department commenced a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres.

As part of this consultation exercise the Department also published an initial pre-consultation equality screening exercise. A copy of the Equality Screening Form can be found at <https://www.comunities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-equality>. My Department will use any evidence provided in the response to the consultation to inform a further screening of the policy to determine the need for an Equality Impact Assessment.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities whether he intends to have discussions with HMRC to ensure there will be no delays in claimants receiving their Tax Credits payments following the announcement that HMRC have not renewed the contract of Concentrix.

(AQW 3314/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities has no legislative or operational responsibility for tax credits. This is solely a matter for HMRC Ministers.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many women's refuge centres have provisions for those with mobility needs.

(AQW 3324/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department funds fourteen refuges through the Supporting People programme, administered by the NI Housing Executive. Thirteen of these refuges have provisions for those with mobility needs.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many women left employment upon entering a women's refuge centre, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3326/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, through the supporting People Programme, funds 14 women's refuges to provide 138 housing support units.

My Department does not hold information on the employment status of those in women's refuge centres.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister for Communities how many applications have been made to the Arts Council Musical Instrument fund since its introduction.

(AQW 3332/16-21)

Mr Givan: Details of applications received in relation to Musical Instruments for Bands Programme are provided in the table below. There was no Programme in 2015/16.

Year	Applications Received
2010/11	65
2011/12	65
2012/13	81
2013/14	77
2014/15	33
2016/17	94

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Communities to outline the progress to date on achieving data sharing protocols on empty homes between Land and Property Services, his Department, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and local councils.

(AQW 3343/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is in the process of finalising a data sharing protocol on empty homes with Land and Property Services.

Land and Property Services has a data sharing agreement in place with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and is updating the protocol to reflect any changes following the commencement of the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as part of their work on the empty homes strategy agreed a data sharing protocol with the Belfast City Council on the 23rd November 2015 which came into effect from 1st March 2016.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Communities to outline when Libraries NI staff can expect to receive the 1per cent pay rise agreed in May 2016.

(AQW 3344/16-21)

Mr Givan: My officials submitted the final Libraries NI Pay Remit for 2016/17 to Department of Finance (DoF) for its approval on 9 August 2016. Once this has been agreed and approved by DoF the 1% pay increase will be paid by Libraries NI as soon as possible thereafter. No further action can be taken until this approval has been received.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities for an update on progress on the Queens Parade site in Bangor, including the Kings Street houses.

(AQW 3348/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Queen's Parade development is a major comprehensive development scheme and significant progress has been made since my Department stepped in and took direct control of the scheme. My officials are currently working with Ards and North Down Borough Council to finalise the development brief and this will be presented to Council members shortly for their endorsement on the way ahead. Developer responses to the Development Brief will then be assessed during January 2017. This assessment will include evaluating the proposed development programmes submitted for the entire Queen's Parade scheme including King Street.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the annual funding his Department has allocated to promote the Irish language and Ulster Scots language, including funding via local councils and associated agencies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3355/16-21)

Mr Givan: The approved budgets for both Agencies of the North South Language Body over the past three calendar years have amounted to:-

Year	Foras na Gaeilge	Ulster Scots Agency
2014	£ 3.302m	£ 1.856m

Year	Foras na Gaeilge	Ulster Scots Agency
2015	£ 3.076m	£ 1.836m
2016	£ 2.59m	£ 1.76m

The Liofa campaign which promotes the Irish Language was allocated £390,455 (2013/14); £257,573 (2014/15); and £99,714 (2015/16) by the then Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

DCAL also allocated £1,112,305 (2013/14); £993,831 (2014/15), and £509,666 (2015/16), over the past three years to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster-Scots to promote Ulster-Scots language.

The previous Department for Social Development (DSD) through its North West Development Office allocated to An Gaelaras £23,148.38 in 2014/15 towards a Project Development Officer's salary in the Gaeltacht Quarter. Funding was not allocated to this project in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 finance years.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Communities whether his officials have had any discussions around helping to establish a Northern Ireland Museum of Sport.

(AQW 3384/16-21)

Mr Givan: In August 2016, my officials met with representatives from the Ulster Sports Museums Association (USMA), the Interim Chief Executive of Sport NI and the Chief Executive of National Museums NI to discuss an USMA proposal for a museum of achievement for Northern Ireland. This concept differs from USMA's previous sports museum proposal in that it would celebrate the achievements of those from Northern Ireland in all walks of life, including sport.

As a result of these discussions it was agreed that USMA and National Museums NI would explore further how the concept is incorporated into the future redevelopment of storylines across the National Museum sites. These discussions are at a very early stage but, I believe, are a very positive step forward.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities whether athletes competing in next year's World Transplant Games are eligible for financial assistance from his Department or any of its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 3424/16-21)

Mr Givan: Neither my Department nor Sport NI, an Arm's Length Body of my Department has any funding programmes currently open to which athletes competing in next year's World Transplant Games could apply.

Athletes competing in the World Transplant Games may wish to contact their Local District Councils, who may be able to advise on any funding opportunities for individuals who are resident in their area.

Furthermore, Sport NI's website contains a link to other funding sources including charitable trusts that may be able to help. The link is:- www.sportni.net/funding.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Communities to outline what NIEA grant support (i) is available; and (ii) is under consideration to support built heritage projects in South Antrim.

(AQW 3429/16-21)

Mr Givan: The responsibilities formerly carried out by NIEA were divided during Departmental restructuring between my Department, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Heritage Funding is now dealt with by the Historic Environment Division, within my Department.

- (i) I launched the Historic Environment Fund on 14 September 2016. There are four streams of funding as follows:
- Heritage Research - this stream will not be open for applications this year following a consideration of responses from the public consultation, many of which argued that awards should be subject to an overall research strategy. This will be developed over coming months.
 - Heritage Regeneration - this aims to strengthen and improve the physical environment and foster the positive identity of places among local communities. It also aims to support third sector capacity and regeneration initiatives. Applications are welcome this year for: Scheduled Monument regeneration projects; proposals from Building Preservation Trusts to carry out temporary works at heritage at risk; and those looking to provide strategic support to the community sector to realise the potential of our heritage.
 - Heritage Repair - this aims to encourage sustainability and the preservation of the historic environment. Applications can be made for either Scheduled Monument or Listed Building repair schemes.
 - Heritage Revival - this aims to promote the social value of our historic environment and the innate contribution this can make to wellbeing and sustainable employment. Applications are open this year to support community archaeology projects; District Councils to highlight Maintenance Week in November; schools to visit Monuments in State Care; and for those who want to highlight good practice through awards.

Applications will be considered from across Northern Ireland and funding will be awarded against qualifying criteria which are set out in the application forms and guidance. In most cases applications for this year must be received by 10 October.

- (ii) Funds for future years will be subject to budget availability but I hope that we will be able to fund a range of projects. Other routes of support under consideration are outlined in the document 'Historic Environment Fund an Overview'. This can be downloaded from my Department's website at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/historic-environment-support.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Executive's action plan to increase the participation of women in community development in order to address paramilitarism, as outlined in Section A Paragraph 3.9 of the Fresh Start Agreement and Section B5 of the Executive Action Plan.

(AQW 3432/16-21)

Mr Givan: My officials are taking forward activity to increase the participation of women in community development in order to address paramilitarism, as outlined in Section A Paragraph 3.9 of the Fresh Start Agreement through two related strands of activity.

Strand one relates to a detailed co-design process involving key stakeholders from the statutory and voluntary and community sectors to develop a framework proposal for public consultation and delivery from April 2017.

Strand two identifies the need for early intervention in identifying and engaging potential participants for the strand one programme and is planned to take place between October 2016 and March 2017.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline what NIEA grant support (i) is available; and (ii) is under consideration to support built heritage projects in Mid Ulster.

(AQW 3488/16-21)

Mr Givan: The responsibilities formerly carried out by NIEA were divided during Departmental restructuring between my Department, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Heritage Funding is now dealt with by the Historic Environment Division, within my Department.

I launched the Historic Environment Fund on 14 September 2016. There are four streams of funding as follows:-

- Heritage Research - this stream will not be open for applications this year following a consideration of responses from the public consultation, many of which argued that awards should be subject to an overall research strategy. This will be developed over coming months.
- Heritage Regeneration - this aims to strengthen and improve the physical environment and foster the positive identity of places among local communities. It also aims to support third sector capacity and regeneration initiatives. Applications are welcome this year for: Scheduled Monument regeneration projects; proposals from Building Preservation Trusts to carry out temporary works at heritage at risk; and those looking to provide strategic support to the community sector to realise the potential of our heritage.
- Heritage Repair - this aims to encourage sustainability and the preservation of the historic environment. Applications can be made for either Scheduled Monument or Listed Building repair schemes.
- Heritage Revival - this aims to promote the social value of our historic environment and the innate contribution this can make to wellbeing and sustainable employment. Applications are open this year to support community archaeology projects; District Councils to highlight Maintenance Week in November; schools to visit Monuments in State Care; and for those who want to highlight good practice through awards.

Applications will be considered from across Northern Ireland and funding will be awarded against qualifying criteria which are set out in the application forms and guidance. In most cases applications for this year must be received by 10 October.

Funds for future years will be subject to budget availability but I hope that we will be able to fund a range of projects. Other routes of support under consideration are outlined in the document 'Historic Environment Fund an Overview'. This can be downloaded from my Department's website at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/historic-environment-support.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities to detail what funding the Irish Football Association received from his Department in (i) 2015; and (ii) 2016 to date.

(AQW 3492/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can advise that in the financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17 to date, the Irish Football Association has received total funding of £9,063,277.67.

This funding has been provided from my Department and Sport NI, an Arm's Length Body of my Department. Details are attached at Annex A

Annex A: Funding Provided to the Irish Football Association 2015-2016

Departmental Funding

Financial Year	Programme	Project Type	Project Title	Grant Total
2015/16	Capital	Redevelopment	Windsor Park Redevelopment	£8,390,547

Financial Year	Programme	Project Type	Project Title	Grant Total
2015/16	Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty & Social Exclusion (PETPSE)	Community based initiative	PETPSE	£73,730.67
2015/16	Sport in the Community	VCET Project	Sport in the Community	£58,000
2016/17	Sport in the Community	VCET Project	Sport in the Community	£58,000
				£8,580,277.67

Sport NI Funding

Financial Year	Programme	Project Type	Project Title	Grant Total
2015/16	Performance Focus	High Performance	Performance Focus Year 3(2015/2016)	£230,000
2015/16	Athlete Investment Programme	Squad Development	Athlete Investment Programme 2015-16	£20,000
2015/16	Safe Sports Ground Programme	Steward Training	Overseeing Function (Overseeing Body) Phase 7 Steward Training	£3,000
2016/17	Performance Focus	High Performance	Performance Focus Year 4 (2016/17)	£230,000
				£483,000

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline what work he is doing to address the challenges faced by British/Irish Sign Language users.

(AQW 3624/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Departmental officials are currently assessing the responses to the Sign Language Framework consultation which closed on 4 July 2016. Upon completion of this analysis I will decide on the way forward.

In 2016/17 my Department is funding the following sign language projects to promote the social inclusion of British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) users and deaf children and their families:

- **National Deaf Children's Society** - Family Sign Language courses and sign language training for professionals working with deaf children
- **British Deaf Association** - Family Sign Language in the Home courses for families with deaf children and enhancement of the accessibility of information and services for Deaf Sign Language users through participation in International Men/Women's Days events
- **British Deaf Association** – Family Signing at Belfast Zoo with a Deaf tutor teaching animal/environmental signs to deaf children and their families to promote social inclusion and sign language culture
- **Action Deaf Youth** – Provision of accredited BSL Level 1 and Level 2 courses for deaf young people and children of Deaf adults and the provision of informal BSL training for parents of young deaf children to teach them the skills and sign vocabulary needed to engage in active play
- **Hands That Talk** – Provision of Deaf awareness and tailored sign language courses to local banks, shops, restaurants/cafes/takeaways, health centres/pharmacies, leisure centres and transport service providers in the north west region to promote the social inclusion of sign language users
- **John Carberry MBE** – Deaf awareness and ISL taster classes for community/voluntary groups and schools in Greater Belfast and Co Antrim
- **D'Sign Arts Group** – Production of 'Death of the Innocents' play based on the true story of 6 deaf children killed in a fire in Strabane Deaf School in 1865 for presentation at the Alley Theatre, Strabane and Lyric Theatre, Belfast in December 2016
- **St Joseph's Centre for Deaf People/Kinghan Church for the Deaf joint project** – Deaf awareness and tailored BSL classes for 40 participating schools across counties Antrim and Down

I have also committed an additional £60,000 in June 2016 monitoring which will provide for additional sign language classes for parents of deaf children in several centres across Northern Ireland. My officials will continue to engage with the Deaf community, parents of deaf children, local universities and other key stakeholders to promote sign language and improve access to services for the Deaf community and their families.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to open up an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) scheme for community groups to access funding for AED devices similar to that aimed at sporting groups by Sport NI. (AQW 3638/16-21)

Mr Givan:

1. My Department has encouraged increased AED provision across the sports sector and supporting the mapping of AEDs to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) database. However, there are no plans to implement a scheme for community groups to open a scheme for community groups to access funding for AED devices.
2. Public access to defibrillation is primarily a matter for the Minister for Health under the terms of objective No6 of the Community Resuscitation Strategy 2014.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Communities to outline the support available to maintain local built heritage. (AQO 299/16-21)

Mr Givan: I launched the Historic Environment Fund on 14 September 2016.

- This has been set up by my Department to stimulate action to realise the full potential of our historic environment. It is divided into four streams: Heritage Repair; Heritage Regeneration; Heritage Revival and. Heritage Research.
- Heritage Repair - has two routes of funding this year: Historic Monument Repair and Listed Building Repair.
- Heritage Regeneration - has three routes of funding this year: Historic Monument Regeneration; Preservation of Heritage at Risk; and Community Enterprise Catalyst.
- Heritage Revival - has four routes of funding this year: Community Archaeology projects; funding for Councils for Maintenance Week; funding for schools to visit monuments; and support for heritage awards initiatives.
- Heritage Research - will not be open for applications this year following a consideration of responses from the public consultation, many of which argued that decisions should be subject to an overall research strategy. This will be developed over coming months.
- More detail is available on my Department's website.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQO 206/16-21, to outline the plans in place to ensure that investment in local social housing stock will not be damaged as a result of the proposed reclassification of housing associations as public bodies by the Office for National Statistics. (AQO 300/16-21)

Mr Givan: To ensure we are fully prepared for the anticipated ONS decision, officials have been working in the background to identify how areas such as investment in social housing in Northern Ireland might be impacted by a possible reclassification of housing associations as public bodies.

After the ONS decision is published, the findings will be carefully analysed. The options for dealing with the anticipated reclassification will be further developed in light of the detail in the report. I will work with my Executive colleagues to progress the agreed approach to the reclassification.

My Department will work to ensure that any potential impact on the Department Expenditure Limit budget and in turn the NI block grant will be minimised.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for Communities whether he has considered introducing an arts and creative industries strategy. (AQO 301/16-21)

Mr Givan: I remain committed to bringing forward an overarching Culture and Arts Strategy for Northern Ireland and the creative industries will be integral to that strategy. Work on strategy development is ongoing with the aim of shaping a future looking strategy that takes culture and arts well into the 21st century.

Culture and arts make a significant contribution to the economy and the wider tourism sector. The ambition is to deliver a strategy that values culture and arts, including creative industries and re-position them as key enablers contributing to the achievement of many of the economic and social outcomes within the new Programme for Government.

A public consultation on the Strategy, conducted earlier this year, sought full engagement with as many arts groups, communities and individuals as possible and attracted over 1,700 responses. The benefits of arts and culture to individuals and society were widely accepted throughout these responses and the development of a cross cutting culture and arts strategy was very much welcomed and this will be taken forward as a key component of my Department's delivery plan for PFG Indicator 27 – Improve Cultural Participation.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities for an update on how the Steps 2 Success programme supports people with complex needs. (AQO 302/16-21)

Mr Givan: Steps 2 Success is my Department's main employment programme, introduced in October 2014.

The programme is designed to allow delivery organisations and participants the flexibility to agree the barriers to employment to be addressed in order to help claimants find and keep a job.

Each of the three delivery organisations offers a range of supports to people with complex needs to help them improve their chances of finding work. These can include:

- A clear focus on supporting health and wellbeing, addressing issues such as self esteem, confidence building, stress and anxiety, where necessary;
- access to specialist, professionally qualified staff such as occupational psychologists;
- referral to specialist support organisations, that are a key part of their delivery supply chain, to deal with issues such as mental health problems, managing health conditions, language barriers and addiction, for example; and
- signposting and referral to a very wide range of external specialist organisations.

All of the employment programmes in my department, including Steps to Success, have an under spend of £7m this year, even though we very have high rates of worklessness in Northern Ireland.

Falls in unemployment levels is one reason; however, much lower than anticipated take up by people in receipt of sickness benefits is another very important factor.

The contract for delivery of the Programme ends in 2018 and I am considering a range of options to improve participation rates, especially amongst those who need most help and support to get into work.

Over the coming months I have tasked my officials with leading a comprehensive engagement exercise to inform the nature and design of the programmes of support that we will be delivering beyond 2018.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Neighbourhood Renewal programme, including plans his Department has for this programme post March 2017.

(AQO 303/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is currently supporting some 252 organisations with contracts totalling around £19.4m across the 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. These contracts have been let to March 2017.

My officials continue to work closely with these organisations ensuring that they continue to deliver high quality services designed to address evidence based need.

Contingency plans are in place that have ensured that work in these areas has continued smoothly even though the extension of regeneration powers did not go ahead as planned.

If required these contingency plans can be extended up to March 2018, pending the outcome of the 2017/18 Budget.

I understand the Executive will decide on its legislative programme and announce it alongside the final Programme for Government.

In the event that there is a lengthy delay in the extension of powers to councils, the Department will review its regeneration policies and strategies accordingly.

I recognise concerns with regards to the future delivery of regeneration, including Neighbourhood Renewal. I can assure you that my officials and I will continue to work closely with all key stakeholders throughout this period.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans for new social housing in West Tyrone.

(AQO 304/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Social Housing Development Programme, 86 new social housing units are planned to start on site in West Tyrone this year and next year. Of these 86 units, 62 are planned to start this year, in 2016/17, with the remaining 14 to start next year, in 2017/18.

Programmed schemes may be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons including delays in site acquisition, achieving planning permission, and so on. Additional schemes may also be added to the SHDP through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory / Off-the-shelf properties during the year, and through the annual housing association bidding round and programme formulation process, which is currently underway.

Housing Associations are also developing further proposals for the West Tyrone area which will be considered by the Housing Executive as it formulates the Social Housing Development Programme for the three year period between 2017/18 and 2019/20. This new programme will be published early in the New Year.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the performance of local athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic games 2016.

(AQO 305/16-21)

Mr Givan: Both the Olympic and Paralympic Games are a worldwide spectacle that showcases the finest athletes and para-athletes competing across a full range of sports; and gaining a place to compete there is an exceptional achievement.

It was exciting to watch and support our local athletes as they competed at the Rio Games. With 28 local athletes at the Olympics and a record number of nine athletes at the Paralympics, Northern Ireland once again has demonstrated its talent for nurturing world class athletes.

Selection to participate at the Games is a reflection of the countless hours of training and preparation undertaken by each athlete so that, at the pinnacle of their sport, they can compete with the world's finest athletes.

Whilst a number of our athletes beat their 'personal bests', it is disappointing that no medals were won at this year's Olympic Games. Northern Ireland's Paralympians, however, performed extremely well by bringing home 6 medals from the Rio Paralympic Games.

Indeed, in this Olympic cycle, Northern Ireland produced 15.5 Olympians per million inhabitants. This compares to GB who produced only 5.8 and the Irish Republic who produced 10.6.

Special mention must be given to Bethany Firth, whose achievement in winning 3 gold medals and 1 silver medal for Team GB in swimming was outstanding. This was even more impressive by the manner in which Bethany won her races, breaking world and Paralympic records on the way to medal success.

It was also wonderful to see Jason Smyth and Michael McKillop continue their successful run by winning gold medals and retaining their titles.

All the athletes who competed at Rio deserve immense credit for qualifying for the Games and they deserve to be recognised as they serve as an inspiration to the next generation.

I have asked officials to make arrangements for a reception to recognise these achievements of all those who competed in Rio.

I am confident that our local athletes will continue to inspire future athletes from Northern Ireland to strive to enjoy success at the next Games in Tokyo.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to outline the progress made on the environmental improvement project at the Drumgor Shopping Centre area in Craigavon.

(AQO 306/16-21)

Mr Givan: A proposal for a project to revitalise the area around the shops in Drumgor and nearby Tullygally has been identified by Council and the Brownlow Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership and included in its Action Plan. This project is at the very early stages of development and progress will be dependent on the development of detailed plans, the securing of necessary approvals and agreements and the availability of funding.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Communities what support his Department can give to families experiencing financial hardship as a direct result of the reported problems with the contract between Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Concentrix.

(AQO 308/16-21)

Mr Givan: HM Revenue and Customs has confirmed that it has decided not to extend its existing contract with Concentrix, a company it employs to check tax credits entitlement and cut tax credit fraud and overpayments. The firm will complete its current contract which expires in May 2017.

HM Revenue and Customs is redeploying 150 staff so that tax credit claimants can get through to advisers and resolve any issues about their claim.

Whilst the Department for Communities has no direct responsibility for working or child tax credit or tax credit claimants, it can provide Crisis Loans to claimants faced with financial emergencies, primarily to help relieve a serious risk to health and safety of customers and their dependants. Crisis Loans are repayable either by direct repayment or from certain social security benefits.

In the case of families who are out of work and receiving child tax credits from HM Revenue and Customs and receiving either Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based), Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related) or Pension Credit, the Department can also provide Budgeting Loans for those who are in need of financial support to help with major items of expenditure or services. Budgeting Loans are repayable normally by deduction from claimant's benefits.

Department of Education

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children that availed of pre-school home teaching, by constituency, for each of the last three years.

(AQW 2531/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The Education Authority (EA) is unable to provide information by constituency.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail any investigation that has been carried out in relation to the informal exclusion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities that cannot be adequately catered for in a mainstream

educational setting and are therefore being sent home; (ii) for his assessment of the scale of the problem; and (iii) to detail the action is being taken to address this issue.

(AQW 2705/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) There has been no investigation carried out in relation to gathering data on the informal exclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities that are not being adequately catered for in a mainstream education setting and are therefore, being sent home. Consideration of informal exclusions, if brought to the attention of the Education Authority (EA), would be dealt with on an individual case basis.
- (ii) To date there has been no assessment of the scale of this problem, but the EA considers that it is possibly less of an issue since the introduction of the Special Educational Needs Disability Order (SEND O) 2005 provisions. When individual cases are brought to the attention of the EA, officers take prompt action to remind a school of its obligation within the SEN framework and to advise them and the parent of the correct procedures.
- (iii) In some exceptional cases and where a school has exhausted its own resources and the statutory assessment is not yet completed, the EA may provide some interim additional resources prior to the statement being finalised in order to help support the child in school. As recorded in the response to question (ii), to date any isolated incidents would be dealt with individually.

Training for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), governors and school principals highlights the obligations towards the needs of children with SEN and/or disabilities and the need for reasonable adjustments to be made would also be stressed. Advice is also given on suspensions and expulsions in relation to pupils with SEN.

The review of behaviour support and Education Otherwise than at School provision (EOTAS) includes a consideration of suspensions and expulsions data, including in relation to children with SEN. Any indication that further action is required will be taken following scrutiny of this data.

The area will also be highlighted to officers from SEN services going into schools and also during SENCO training during this academic year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how many children with special educational needs were still awaiting (i) a suitable nursery placement; and (ii) a suitable Primary 1 placement at the beginning of this academic year.

(AQW 2707/16-21)

Mr Weir: The information, by Education Authority (EA) office area, is as follows:

EA Office Area	Number awaiting nursery placement	Number awaiting P1 placement
Armagh	0	0
Ballymena	0	0
Belfast	0	0
Dundonald	0	<5*
Omagh	0	0

* Actual number suppressed to avoid possible identification of individuals.

The EA has advised that, as children with special educational needs (SEN) are referred for statutory assessment on an ongoing basis throughout the year, there may be some children where the statutory assessment has been initiated but it is too early to determine the SEN or appropriate placement/provision. Some of these children will currently be in mainstream but may be enrolled in specialist provision later in the school year. These numbers have not been included in the above table, as a suitable placement has not yet been determined.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all pre-school providers per constituency; and (ii) how many first preference applications each received and how many first preference applications were accepted by each provider.

(AQW 2759/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many children within a mainstream school setting have (a) ADHD; and (b) autism; and (ii) the plans he has to increase training for teaching and class room assistants in the next five years.

(AQW 2811/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) In 2015/16, of all pupils in mainstream settings (i.e. primary and post-primary schools):

- (a) 1,651 have ADHD as their primary need, and;
 (b) 2,816 have autism as their primary need.

Source: NI school census

- (ii) The Education Authority's autism and behaviour support services provide a comprehensive training programme for teaching and classroom assistants across all phases of education. This programme includes generic training in understanding and effectively responding to children and young people with autism and/or ADHD as well as bespoke training in respect of meeting the needs of individual children. Training is available throughout the school year and also during July and August.

It is the responsibility of each school to identify the training needs of their staff. The autism and behaviour support services will respond to the training needs identified by schools over the next five years and work with schools, other services, Health Trusts and the Middletown Centre for Autism to ensure that teaching and classroom assistants continue to receive high quality and relevant training in autism and ADHD.

Middletown Centre for Autism is funded by the Department of Education to provide training in autism to educational professionals and this includes classroom assistants. The Centre develops a three year plan as part of its business and corporate planning process. The Centre's planned training for educational professionals, subject to agreed budget allocations, is as follows:

Year	Professional Training Places Planned*
2016-17	3600
2017-18	3600
2018-19	3600

* Training is offered to all educational professionals working with children with autism, including teachers and classroom assistants, it is not possible to confirm what proportion of this training will be taken up by teaching/classroom assistants.

Training provided by the Centre will also be supported by increased online learning capacity as it is currently upgrading its virtual learning environment system.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail how many organisations and arm's-length bodies within his departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and (ii) to outline how an established recruitment agency is considered.

(AQW 2847/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department's arm's length bodies do not use recruitment agencies as their normal method of filling vacant posts and therefore do not consider any recruitment agency to be a preferred provider of staff.

When the Departments ALBs do use recruitment agencies they have advised the process is as follows:

- The Education Authority (EA) has advised that following a public advertisement for tenders and an evaluation process, they established a Framework of 3 local recruitment agencies in June 2013 and basic grade temporary workers have been recruited using those agencies since that date;
- The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has also advised that where resources are required to be sourced via a recruitment agency, a select list of agencies is identified and they are all invited to submit suitable applications;
- The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has rarely used recruitment agencies; however, when they have, they source from a range of agencies so as to ensure the widest pool and best value for money;
- The General Teaching Council Northern Ireland (GTCNI) consider agencies based on their market presence in a particular area of expertise;
- The Middletown Centre for Autism either use the collaborative arrangements negotiated through Central Procurement Directorate NI, the Office of Government Procurement Ireland or a Centre of Procurement Expertise. If no satisfactory contract exists within these frameworks, Middletown will then procure the required service through a quotation or tendering process as appropriate;
- The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) send out a specification to a number of agencies requesting CV's;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) do not use recruitment agencies.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education how his Department is monitoring the negative effects of body shaming in relation to physical education uniforms.

(AQW 2855/16-21)

Mr Weir: Departmental guidance on uniforms can be found on the Department's website at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-uniform-0>

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail how many contracts for Home to School Transport from 2014 were awarded to private companies; (ii) whether his Department incurred additional costs as a result.

(AQW 2856/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has advised that the number of contracts for Home to School Transport awarded in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial years was as follows:

- 2014/15 - 306
- 2015/16 - 184

The EA has confirmed that no additional costs were incurred as a result of using private companies.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education why only 60 per cent of his department budget is allocated to schools.

(AQW 2869/16-21)

Mr Weir: On top of the 60% aggregated schools budget, around an additional 12% of the overall 2016-17 budget is allocated to schools from centre budgets held by the Education Authority, with a further 13% attributable to services to them.

Therefore about 85% of my departmental budget goes towards schools funding.

Over the next few months, I will give consideration as to how I can give greater freedom and autonomy to schools in spending this budget.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline the progress he has made in increasing free early education and childcare from 12.5 hours to 20 hours per week.

(AQW 2873/16-21)

Mr Weir: Any increase for funded pre-school education places that are currently provided for at least 12.5 hours per week would require a comprehensive analysis of:

- the potential implications for the delivery of the universally funded Pre-school Education Programme;
- the potential impact of an increase in pre-school hours on the early years estate where 3,000 additional pre-school education places (currently offered in the afternoon as part of a dual day) may be needed as a result of a longer pre-school day;
- increased funding requirements; and
- existing research on the benefits of increasing the number of hours provided to pre-school children.

The provision of additional childcare services, including wraparound services to complement existing pre-school education provision, will be considered in the context of the Childcare Strategy and be decided on the basis of need, demand, capacity and available resources.

I hope to bring forward the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many responses received to the consultation, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline why there are no targets for shared and integrated education in PFG 2016-21.

(AQW 2893/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Programme for Government 2016-21 is being developed using an outcomes-based approach based on delivering improved well-being for citizens. Consultation on the Draft Programme for Government Framework concluded in July, and a further consultation on a full draft Programme for Government is planned for early October.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education, relating to the PFG 2011-15 target of having all children participate in shared education programmes by 2015, to outline why a total of 2.5 per cent participation was achieved.

(AQW 2895/16-21)

Mr Weir: It is not clear what the 2.5 per cent relates to, however the PFG 2011-15 target was "to ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015". This was in recognition that while all children should have the opportunity, not all may wish to participate.

It is also worth noting that the 2015 School Omnibus survey of school Principals shows that 59.3% of respondents indicated that they partnered in shared education with another school. The 2015 Young Life & Times Survey of 16 years olds shows that 51% reported that they had participated in shared education with other schools, while the 2015 Kids Life and Times survey of P7 pupils shows that 58% reported participation in shared education.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Education to detail the ratio of special needs classroom assistants employed to the number of children with statements of special needs, broken down by year since 2008.

(AQW 2912/16-21)

Mr Weir: The following table details the ratio of special needs classroom assistants employed to the number of children with statements of special educational needs (SEN) from 2008/09 onwards.

It is however important to note that ratios are not used by the Education Authority to determine the number of classroom assistants employed to the number of SEN children. The number of classroom assistants required depends on the individual needs of each child, and whether this is in a mainstream school setting or a special school.

Year	i) Special Needs Classroom Assistants ^{1,2}	ii) Children with statements of special educational needs ^{2,3}	Ratio of i) to ii)
2008/09 ⁴	5,082	12,164	0.42
2009/10 ⁴	5,307	12,312	0.43
2010/11 ⁴	5,465	12,509	0.44
2011/12	6,222	14,002	0.44
2012/13	6,454	14,426	0.45
2013/14 ⁵	6,920	15,058	0.46
2014/15 ⁶	7,402	15,853	0.47
2015/16 ⁷	7,965	16,464	0.48

- 1 Classroom assistants source: Education Authority payroll system and Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated (VG/GMI) school support staff survey.
- 2 Information for classroom assistants in nursery schools was not available.
- 3 Statemented pupils source: NI school census.
- 4 Information for special needs classroom assistants in VG/GMI schools is not available prior to 2011/12.
- 5 Information on classroom assistants for one grant maintained integrated school is not available for 2013/14.
- 6 Information on classroom assistants for three voluntary grammar schools is not available for 2014/15.
- 7 Information on classroom assistants for one voluntary grammar school is not available for 2015/16.
- 8 Where information is not available on classroom assistants the corresponding data for statemented pupils has been excluded.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education (i) why he did not bid for additional monies for Early Years or the Pathway Fund in the June Monitoring Round; and (ii) whether he will bid for additional transitional monies in the next monitoring round.
(AQW 3058/16-21)

Mr Weir: The new Pathway Fund was introduced from 1 April 2016 to replace the Early Years Fund. The total fund value of the Pathway Fund (£2.9m) is the same level as the Early Years Fund.

As explained by the Finance Minister to the Assembly on Tuesday 14 June 2016, we are in a new regime regarding monitoring rounds and I am not going to comment on any individual pressures or easements that may, or may not, have been made on behalf of my Department in the 2016-17 June monitoring round or future monitoring rounds.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education, in cases where school property has been disposed, to outline the timescales to complete the disposal process in each case.
(AQW 3082/16-21)

Mr Weir: The responsibility for school property and its subsequent disposal is dependent on the school sector.

The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for schools in the Controlled Sector. Maintained, Grant Maintained Integrated and Voluntary Grammar schools are owned by the Trustees of each school. Therefore when schools in these categories close it is the Trustees who make the decision on the further use or disposal of the property. Accordingly I can only answer in respect of school property falling within the Controlled Sector.

The EA, as a public sector body, is required to dispose of surplus assets in accordance with the Land and Property Services' Guidance 'Central Advisory Unit: Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland.' Also in line with Managing Public Money Northern Ireland the EA will try to ensure that disposals of surplus property occur within three years, subject to professional advice on the capacity of the market.

For controlled schools which closed between the beginning of the 2011 school year and the end of the 2016 school year and which are not being used for other educational purposes, the table below summarises the timescales for disposal.

Name of School	Date of Closure	Date of Disposal / Notes
Drumlegagh Primary School	31/08/2012	Original site and building reverted to Church in September 2013. A portion of the site, not included within the reversion clause, was sold by the EA (2016).
Dunmurry High School	31/08/2012	Sale completed December 2014
Aghavilly Primary School	31/08/2012	Building reverted to the Successors in Title (June 2012)

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to outline the budget allocated to the Strule Shared Education Campus at the announcement of the project.

(AQW 3083/16-21)

Mr Weir: Outline Business Case 2 (OBC 2) (2013) set out the initial capital budgetary implications of the preferred option. At Quarter 1 2012 prices the estimated total construction cost of the Strule Shared Education Campus was £126m, this figure included Optimism Bias. This comprised the construction of the six core schools, professional fees, shared facilities, site works, and road works. This estimate does not include other non-construction programme costs.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to outline how much of the budget allocated to the Strule Shared Education Campus has been spent to date.

(AQW 3084/16-21)

Mr Weir: The construction forecast spend from the 1 April 2010 up to 31 March 2017 for the Strule Shared Education Campus is £19.3m. This includes the costs associated with for example, the design of the six schools and shared educational facilities, construction of Arvalee School and Resource Centre which opened on 6 September 2016, site enabling and preparation works, statutory charges, professional fees and initial road works. This estimate does not include other non-construction programme costs.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all school closures between 2011 and 2016; and (ii) how many have been re-used for other educational purposes.

(AQW 3086/16-21)

Mr Weir: Details of the schools that closed between the beginning of the 2011 school year and the end of the 2016 school year are set out in the table below. Some of these closures have been due to amalgamations and the new school is currently operating on split sites. Where it is known that the former school has been re-used for educational purposes this has been indicated.

With regard to school closures, outside of the controlled school sector, responsibility for the disposal or re-use of school property is a matter for the trustees as owners of the school.

Reference Number	Name of School	Re-used for Educational Purposes*
103-0329	Edmund Rice Primary School	Yes
103-6464	Star of the Sea Primary School	Yes
103-0316	St Aidan's Primary School	Yes
103-0317	St Bernadette's Primary School	No
123-0173	St Gemma's High School	No
101-0296	Ballygolan Primary School	No
121-0266	Orangefield High School	No
101-0269	Avoniel Primary School	Yes
113-6230	Holy Family Nursery School	Yes
203-1886	Corranny Primary School	-
203-1892	Cornagague Primary School	-
203-2537	Loreto Convent	Yes
203-6053	St Colmcille's Primary School	Yes
231-6601	Elmbrook School	Yes

Reference Number	Name of School	Re-used for Educational Purposes*
231-6234	Erne School	Yes
221-0164	Strabane High School	Yes
241-0096	Strabane Grammar School	Yes
203-6096	St Mary's Girls' Primary School	Yes
203-2689	St Mary's Boys' Primary School	Yes
201-6376	Ardstraw Primary School	Yes
201-2392	Drumlegagh Primary School	No
223-0181	St Peter's High School	-
223-0111	St Eugene's High School	-
203-2664	St Davog' Primary School	-
231-0029	Altnagelvin Hospital School	-
211-6333	Ballycolman Nursery School	Yes
203-1888	St Eugene's Primary School	-
201-2674	Bridgehill Primary School	No
221-0305	Devenish College	Yes
221-0080	Lisnaskea High School	No
231-0015	Belmont House School	Yes
231-6525	Foyle View School	Yes
203-6389	St Anne's Girls' Primary School	Yes
203-2510	Barrack Street Boys' Primary School	Yes
223-0254	Immaculate Conception College	-
203-2687	St Macartan's Primary School	-
203-2600	St Francis of Assisi Primary School	-
203-2631	Envagh Primary School	-
203-2265	St Anthony's Primary School	-
203-2712	Gortnagarn Primary School	-
203-2702	Evisk Primary School	-
203-2277	Craigbrack Primary School	-
241-0040	Collegiate Grammar School	Yes
242-0042	Portora Royal School	Yes
303-0713	Carlane Primary School	-
362-0012	Dalraida Preparatory Department	Yes
321-0013	Garvagh High School	No
301-2224	Cullycapple Primary School	Yes
301-2255	Drumard Primary School	Yes
321-0200	Monskstown Community High School	Yes
321-0279	Newtownabbey Community High School	No
321-0233	Ballee Community High School	Yes
341-0033	Coleraine High School	Yes
342-0032	Coleraine Academical Institution	Yes

Reference Number	Name of School	Re-used for Educational Purposes*
304-0451	Kilcoan Primary School	Yes
301-0760	Mullaghdubh Primary School	Yes
303-3311	Glenravel Primary School	Yes
303-0625	St Mary's Primary School	Yes
303-2011	Altayeskey Primary School	-
403-1644	St Patrick's Primary School	-
403-1384	Convent of Mercy Primary School	Yes
401-1647	Ballykiegle Primary School	No
401-1688	Redburn Primary School	Yes
421-0194	Dunmurray High School	No
403-6081	St Luke's Primary School	Yes
403-6134	St Mark's Primary School	-
461-0085	Down High Preparatory Department	Yes
421-0086	Knockbreda High School	Yes
421-0183	Newtownbreda High School	Yes
461-0097	Cygnets House Preparatory Department	Yes
501-1034	Aghavilly Primary School	-
501-6028	Keady Primary School	No
523-0070	St Mary's High School	Yes
523-0088	St Paul's Junior High School	Yes
542-0056	St Michael's Grammar School	Yes
523-0160	St Brigid's High School	-
503-1301	Clontifleece Primary School	-
503-1213	St Clare's Convent Primary School	-
503-1576	St Colman's Abbey Primary School	-
503-2693	Crievagh Primary School	-

* Educational use could include, for example, use as a school, as a site for a new school build, youth service provision or Education Authority administrative accommodation.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many groups are funded through the Education Authority in North Belfast; and (ii) where these groups are situated.

(AQW 3120/16-21)

Mr Weir: A total of 119 groups in North Belfast have been funded through the Education Authority since its formation in April 2015. The table below provides a list of these groups and their locations.

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Ashton Community Trust/New Lodge Youth Club	117 Upper Meadow Street, BELFAST	BT15 2FX
112th Scout Group	McConnell Youth Complex, 837-869 Shore Road, BELFAST	BT15 4HS
1134 (West Belfast) Air Training Corps	581 Antrim Road, BELFAST	BT15 4DX
119th Belfast Brownies	1 Wallasey Park, BELFAST	BT14 6PN
119th Belfast Girl Guide Company	Joanmount Methodist Church, 1 Wallasey Park, BELFAST	BT14 6PN

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
119th Rainbow Guides	1 Wallasey Park, BELFAST	BT14 6PN
15th Belfast Company Boys' Brigade	144 Limestone Road, BELFAST	BT15 3AL
16th Seaview Presbyterian Girls' Brigade	Seaview Presbyterian Church,94 Shore Road, BELFAST	BT15 3PZ
17th 'B' Belfast Girl Guiding Company	John White Memorial Congregational Church,Tennant Street, BELFAST	BT13 3GD
20th West Belfast Scout Group	Harry Maguire Scout Centre,123 Bray Street, BELFAST	BT13 3DU
222nd NI St Mary's Parish Girls' Brigade Company	St Marys Parish,Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 7GB
22nd Belfast Company Boys' Brigade	Woodvale Presbyterian Church,Woodvale Road, BELFAST	BT13 3BU
230th Girls' Brigade Company	Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle,837-869 Shore Road, BELFAST	BT15 4HS
33rd Belfast Boys' Brigade Co.	773 Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 8AA
41st Belfast Guides	Shankill Parochial Hall,403 Shankill Road , BELFAST	BT13 3AF
45th Belfast Scout Group	Immanuel Church of Ireland,Ardoyne Road, BELFAST	BT14 7JH
48th Scout Group	1 Upper Meenan Street,, BELFAST	BT13 1NT
54th Boys' Brigade	267 Shankill Road, BELFAST	BT13 1FT
57th 'B' Belfast Brownies	292 Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 7ED
57th 'B' Belfast Guides	292 Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 7ED
58th Belfast Company Boys' Brigade	Alexandra Presbyterian Church,York Road, BELFAST	BT15 3HE
59th Company Girls' Brigade	Greencastle Methodist Church,Whitewell Road, BELFAST	BT36 7ES
69th Cavehill Methodist Girls' Brigade	Cavehill Methodist Church,92-114 Cavehill Road, BELFAST	BT15 5BT
6th Belfast Scout Group	Hill Scout Hall,33 Ophir Gardens, BELFAST	BT15 5EP
76th North Belfast Scout Group	Joanmount Methodist Church,1 Wallasey Park, BELFAST	BT14 6PN
78th Belfast Scout Group	487 Antrim Road, BELFAST	BT15 3BP
92nd Belfast Company Boys Brigade	Eglinton Presbyterian Church,Ballysillan Road, BELFAST	BT14 6RB
93rd Boys' Brigade	Matchett Street, BELFAST	BT13 3GD
99th Belfast Company Boys' Brigade	St Matthews Church Hall,403 Shankill Road, BELFAST	BT13 3AF
Ardoyne Youth Club	Old Beltex Mill,Flax Street, BELFAST	BT14 7EJ
Ardoyne Youth Enterprises	Old Beltex Mill,Flax Street, BELFAST	BT14 7EJ
Artillery Youth Centre	Victoria Parade, BELFAST	BT15 2ES
Ballysillan Youth For Christ	50-52 Benview Park, BELFAST	BT14 8HU
Ballysillan Youth Group	Ballysillan Presbyterian Church,773-775 Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 8AA
Ballysillan Youth Initiative	Belfast Boys' Model School, Ballysillan Road, BELFAST	BT14 6RB
Basement Youth Club	120 Alexandra Park Avenue, BELFAST	BT15 3GJ

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Belfast City Mission Shore Road Youth Club	807 Shore Road, Shore Crescent, BELFAST	BT15 3HR
Benvue Community Centre	80 Ballysillan Park, BELFAST	BT14 8HD
Club Oige Mhachaire Bothain	253-255 Bothar ne Seanphairce, BEAL FEIRSTE	BT14 6QR
Crumlin Road Presbyterian Church ROC Café	292 Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 7ED
Deanby Youth Club	17-21 Oldpark Terrace, BELFAST	BT14 6NP
Eglinton Youth Club	Eglinton Presbyterian Church, Ballysillan Road, BELFAST	BT14 6RB
Fortwilliam Youth Club	2a Mount Vernon Road, BELFAST	BT15 4AY
Glenbank Youth Club	2 Glenbank Drive, Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 8BJ
Greater Whitewell Community Surgery	878 Shore Road, NEWTOWNABBEY	BT36 7DQ
Hammer Youth Club	Agnes Street, BELFAST	BT13 1GA
Holy Family Guide Unit	Newington Youth Centre, 224 Limestone Road, BELFAST	BT15 3AR
Holy Family Youth Centre	224a Limestone Road, BELFAST	BT15 3AP
Inclusion & Diversity Team	111-113 Limestone Road, BELFAST	BT15 3AB
Jennymount Methodist 13th Girls' Brigade	Jennymount Methodist Church, North Queen Street, BELFAST	BT15 3DH
John Paul II Youth Club	Brookfield Place, BELFAST	BT14 7EX
Ligoniel Improvement Association	148 Ligoniel Road, BELFAST	BT14 8DT
Lower Oldpark Community Association	9-23 Avoca Street, BELFAST	BT14 6EN
Manor Street/Cliftonville Community Group	60-64 Manor Street, BELFAST	BT14 6EA
Marrowbone Community Association	253-255 Oldpark Road, BELFAST	BT14 6QR
Mountainhill Youth Club	146 Ligoniel Road, BELFAST	BT14 8DT
Mountcollyer Youth Club	111-113 Limestone Road, BELFAST	BT15 3AB
North Belfast Area Project	c/o Mountcollyer Youth Club, 111-113 Limestone Road, BELFAST	BT15 3AB
North Belfast District Explorers	Antrim Road, BELFAST	
Seaview Every Girls Rally	Seaview Drive, BELFAST	BT15 3BN
Somerton Road Evangelical Presbyterian Church Youth Club	44 Somerton Road, BELFAST	BT15 3LG
St Patricks Guide Unit	St Kevins Hall, North Queen Street, BELFAST	BT15 1ER
Star Neighbourhood Centre	79-83 Hillman Street, BELFAST	BT15 2FS
Streetbeat Youth Project	16 Woodvale Road, BELFAST	BT13 3BS
Vine Centre	193 Crumlin Road, BELFAST	BT14 7AA
Welcome Evangelical Church - Friday Night Club	163 Cambrai Street, BELFAST	BT13 3JH
Shankill United Football Club	Agnes Street, Belfast	BT13 1GG
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum	185 Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast	BT14 6DT
North Belfast Harriers	14 Oldpark Terrace, Belfast	BT14 6NN
New Lodge Arts	5 Churchill Street, Belfast	BT15 2BP
Seaview Enterprises	St Vincent Street, Belfast	BT15 3QG
5th Newtownabbey BB	Whitehouse Presbyterian Church, Shore Rd	BT37 9SY
7th Newtownabbey BB	Newtownabbey Methodist Mission, 35A Rathcoole Drive	BT37 9AQ

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
10th Newtownabbey BB	Abbots Cross Congregational Church, Doagh Rd	BT37 9QN
11th Newtownabbey BB	Belfast City Mission, Innis Walk, Rathcoole	BT37 9EZ
127th Belfast Girls Guides	St Comgalls Church of Ireland , Coolderry Gardens	BT37 9DH
2nd Cloughfern Girl Guides	Church of the Ascension, 126 Doagh Road	BT37 9QR
108th Belfast Guides	Glengormley Presbyterian Church, 267 Antrim Road. Newtownabbey	BT36 7QN
Abbots Cross Cong BB	Doagh Rd, Newtownabbey	BT37 9QW
21st Glengormley Methodist GB	Glencairn Drive, Newtownabbey	BT36 8EP
110th Abbots Cross Presbyterian Church	Doagh Rd, Newtownabbey	BT37 9RB
111th Newtownabbey Methodist Mission GB	35A Rathcoole Dive, Newtownabbey	BT37 9AQ
124th Rathcoole Presbyterian GB	Rathcoole Presbyterian Church, Rathmore Way	BT37 9DS
281 Belfast City Mission GB	Belfast City Mission, Innis Walk, Rathcoole	BT37 9EZ
Glengormley Fire Fighter Cadets	Church Road, Glengormley Fire Station, Glengormley	BT36 6HH
Squadron 1919 ATC	Abbots Cross, TA Centre, 77 Doagh Road	BT37 9QJ
Carnmoney Parish CLB	Carnmoney Parish Church Hall, Church Road	BT36 6DJ
Rathcoole Every Grils Rally	Rathcoole Primary School, 36 Derrycoole Way	BT37 9EL
1st Cloughfern Scouts	C/O Church of the Ascension, 126 Doagh Rd, Newtownabbey	BT37 9QR
6th Antrim Scouts	St Bernards Church, 210 Antrim Rd	BT36 7QR
108th Belfast Scout Group	St Brigids Church, Ballyclare Rd, Newtownabbey	BT36 5HL
Abbots Cross YC	Christ Congregational Church, Abbots Cross, Doagh Rd	BT37 9QW
Belfast City Mission YC	Innis Walk, Rathcoole	BT37 9EZ
Mixed Doubles YC	Abbots Cross Presbyterian Church, Doagh Rd	BT37 9QN
Newtownabbey Methodist Mission YC	35A Rathcoole Drive, Newtownabbey	BT37 9AQ
Queens Parks Womens Group	10 Portland Avenue, Glengormley	BT36 5EY
5th North Belfast Scouts	Scout Hall, 168 Church Rd, Newtownabbey	BT36 6HJ
St Bernard's YC	St Bernards Primary School, Elmfield Rd	BT36 6DW
Newtownabbey Gateway YC	Inniscoole Day Centre, 57 Rosslea Way, Rathcoole	BT37 9BZ
16th Newtownabbey BB	Belfast City Mission, Innis Walk, Rathcoole	BT37 9EZ
Millgreen YC	19A Newton Gardens, Newtownabbey	BT36 7BX
Rathcoole YC	1A The Diamond, Rathcoole	BT37 9BJ
Glengormley YC	Glenverna Drive, Newtownabbey	BT36 5JB
174 Trust Playgroup	Duncairn Avenue, Belfast	BT14 6BP
Holy Cross PEAG	Flax Street, Belfast	BT14 7EJ
Naiscoil Mhic Rheactain	Duncairn Avenue, Belfast	BT14 6BP
Our Lady's PEAG	31-51 Oldpark Avenue, Belfast	BT14 6HH
Play and Learn PEAG	Ardoyne Road, Belfast	BT14 7HZ
Resurrection Playgroup PEAG	120 Cavehill Road, Belfast	BT15 5BU
St Vincent De Paul Playgroup PEAG	169 Ligoniel Road, Belfast	BT14 8DP
Stepping Stones Playgroup	722 Antrim Road, Belfast	BT15 5GQ

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Sunshine Playgroup	111-113 Limestone Road, Belfast	BT15 3AB
TLC Nursery PEAG	162a Cavehill Road, Belfast	BT15 5EX
Wishing Well PEAG	7-9 Alliance Crescent, Belfast	BT14 7PL
Glengormley IPS Playgroup	166 Church Road, Glengormley	BT36 6HJ
Naiscoil Eanna	St Enda's GAC, Hightown Road, Glengormley	BT36 7AU
St Bernard's Playgroup	165 Antrim Road, Newtownabbey	BT36 7QR
St Mary's on the Hill Playgroup	142 Carnmoney Road, Newtownabbey	BT36 6JU
Pathways	Duncairn Avenue, Belfast	BT14 6BP

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many Educational Welfare Officers are employed; and (ii) where they are situated.

(AQW 3121/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are 121 Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) employed by the Education Authority.

The table below sets out the numbers attached to each office:

Number of EWOs	Area Offices
30	Armagh
24	Omagh
20	Dundonald
25	Ballymena
22	Belfast
121	TOTAL

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to detail the surplus and deficits held by each school in Upper Bann in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3128/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Education for an update on the future of St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

(AQW 3210/16-21)

Mr Weir: The previous Minister of Education commissioned the development of an outline proposal for cross border education as an alternative to the closure of St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

Work by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has been developed and my officials agree with the CCMS analysis that a cross border approach would not meet required quality thresholds, nor would such an approach be cost effective.

I have asked CCMS to engage with St Mary's on the proposal and on the appropriate steps that should be taken for education provision for children in the Brollagh area.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the recent GCSE performance at St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

(AQW 3211/16-21)

Mr Weir: The final validated data relating to schools' most recent GCSE performance is not yet available within the Department.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Education whether the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Western Education and Library Board has brought forward a pilot scheme concerning the future of St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

(AQW 3212/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) submitted an outline proposal for cross border educational arrangements for the area as an alternative to the closure of St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

My officials agree with the CCMS analysis that a cross border approach would not meet required quality thresholds, nor would such an approach be cost effective.

I have asked CCMS to engage with St Mary's on the proposal and on the appropriate steps that should be taken for education provision for children in the Brollagh area.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Education to detail any discussions he has had with education authorities in Donegal concerning the future of St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

(AQW 3214/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have had no discussions with education authorities in Donegal concerning the future of St Mary's High School, Brollagh.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the response rate to the School Omnibus Survey, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3230/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department introduced the School Omnibus Survey in 2013 with the survey being run again in 2014 and 2015.

In 2013, 53% of grant aided schools responded to the School Omnibus Survey; comparable figures for 2014 and 2015 were 31% and 36% respectively.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education why schools are not obliged to respond to the School Omnibus Survey.

(AQW 3231/16-21)

Mr Weir: The survey collects information on a range of topics relevant to my Department in delivering education in Northern Ireland. The questions in the survey can vary each year depending on my Department's needs and priorities. It is not mandatory and the decision to respond to the survey lies with the schools.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the time spent engaging in curricular Physical Education each week by school years 8 to 12.

(AQW 3232/16-21)

Mr Weir: It is a matter for each school to determine how much time is devoted to Physical Education (PE) in the curriculum. However, the findings from the 2015 School Omnibus Survey show that for post-primary pupils in Years 8 to 12, the most frequently reported duration of PE was 61 to 90 minutes per week.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education how he plans to address the growing use of sexually offensive language among teenage pupils.

(AQW 3296/16-21)

Mr Weir: The House of Commons report that you refer to, whilst quoting UK statistics, relates exclusively to policies and practice operational in GB. There are some essential differences in the education system in Northern Ireland, including the statutory requirement for schools here to provide pupils at Key Stage 3 with opportunities to "explore the implications of sexual maturation [and] the emotional, social and moral implications of early sexual activity", and to enable pupils at Key Stage 4 to "develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality and the responsibilities of healthy relationships"

Further, every school here is required to have a school discipline/behaviour policy. This is to promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect throughout the school, and prevent bullying. Every school must communicate its policy to staff, parents and pupils at least once a year.

It is important however to also emphasise that parents have a central role to play in guiding, monitoring and influencing their own children's behaviour.

You may be interested to know that the Department issued circular guidance to all schools earlier this year on 'Children who display harmful sexualised behaviour'. The guidance was provided to help schools identify children exhibiting harmful sexualised behaviour and to ensure that these children receive an appropriate intervention at an early stage.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what measures have been put in place to educate young people of the effects of pornography.

(AQW 3297/16-21)

Mr Weir: DE Circular 2015/22, which issued in August 2016, advised schools about revised Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) guidance produced by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). There are two separate guidance documents – one for primary level and one for post-primary level.

The guidance does not stray into the actual content of teaching and learning as this is a matter for each school across all Areas of Learning within the statutory curriculum. It does, however, make reference to issues such as pornography and 'sexting', and provides a resource directory signposting schools to useful resources which teachers/schools may find helpful.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education, given the recent House of Commons report on sexual harassment in schools, to outline what measures he will take to address sexual violence in schools.

(AQW 3298/16-21)

Mr Weir: The House of Commons report that you refer to, whilst quoting UK statistics, relates exclusively to policies and practice operational in GB. There are some essential differences in the education system in Northern Ireland, including the statutory requirement for schools here to provide pupils at Key Stage 3 with opportunities to “explore the implications of sexual maturation [and] the emotional, social and moral implications of early sexual activity”, and to enable pupils at Key Stage 4 to “develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality and the responsibilities of healthy relationships”

Further, every school here is required to have a school discipline/behaviour policy. This is to promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect throughout the school, and prevent bullying. Every school must communicate its policy to staff, parents and pupils at least once a year.

It is important however to also emphasise that parents have a central role to play in guiding, monitoring and influencing their own children’s behaviour.

You may be interested to know that the Department issued circular guidance to all schools earlier this year on ‘Children who display harmful sexualised behaviour’. The guidance was provided to help schools identify children exhibiting harmful sexualised behaviour and to ensure that these children receive an appropriate intervention at an early stage.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education, given the recent House of Commons report on sexual harassment in schools, to outline what measures he will take to address sexual harassment in schools.

(AQW 3299/16-21)

Mr Weir: The House of Commons report that you refer to, whilst quoting UK statistics, relates exclusively to policies and practice operational in GB. There are some essential differences in the education system in Northern Ireland, including the statutory requirement for schools here to provide pupils at Key Stage 3 with opportunities to “explore the implications of sexual maturation [and] the emotional, social and moral implications of early sexual activity”, and to enable pupils at Key Stage 4 to “develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality and the responsibilities of healthy relationships”

Further, every school here is required to have a school discipline/behaviour policy. This is to promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect throughout the school, and prevent bullying. Every school must communicate its policy to staff, parents and pupils at least once a year.

It is important however to also emphasise that parents have a central role to play in guiding, monitoring and influencing their own children’s behaviour.

You may be interested to know that the Department issued circular guidance to all schools earlier this year on ‘Children who display harmful sexualised behaviour’. The guidance was provided to help schools identify children exhibiting harmful sexualised behaviour and to ensure that these children receive an appropriate intervention at an early stage.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline what programmes are in place in schools to educate young people on the dangers of texting while driving.

(AQW 3300/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) which has statutory responsibility for road safety education has developed a number of road safety resources to help teachers teach road safety in schools. Resources include six education packs which all deal with different aspects of road safety, including distractions; two of which address texting while driving. These packs are used by teachers to initiate discussion among young people and help them to determine what bad road safety choices are and encourage them to always make better choices while using the roads.

DfI has also provided a series of seven short lessons which deal with all aspects of road safety, again including distractions and texting. These lessons can be taught as a standalone lesson or as a suite of lessons.

The resources mentioned above are made available to all schools through the C2k exchange (Fronter and Equella). Teachers, therefore, have ready access to the resources needed to help in the planning and teaching of road safety education.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what criteria is used to ensure that sexual health education is being taught effectively to young people.

(AQW 3301/16-21)

Mr Weir: Sexual health education is covered under Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) within the curriculum. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) applies the same criteria to inspecting the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the subjects through which RSE is taught, as it does to all subjects.

ETI’s findings on the teaching of RSE in post-primary schools and in primary/special schools are included in reports on RSE published in 2011 and 2016 respectively.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Education which projects his Department is reviewing, or plans to review, as a result of changes in funding from European sources.

(AQW 3333/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department has no plans at present to review projects funded from EU sources as no changes in funding have been announced.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many groups are funded through the Education Authority in Mid Ulster; and (ii) where these groups are situated.

(AQW 3509/16-21)

Mr Weir: A total of 115 groups in Mid Ulster have been funded through the Education Authority since its formation in April 2015. The table below provides a list of these groups and their locations.

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
100th Northern Ireland Company The Girls' Brigade	McNeece Memorial Hall, Hillhead Rd, Stewartstown	BT71 5HY
190th Bellaghy Presbyterian GB	Bellaghy Presbyterian Church Hall, Main Street, Bellaghy, Co Londonderry	BT45 8HT
1st Bellaghy BB	Bellaghy Presbyterian Church Hall, Main Street, Bellaghy, Co Londonderry	BT45 8HT
1st Castledawson BB	Presbyterian Church Hall, Main Street, Castledawson, Co Londonderry	BT45 8AA
1st Coalisland Brownies and Rainbows	Holy Trinity Church Hall, 82 Dungannon St, Coalisland	BT71 4HT
1st Cookstown Boys' Brigade	Molesworth Presbyterian Church Hall, 71 Moleworth St	BT80 8PA
1st Cookstown Guide Assoc.	LondonderryLoran Parish Hall, 13 Loy Street	BT80 8PZ
1st Cookstown Scout Group	1st Presbyterian Church Hall, 71 James St	BT80 8AE
1st Culnady BB	Cunlady Presbyterian Church Hall, Culnady Rd, Upperlands, Co Londonderry	BT45 5TS
1st Desertcreat Scout Troop & Cubs	Desertcreat Parish Church, Stewartstown	BT71 5QD
1st Kildress Brownie Guides	Kildress Parish Hall, Wellbrook Rd, Cookstown	BT80 9RY
1st Loy Cookstown Girl Guides	1st Loy Presbyterian Church Hall, 71 James St	BT80 8AE
1st Maghera BB	Presbyterian Church Hall, 7 Meetinghouse Ave, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5BA
1st Magherafelt BB	Garden Street Church Hall, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 5DD
1st Moneymore Guide Company	2nd Moneymore Presbyterian Church Hall, Moneymore	BT45 7PY
1st Moyola Scout Group	10 Station Rd, Castledawson, Co Londonderry	BT45 8AZ
1st Newmills Boys' Brigade	c/o Drumreagh Crescent, Newmills	BT71 4HJ
1st Newmills Girl Guides	Presbyterian Church Hall, Roughan Rd, Newmills, Dungannon	BT71 4EP
1st Pomeroy Scouts	Presbyterian Church Hall, 1 Edendoit Rd	BT70 2QH
1st Tamlaght O'Crilly BB	Drimbolg Reformed Presbyterian Church Hall, Drimbolg Rd, Upperlands, Co Londonderry	BT46 5UD
1st Tobermore GB	McKinney Memorial Hall, Main Street, Tobermore, Co Londonderry	BT45 5QG
218th Molesworth Girl's Brigade	McKinney Memorial Hall, Cookstown	BT80 8PA
220th Castledawson GB	Presbyterian Church Hall, Main Street, Castledawson, Co Londonderry	BT45 8AA

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
221st Magherafelt GB	1st Magherafelt Church Hall, Meeting Street, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6BN
258th Culnady GB	Culnady Presbyterian Church, Culnady Rd, Upperlands, Culnady, Co Londonderry	BT46 5TN
33rd Londonderry Ballinascreen Scouts	St Colms Hall, 1 Cahore Rd, Draperstown, Co Londonderry	BT45 7AP
6th Tyrone Scout Group	9 Chapel Street, Cookstown	BT80 8QB
Altayeskey PS Youth Club	177 Sixtowns, Draperstown, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 7BH
BallinLondonderry Playgroup	BallinLondonderry Bridge Road, Coagh, Cookstown	BT80 0AY
Ballinascreen Early Year	Tobermore Road, Drapertown	BT45 7AG
Ballygoney Coagh & S'land Hol. B.C.	Salterland Presbyterian Church, 39 Ballymulligan Rd	BT45 7TT
Ballyronan Community Playgroup	Marina Centre, 135a Shore Road, Ballyronan	BT45 6JA
Bann Valley Community Group	232 Moyagall Rd, Portglenone, Co Antrim	BT44 8LG
Beacon Playgroup	54 Milburn Close, Cookstown	BT80 8HF
Bosco Community Playgroup	Loy Street, Cookstown	BT80 8PZ
Brockagh Playgroup	Mountjoy Road, Coalisland, Dungannon	BT71 5DQ
Busy Bee Cross Community Playgroup	15 Station Road, Maghera	BT46 5BS
Cairde ui Neill	104 Washingbay Road, Coalisland	BT71 4PU
Cairdeas Eoghain	31 Lomond Heights, Cookstown	BT80 8XW
Club Oige Luraigh	An Carn, 132A Tirkane Rd, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5NH
Coagh Baptist Good News Club	Coagh Baptist Church, 44 Urbal Rd	BT80 0DP
Coagh Baptist Youth Group	46 Urbal Road, Coagh	BT80 0DP
Conradh na Gaeilge: Seal Spraoi	53 Innishmore Park, Coalisland	BT71 4RH
Cookstown Amateur Swimming Club	Leisure Centre, Fountain Rd, Cookstown	BT80 8PQ
Cookstown Baptist Youth Club	Burn Road, Cookstown	BT80 8DR
Cookstown Firefighter Cadets	Cookstown Fire Station, 36 Church St	BT80 8QD
Cookstown Town - Youth Programme	Unit 2, 7 B Burn Road, Cookstown	BT80 8DN
Cookstown Youth Resource Centre	74 Fountain Road, Cookstown	BT80 8QF
Cornstore Youth Club	St Colm's High School, 2 Magherafelt Rd, Draperstown, Co Londonderry	BT45 7AF
Crossdernott Youth Club	76 Thornhill Road, Dungannon	BT70 3HN
Culnady Presbyterian Youth Club	Culnady Presbyterian Church Hall, 91 Culnady Road, Upperlands, Co Londonderry	BT46 5TN
Curragh Young Farmers Club	Curragh Hall, 43 Crewe Road, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5HN
LondonderryLoran Scout Group	LondonderryLoran Church Hall, 13 Loy Street	BT80 8PZ
Discovering Kids Playgroup	100 Loup Road, Moneymore, Magherafelt	BT45 7ST
Donaghmore Girls' Friendly Society	St Patrick's Church of Ireland Parish Hall, 16 Pomeroy Rd, Dungannon	BT70 3HG
Fairhill Youth Club	3A Tirkane Rd, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5AG
Forever Friends Cross Community Playgroup	Gortgonis Road, Coalisland, Dungannon	BT71 4QG

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Fort Riding for the Disabled	Fort Centre, 38 Craigmore Rd, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5AN
Gaelscoil an Tseanchai	6a Killowen Drive, Magherafelt	BT45 6DS
Galbally Youth and Community Association	36 Lurgylea Road, Dungannon	BT70 2NX
Glenview Pre-School Centre	45A Glen Road, Maghera	BT46 5AP
Gran Tot's Playgroup	15D Main Street, Swatragh	BT46 5QB
Greenlough Early Years	232 Mayogall Road, Portglenone	BT44 8NN
Happy Days Playgroup, Dungannon	School Lane, Brackaville, Coalisland, Dungannon	BT71 4NW
Jack and Jill Playgroup, Cookstown	21 Loy Street, Cookstown	BT80 8PZ
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Workspace Units 1-4, Parker Avenue, Castledawson	BT45 8AR
Kilcronaghan & Ballynascreen GFS	Faulkner Hall, 1 Wood Rd, Tobermore, Co Londonderry	BT45 5QJ
Kildress Area Youth and Comm Club	St Joseph's Parochial Hall, 9 Cloughfin Rd	BT80 9JD
Laughterland Early Years	Black Park Road, Toomebridge	BT41 3SL
Lavey Early Years	63a Mayogall Road, Knockloughrim	BT45 8PG
Lissan Cross Community Playgroup	Claggan Road, Churchtown, Cookstown	BT80 9XE
Lissan Parish G.F.S.	Lissan Parish Church Hall, Cookstown	BT80 9XD
Little Acorns Playgroup, Coagh	St Luke's Parish Hall, Bridgend, Cookstown	BT80 0EJ
Little Amps Early Years	94 Kilrea Road, Upperlands, Maghera	BT46 5SB
Little Rainbows Early Years	189a Glen Road, Maghera	BT46 5JN
Little Wombles Cross Community Playgroup	High Street, Draperstown	BT45 7LG
Lollipop Playgroup	Hillview Avenue, Donaghmore, Dungannon	BT70 3DL
Loughshore Youth Forum	The Marina Centre, 135a Shore Rd, Magherafelt	BT45 6JA
Maghera Pres. Youth Club	7 Meetinghouse Avenue, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5BA
Magherafelt Youth Centre	1 Princess Terrace, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6DD
Magherafelt Youth Council	1 Princess Terrace, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6DD
Moyola Guides	Christ Church Parish Hall, 12 Station Rd, Castledawson, Co Londonderry	BT45 8AZ
Naiscoil Charn Tochair	131 Tirkane Road, Maghera	BT46 5NH
Naiscoil Na Sperini	82 Sixtowns Road, Draperstown	BT45 7BB
Newbridge Youth Club	Blackpark Rd, Toomebridge, Co Antrim	BT41 3SL
Newmills Girls' Friendly Society	Tullaniskan Church Hall, Farlough Rd, Dungannon	BT71 4DX
Newmills Playgroup	82A Annaginny Road, Newmills, Dungannon	BT71 4EA
Newmills Youth Group	Presbyterian Church Hall, Roughan Rd, Newmills, Dungannon	BT71 4EP
Ogras Youth Club	Parochial Centre, Coalisland	BT71 4PF
Orritor Youth Club	Orritor Presbyterian Church Hall, Cookstown	BT80 9NE
Paddington Playgroup	40 Lurgylea Road, Galbally, Dungannon	BT70 2NX

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Pomeroy Pre-School Playgroup	5 Cavanakeeran Road, Pomeroy, Dungannon	BT70 2RD
Pomeroy Resource Group	49/51 Main Street, Pomeroy	BT70 2QH
Saturday Youth Get Together	1st Magheraflet Church Hall, Meeting Street, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6BN
Seal Spraoi	Gortgonis Civic Centre, Dungannon	BT71 4QG
Slaughtneil Youth Club	Emmetts GAC Halfgayne Rd, Maghera, Co Londonderry	BT46 5NH
Slievegallion Community Pre-School	62B Longfield Road, Desertmartin	BT45 5LS
St Colmcilles CGI	c/o Meadowbank Sports Arena, Ballyronan Rd, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6EH
St John Bosco Youth Club	3 Culbane Rd, Portglenone, Ballymena, Co Antrim	BT44 8NZ
St Patrick's Youth Club	The Torrent Complex, 9 Hillview Ave, Donaghmore	BT70 3DL
St Swithin's CL & CG Brigade	47 Church Street, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6AP
Stepping Stones Pre-School Centre	130 Tirkane Road, Maghera	BT46 5NH
Superstars Club For Special Needs	13 Oldtown Street, Cookstown	BT80 8EE
Tamlaght O'Crilly Guides	Churchtown Presbyterian Church Hall, 74 Tamlaght Rd, Upperlands, Co Londonderry	BT46 5XA
Tiny Tots Community Playgroup, Stewartstown	33AHillhead Road, Stewartstown, Dungannon	BT71 5HY
Tiny Tots PreSchool Education Centre, Cookstown	28 Dunamore Road, Cookstown	BT80 9NT
Tirgan Community Association Youth Club	36 Tirgan Rd, Moneymore, Co Londonderry	BT45 7RX
Tober Tinys Playgroup	6 Desertmartin Road, Tobermore	BT45 5SG
Tobin Youth Centre	Tobin Memorial Park, Ardboe Rd, Cookstown	BT80 0HW
Tobin Youth Centre (Moortown) Ltd	c/o 178c Battery Road, Cookstown	BT80 0HS
Traad and Ballyronan Youth Club	The Shore Milk Bar, 135a Shore Rd, Magherafelt	BT45 6JA
Twinkle Playgroup	Mullinahoe Road, Ardboe, Dungannon	BT71 5AT
Woods Girl Guides	Woods Parish Hall, Carraloan Rd, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6HU
Woods Youth Club	Woods Parish Hall, Carraloan Rd, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6HT
Woodschapel Scouts	Woods Parish Hall, Carraloan Rd, Magherafelt, Co Londonderry	BT45 6HZ

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of why 86 per cent of Catholic Maintained post-primary schools do not offer 27 courses at A-Level and 29 per cent do not offer 24 courses at GCSE.

(AQW 3737/16-21)

Mr Weir: There will be a variety of reasons why individual schools do not meet the requirements of the Entitlement Framework; there is no defining feature common to all the schools identified.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline what action he is taking to help secure the viability of Tullycarnet Primary School; and (ii) whether he will support granting a community association a five year lease to enable them to access capital investment for the school from local government.

(AQW 4104/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) is the relevant school managing authority for Tullycarnet Primary School (PS).

- (i) Actions to address the school's future viability are the responsibility of the EA in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) through the Area planning Process. My Department's SSP provides a framework for the assessment of a school's viability and should the EA be concerned about the viability of a Controlled school such as Tullycarnet PS, it must consider all options and take the necessary action to ensure that the education of pupils is not being compromised.

If a significant change to existing education provision is required, the EA will initiate and publish a statutory development proposal. This process will enable anyone interested in or affected by a proposal to submit their views on it before a final decision is taken.

I understand that the EA's Annual Action Plan (December 2015 – March 2017) notes its intention to consult with the Board of Governors of Tullycarnet PS about options for future provision. However, to date, no related DP has been published by the EA to confirm its future intent for the school.

- (ii) Matters relating the use of the school building by another organisation are a matter for the Board of Governors working with the EA.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister of Education to outline the steps his Department is taking to encourage children to cycle to and from school.

(AQO 328/16-21)

Mr Weir: I am committed to improving the wellbeing of children and young people and ensuring they recognise the importance of living and travelling sustainably to help protect the environment for their future.

The Department of Education promotes cycling in schools through the curriculum; partnership working with other organisations and through infrastructure improvements within the school grounds.

The statutory curriculum provides teachers with opportunities to encourage children to take up cycling. These include through Physical Education, The World Around Us (at primary level) and the Environment and Society (at post-primary level).

There are also opportunities within the curriculum for teachers to increase children's awareness of road safety. However road safety education, which includes cycling proficiency, is the responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure (DfI).

The Department is continuing to engage with DfI and the Public Health Agency on their Active Schools Travel Programme. In the last two financial years we have provided capital funding for the installation of cycle shelters in 23 schools who fully participated in the programme. Further installations to support the extended programme will be considered against competing priorities in line with the available capital budget.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a new school at Glenwood Primary School, North Belfast.

(AQO 329/16-21)

Mr Weir: Glenwood Primary School was included in the January 2013 announcement of 22 major capital investment projects to be taken forward in planning.

A former decision to turn down a Development Proposal (DP 225) to close Malvern Primary School necessitated a review of the potential future size of the planned project for Glenwood Primary. The Education Authority was subsequently tasked with engaging with the local community to agree a wider area planning solution encompassing Edenbrooke, Glenwood and Malvern Primary Schools.

There has been ongoing community engagement regarding the short list of options for the project and the Authority is making arrangements to engage with local politicians, as soon as practicable, to seek their views on the acceptability and viability of alternative sites under consideration. Taking these views into consideration, it is hoped to review and finalise the business case for the Glenwood PS project later this year.

In the meantime, the £1.2 million project to deliver a new double nursery unit on a new site for 52 pupils at Edenderry Nursery School is progressing well. The Nursery School, which is currently based within the existing Glenwood Primary School grounds, should move to its new site later this year.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's strategy for overcoming the gap in educational outcomes between disadvantaged young people and their peers from higher income families.

(AQO 330/16-21)

Mr Weir: While recent statistics demonstrate a continued upward trend in the performance of our school leavers, there is still a need to address low levels of attainment and the significant gaps that remain between our most and least deprived pupils. We also need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes so that more of our young people leave school with these key skills.

Teachers and school leaders are best placed to identify those pupils at risk of underachievement and, through high quality teaching and learning, identify the most appropriate actions to meet individual pupil needs and raise attainment.

One of my key priorities is to drive more ambitious improvement in every school and in every sector so that more of our young people achieve and progress.

I will focus on those policies that are driving improvement and which are supporting schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning which some pupils face.

I intend to work closely with schools, early years and childcare providers, the youth service and other education stakeholders to ensure that together we can meet the needs and nurture the aspirations of our children and young people.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Education what advice he would give regarding the older sibling criteria used by primary schools when allocating school places in circumstances where the older siblings are unable to attend mainstream school due to special needs.

(AQO 331/16-21)

Mr Weir: Criteria used by a primary school to establish which children to admit in the event of the school being oversubscribed with applications are solely a matter for the school's Board of Governors.

My Department provides guidance on the admissions process to all primary school Principals and Boards of Governors. The latest guidance is available on my Department's website and it recommends the use of an 'Eldest Child' criterion. The guidance recommends that this criterion is defined as 'children who, at the date of their application, are the eldest child of the family to be eligible to apply for admission to the school.

The guidance reminds Boards of Governors that there may be circumstances whereby a family has not had the opportunity to have an elder child enrolled. These circumstances could include, as you have outlined, instances where the eldest sibling does not attend mainstream education. It may also arise, for example, where a child is more than seven years younger than their next eldest sibling or in cases where a family has moved home.

The guidance advises Boards of Governors that no matter which criteria the school decides to use, that they are described clearly and fully.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Education for an update on the potential capital build projects for the post-primary sector in the Dickson Plan area.

(AQO 332/16-21)

Mr Weir: When the Department is considering making an announcement of new projects to advance in planning for major capital investment, a call is made to the school managing authorities to submit priority proposals for consideration.

These proposals are considered under the Department's 'Protocol for Selection of Major Works Projects to Proceed in Planning'. The first stage of the Protocol includes a 'gateway check' to ensure that there are no ongoing uncertainties around area planning issues, sustainability and/or the school size that could significantly delay the progress of a major capital project.

The following schools involved in the Dickson Plan were submitted in the Education Authority's priority proposals in advance of the last major capital announcement involving the post-primary sector in June 2014:

- Portadown College
- Lurgan College

At the time, the revised Post Primary Area plans submitted by the former Southern Education and Library Board included proposed changes in the Craigavon area involving the reorganisation of post primary education in the Portadown, Lurgan and Tandragee areas. As there was no clear area planning solution, proposed projects for these schools did not pass the gateway check in order to proceed to scoring for consideration for a major capital investment project.

Given the substantial programme of major capital investment currently underway, there are no plans for a further announcement at present.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education how he will support the families of children that are not eligible for a Sure Start programme.

(AQO 333/16-21)

Mr Weir: Sure Start is a targeted service that has a distinct geographical remit, defined by ward boundaries, although provision is universal within the targeted areas. All children aged under four and their families, within the catchment area of each Sure Start, can access services.

The Sure Start Programme was initially delivered in the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, and a recent expansion initiative to extend it into the 25% most deprived areas is expected to complete in 2016/17. Findings from the Independent Review of Sure Start (2015), together with existing research, provide assurance that targeting of available resources in areas of highest deprivation is likely to have the greatest impact on those children and families that can benefit from the type of services Sure Start offers.

In some circumstances, and subject to resource availability, a degree of flexibility may be exercised to extend Sure Start services for children who live outside of the catchment areas, including children who are identified as being 'at risk'. Sure Start projects can also provide information on alternative early years provision that could offer support to families who do not reside in Sure Start areas.

The Department of Education is currently investing around £25m per year in the Sure Start Programme, enabling the provision of support to around 38,800 children aged under four and their families.

The Department also invests £56m per year in universal Pre School Education to provide one year of funded pre-school education to every family that wants it, and will continue to work with other departments, agencies and non-statutory providers, where appropriate, in helping families to access support.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the support provided in schools for pupils with Down syndrome.

(AQO 334/16-21)

Mr Weir: A child with Down Syndrome will usually have a Statement of special educational needs (SEN) which will identify the extent of the child's SEN and the additional tailored support required to meet the individual needs of the child.

Whilst the majority of pupils with Down Syndrome are educated within a special school setting, some are educated within a mainstream school or in a Learning Support Centre attached to a mainstream school.

The Education Authority's (EA) Learning Support Service supports the effective inclusion of pupils with medical syndromes and/or complex learning needs, such as Down's, within the mainstream school setting.

Support takes the form of advice and support/training to class teachers and classroom assistants regarding appropriate teaching strategies and resources to support children and young people with Down Syndrome. A level of adult assistance may also be provided as required.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Education whether he is aware of the disadvantage faced by local students applying to degree courses in the Republic of Ireland as a result of the allocation of points for A Levels and Leaving Certificates.

(AQO 335/16-21)

Mr Weir: I am aware that there have been issues for students from here applying to universities in the Republic of Ireland.

CCEA, as the qualifications regulator here, has worked with the Irish Universities Association (IUA) in Dublin to ensure that A Level applicants for admission to Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Ireland are not disadvantaged.

Two universities in the south, Trinity College Dublin and NUI Galway have put in place initiatives to encourage applications from A level students. In addition, the allocation of Central Applications Office (CAO) points for A Levels has been revised for university admissions from 2016.

Application data received from the CAO would indicate that these initiatives are having a positive impact with an additional 627 applicants in 2016 compared to 2014, which represents an increase of 57%.

The main challenge however will be to see whether those applications will lead to registered students.

There are other issues that continue to disadvantage pupils from here. Issues such as the wider recognition of applied subjects and the need to sit A levels in one year.

As well as working to address these issues, my officials and officials from CCEA are liaising with the IUA and CAO to provide guidance on the admissions procedures that operate in the Republic. It is hoped that this guidance will be available later this year.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme.

(AQO 336/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme launched on 5 September 2016 and will operate on a pilot basis for the 2016/17 academic year.

All information can be found on the Department of Education website. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/20324>

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of whether a consistent approach to the teaching of Relationship and Sexuality Education in all schools would help to reduce educational inequalities.

(AQO 337/16-21)

Mr Weir: Effective provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is essential if pupils are to value themselves as individuals and make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives.

The Department requires all grant-aided schools to develop their own RSE policy based on the ethos of their school and subject to consultation with parents and pupils.

In August 2015 the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) produced revised RSE guidance for primary and post-primary schools.

CCEA's guidance does not stray into the actual content of teaching and learning, as this is a matter for each school. However, it provides a template for the development of a school's RSE policy, a directory signposting schools to useful resources as well as advice on the teaching of sensitive issues.

An evaluation report on RSE provision in primary and special schools was published by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in July 2016.

Department for the Economy

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department will help Omagh Enterprise Company to create jobs and capitalise on the opportunity provided by Project Kelvin and the available accommodation.

(AQW 2478/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I have agreed to meet Omagh Enterprise Company on 28th September to discuss a proposal that differentiates the region in creating jobs and attracting inward investment in the context of the draft Programme for Government. This will include how the region might capitalise on the unique opportunity offered by Project Kelvin as well as a proposition that includes property and skills infrastructure.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the application of the apprenticeship levy.

(AQO 313/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The introduction and collection of the Apprenticeship Levy is a reserved matter which will be imposed by the UK Government on employers with a pay-bill in excess of £3 million.

Northern Ireland in due course expects a share of the funds to be raised through the Levy. Whilst it will be a matter for the Executive to decide on the allocation of those funds, I am currently considering how they might be best used for skills and apprenticeship training in Northern Ireland in support of our Economic and Skills strategies.

It is my intention to issue a short consultation paper, which will primarily seek the views of the business community, on how any revenues available from the Levy might be implemented to support skills development in Northern Ireland.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on his proposed approach to the apprenticeship levy.

(AQO 314/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The introduction and collection of the Apprenticeship Levy is a reserved matter which will be imposed by the UK Government on employers with a pay-bill in excess of £3 million.

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Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy what action his Department is taking to address areas where no, or no worthwhile, broadband provision can be received in rural West Tyrone.

(AQO 315/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Since 2008, my Department has channelled almost £64 million pounds to encourage private sector upgrades to our telecoms networks, primarily in rural areas.

Broadband download speeds in Northern Ireland are continuing to increase - the average download speed now stands at 28.3 Megabits per second, just below the UK average of 29 Megabits per second. While there is no doubt that this investment has brought significant improvements for many rural dwellers, I recognise that more needs to be done.

Under my Department's Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project, BT has reported, at 30 June 2016, that some 1,300 premises in West Tyrone have taken up new broadband services delivered through this project. The contract, with BT, has a mechanism which requires funding to be returned for re-investment when take up of service exceeds a certain threshold. This will allow more premises to see improvements, including in West Tyrone.

In addition, my Department is also managing the Superfast Roll-out Programme which, by 31 December 2017, will provide access to superfast broadband, with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second, to a further 39,000 premises across Northern Ireland, primarily in rural areas and including a number in West Tyrone.

It is important to recognise that where fixed-line broadband is not viable, there are other technology alternatives available. Details of these can be found on my Department's website. We will shortly be publishing further information to promote better awareness of broadband solutions.

For those premises that continue to have access to services of less than 2 Megabits per second, my Department offers assistance with the cost of installing a basic broadband service, using satellite or wireless technology. It ensures that no household or business which meets the eligibility criteria, need pay more than four hundred pounds to access a basic broadband scheme over a 12 month period.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy how he plans to increase the number of jobs available for people of working age in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.

(AQO 317/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI provides a wide range of support to help local businesses grow and create more jobs, as well as competing globally to attract inward investment to Northern Ireland. The agency also has a Regional Office, based at Timber Quay, which provides advice, guidance and support to businesses across the North West.

The agency works closely with the Derry City and Strabane District Council to develop the local investment proposition and Community Plan to attract investment and set relevant targets for the area. The partnership working by local stakeholders to develop a sales message for their respective areas sets out the unique selling points and what the area offers investors.

Whilst the decision of where to locate ultimately remains with the investor, recent investors attracted to the Derry City and Strabane District Council area include Metaverse Mod Squad who announced 100 jobs in June 2015, and OneSource Virtual who announced 289 jobs in July 2015.

Initiatives like the FDI app, which presents a snapshot to potential investors of the benefits of locating in Northern Ireland, are to be welcomed. Many Councils have indicated their desire to work with Invest NI on this initiative. I would encourage all councils to work with Invest NI to develop their own local version of the app.

We are fortunate to live somewhere with short travel to work time, meaning jobs created anywhere in Northern Ireland benefit all. Many living in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area have greatly benefitted from the employment opportunities created by businesses with support from Invest NI. Local examples include McColgan's Quality Foods, Fleming Agri and O'Neill's Irish International Sports Company.

Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 Invest NI made 1,925 offers of support to businesses within the Derry City and Strabane District Council area. This support amounts to over £36 million and will lead to associated total investment in the area of some £215 million. Invest NI's support, including the Regional Start Initiative, led to the promotion of over 3,300 new jobs by businesses in the area.

Mr Poots asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink 2016.

(AQO 318/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Year of Food and Drink 2016 is an exciting initiative which has presented a great opportunity for us to celebrate all that is great about Northern Ireland Food and Drink.

The initiative has been a resounding success bringing together many key industry partners working in collaboration to maximize the opportunity of showcasing key producers, chefs and restaurateurs in Northern Ireland.

To date over 7,000 businesses have been involved in the Year of Food and Drink. These include major private sector partners such as Tesco, Moy Park, Lidl, Irwin's, ASDA, Tayto and our local airports. Many of these businesses have participated in training workshops and initiatives

There have been over 50 official Year of Food and Drink events supported through Tourism NI and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs funding. Highlights during the year so far include the Balmoral Show and the Foyle Maritime Festival. Forthcoming events include the BBC Good Food Show and restaurant weeks that will be happening in major destinations across Northern Ireland.

There have been over one hundred media visits securing major features in newspapers and TV shows both locally and across the world. These have resulted in more than £8 million weighted PR value in the first 9 months of 2016, against the target for the year of £10 million.

New sales and promotional activity have been secured in new markets including a fortnight promotion run in London's prestigious Fortnum and Mason, a dedicated Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink at the British Embassy Dublin Garden party, promoting Northern Ireland food and drink to over 1,200 key influencers. Twenty three new International Buyers visits have already taken place

2016 has been another record year for Northern Ireland at the Northern Ireland Great Taste Awards, including one of our own products, Hannan Meats, taking the title of Supreme Champion. This adds to the growing list of accolades that is testament to the quality of the Northern Ireland Food and Drink offer, giving further credibility to rising recognition that Northern Ireland is a great Food and Drink destination.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans to promote the international potential of local universities.

(AQO 319/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Higher Education institutions in Northern Ireland are autonomous and are responsible for increasing their international activity. Within this overall context my Department's Higher Education Strategy, Graduating to Success, committed to ensure that by 2014 institutions had reviewed their international strategies and set challenging targets to enhance their international standing.

This work has now been completed and each institution has an international strategy in place to increase collaboration and inward and outward mobility of students and staff.

My Department funds various international study and work abroad initiatives, benefitting not only students and staff but also local higher education institutions by raising their international profiles.

Officials from my Department sit on a number of panels and boards which are responsible for oversight of internationalisation within the Higher Education sector.

In addition my Department continues to liaise, as necessary, with Universities UK to ensure that the Northern Ireland perspective is represented, and also provides proportional funding for the international arm of Universities UK. This body represents UK universities and acts in their collective interests globally, promoting universities abroad, providing information for and about them, and creating new opportunities for the sector.

My Department also provides funding for research programmes designed to promote collaboration between Northern Ireland universities and the USA, Republic of Ireland and the rest of Europe.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the unemployment figures published in the Labour Market Report on 14 September 2016.

(AQO 321/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The September Labour Market Report shows that for August 2016 the number of claimants in receipt of unemployment related benefits stood at 35,100, a decrease of 800 over the month. Unemployment claimant figures fell by 6,700 over the last 12 months, equivalent to a decrease of 16%. This continued reduction in the number of people on the unemployment register is very welcome with almost 30,000 fewer people claiming unemployment benefits since the most recent peak in February 2013.

The unemployment rate is also moving firmly in the right direction. For the period May - July 2016 the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey unemployment rate was 5.6% - a decrease of 0.2 percentage points over the quarter and 0.7 percentage points over the year. This is the lowest it has been since the end of 2009, and compares very favourably to the Republic of Ireland and European Union averages of 7.8% and 8.6% respectively.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for the Economy whether he has any plans to improve the regulatory framework for business.

(AQO 322/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: We must continue to build the strong foundations for growth of the Northern Ireland economy, supporting our locally grown businesses, encouraging business start ups and entrepreneurship, and attracting international investment. Our approach to regulation therefore must be one which is attractive and clearly demonstrates that Northern Ireland is pro-business.

I will improve the regulatory framework by reducing red tape and streamlining regulatory functions by taking forward the Better Regulation Action Plan. The Action Plan seeks to develop a modern regulatory regime that will allow business to grow while ensuring that citizens are appropriately protected.

I will ensure that my officials continue to work closely with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in GB, to ensure that the regulatory environment for business in Northern Ireland keeps pace with UK-wide developments in company law. This ensures that companies here benefit from modernisation and deregulatory measures, delivering greater transparency of ownership, simplifying reporting requirements and improving governance.

I will be taking forward early conciliation provisions under the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to enhance opportunities for resolving workplace disputes without the need for legal action, and making improvements to employment tribunal regulations to improve processes for those who do require a legal remedy.

I will also commence those provisions of the Employment Act 2016 relating to Public Interest Disclosures, and I will engage with Executive colleagues in consideration of policy options to tackle abuses in zero hours and non-guaranteed hours contracts.

In the course of the current Assembly, I will be introducing an Insolvency Bill which will further modernise and streamline insolvency legislation for the benefit of creditors and the wider business community.

Department of Finance

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to impose rates on charity shops.

(AQW 2565/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): I am currently considering reform to non-domestic rates including charitable relief and no decisions have been made.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance how many people were employed on zero hours contracts on 1 September, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2827/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is a sample survey designed to provide labour market information in line with international standards, asks respondents whether they are on a “zero hours contract” in their main job.

The LFS estimates that there were 16,000 individuals here employed on a zero hour contract at April to June 2016. However, due to sample size constraints this estimate has a large statistical margin of error, limiting its reliability. The survey is also unable to provide a measure of the number of zero hours contracts in previous years, because the estimates are potentially disclosive.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the rates payable for amateur sporting groups.

(AQW 2970/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The power to make Regulations dealing with the wider enhancement to sport and recreation relief for unlicensed CASCs (as outlined in my Department’s consultation proposals) was commenced on 19 September for Regulation-making purposes.

This follows the passage of the associated primary legislation during the last mandate.

The Finance Committee has now considered and cleared the SL1 in respect of the Rule and the associated Statutory Rule was subsequently made by the Department on 28th September 2016.

The Statutory Rule will be subject to a debate in the Assembly in the coming weeks; the exact timing of its coming into operation will be dependent upon the scheduling of Assembly business.

The Rule will come into operation the day after the date upon which it is affirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the impact of INTERREG IVA HATCH project funding to (i) support small and medium sized enterprises in Construction and Engineering; (ii) maximise the economic contribution of the migrant workforce ; and (iii) encouraging female entrepreneurs.

(AQW 2996/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The HATCH (Higher Attainment through Cross-Border Hubs) Project, which was awarded €1,000,000 in funding from the INTERREG IVA Programme in January 2010 and operated until February 2015, supported and developed entrepreneurship in the Border Region. To meet this objective, it developed and delivered targeted accredited courses tailored to meet the needs of economically and/or socially disadvantaged groups.

The project developed 36 targeted courses to meet the needs of three specific cohorts:

- the construction and engineering sectors (20 courses)
- foreign nationals (9 courses)
- female entrepreneurs (7 courses).

A total of 457 individuals participated at these courses and 114 businesses were represented.

Over 95% of participants reported that they had a ‘very positive’ learning and networking experience through HATCH.

Results of the final evaluation survey administered to participants demonstrated a 58% decrease in the numbers unemployed pre- and post -participation in HATCH and a 60% increase in those taking up or considering self-employment.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Finance what discussions he has had with the UK Treasury about changing the Child Tax Credit Customer Hotline to a free phone number.

(AQW 3003/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I have not had any discussions with the Treasury on this matter.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance how many organisations and arm’s-length bodies in his departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and how an established recruitment agency is considered for inclusion on this list.

(AQW 3006/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: All the organisations and arm’s length bodies within my remit, that are listed on the List of Participating Bodies for CPD Collaborative Frameworks.

(<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/list-public-bodies-which-can-participate-cpd-collaborative-frameworks>), have access to the current NICS Temporary Worker contract to source their Temporary/Agency worker requirements.

This contract was set up through an open tendering competition run by The Department of Finance Central Procurement Directorate (CPD).

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance how many people have died from Sepsis, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3048/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Table 1 outlines the number of deaths from Sepsis¹ registered here over the five year period 2011 to 2015, the latest year for which figures are available.

Table 1: Number of deaths from Sepsis¹ registered in NI, 2011-2015

Registration Year	Number of Deaths
2011	77
2012	78
2013	109
2014	70
2015	94
Total	428

¹ Since 2001, the tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD10) is used to classify cause of death. The codes used for 'Sepsis' are A39.2, A39.3, A39.4, A40, A41 and P36.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance how many pregnant women have died from Sepsis in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3049/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There have been no deaths of pregnant women from Sepsis¹ registered here over the five year period 2011 to 2015, the latest year for which figures are available.

¹Since 2001, the tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD10) is used to classify cause of death. The code used for sepsis in pregnancy is O85. Also included are codes used for 'Sepsis' (A39.2, A39.3, A39.4, A40 and A41), and where pregnancy is mentioned on the death certificate.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of people in each constituency on zero hours contracts broken down by (i) total; and (ii) age, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3051/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is a sample survey designed to provide labour market information in line with international standards, asks respondents whether they are on a "zero hours contract" in their main job.

The LFS estimates that there were 16,000 individuals here employed on a zero hours contract at April to June 2016. However, due to sample size constraints this estimate has a large statistical margin of error, limiting its reliability. The survey is also unable to provide a measure of the number of zero hours contracts broken down by constituency or by age over the last five years because the estimates are potentially disclosive.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what was the average time taken to provide a decision on submitted business cases, over the last three years.
(AQW 3115/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The table below shows the average time taken by DoF to reach a final decision on business cases submitted to the department for approval.

	Average number of days to final decision*
2013-14	22
2014-15	25
2015-16	28

* Figures shown are for working days (including public holidays).

Time to final decision includes time taken for spending department to respond to any queries raised. These figures are sourced from a live database, and therefore can change over time.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Finance how many people are currently enrolled with recruitment agencies, broken down by individual agency.
(AQW 3225/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) how many civil servants are currently based in Fermanagh and South Tyrone; (ii) how many civil servants in equivalent roles were based in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in 2010-11; and (iii) how many posts are projected to be in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by 2018.

(AQW 3280/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The information requested at parts (i) and (ii) is set out in the table below. The information requested at part (iii) is not held by my Department.

NICS Staff with a work location in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Assembly Area

Date	No.
1 July 2016	693
1 January 2011	789

Notes:

- Headcount figures at date listed;
- Information taken from HRConnect and additional Department of Justice databases;
- July 2016 figures include staff working in the 9 Northern Ireland ministerial Departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Team are also included;
- January 2011 figures include staff working in the 12 Northern Ireland ministerial Departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Assembly Ombudsman/Commissioner for Complaints are also included;
- Not all departments have work locations in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Assembly Area;
- Figures exclude staff on career break or on secondment to an external organisation;
- January 2011 figures include 25 staff who worked in DOE Planning Service in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Assembly Area. This function transferred to the local councils on 1 April 2015.

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance to detail the total number of people who (i) live in Northern Ireland and work in the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) live in the Republic of Ireland and work in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3396/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir:

- (i) The 2011 Census reported that there were 6,324 people who lived in Northern Ireland but worked in the Republic of Ireland.
- (ii) The 2011 Census in the Republic of Ireland, reported that there were 6,419 people who lived in the Republic of Ireland but worked in Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance whether the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs headquarters at Ballykelly will be solely funded from the DAERA budget.

(AQW 3399/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I can confirm the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs headquarters at Ballykelly will be funded from the DAERA budget.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Finance what is the average cost of providing an answer to Assembly Written Questions.

(AQW 3544/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Finance to outline what plans, if any, he has to set up an EU taskforce within his Department as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union.

(AQW 3565/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Executive has agreed a coordinated approach to be undertaken following the outcome of the EU Referendum. The Head of the Civil Service has formed an Interdepartmental Coordinating Group to consider the strategic context, challenges and opportunities we face. My Permanent Secretary in the Department of Finance is co-chair of this group.

Within my Department I meet with senior officials on a weekly basis to monitor and discuss progress on EU Structural Fund Programmes and implement necessary actions to expedite drawdown.

Further information on engagement undertaken by my Department has been provided in the response to AQO 218/16-21.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding. **(AQW 3573/16-21)**

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department has not made, and is not currently preparing, any bids to the EU Investment Bank. My Department does not have any ongoing projects that are reliant on EU funding.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance how much revenue is raised by (i) the domestic regional rate; and (ii) the non-domestic regional rate. **(AQW 3801/16-21)**

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The amount of revenue raised by the Regional Rate during 2015/16 is summarised in the table below. The figures quoted include the gross value of all of the rating assessments raised during 2015/16 before rate reliefs, discharges and write-offs are applied.

The table below splits the revenue raised from domestic, non-domestic and mixed properties.

	Revenue Raised*
Domestic Properties	375,023
Non-Domestic Properties	392,231
Mixed Properties	6,757
Total	774,011

* note that figures are subject to change pending finalisation of the annual audit

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Finance for an update of the District Rate Convergence Scheme. **(AQO 342/16-21)**

Mr Ó Muilleoir: This £30m scheme has been in operation since April 2015 and has led to automatic adjustments to the bills of over 300,000 ratepayers, domestic and business. It will continue to operate for another two financial years.

As the Member may be aware the scheme is due to be reviewed by my Department before the end of the year, in line with the amendment to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 made by his party during the passage of that Bill. My understanding is that this work is well advanced and my Department is on track to deliver its report to the Assembly later this calendar year.

I cannot pre-empt its findings nor is my Department complacent about the scheme's effectiveness but I can confirm that there has been no adverse response to date. LPS has received a very low number of complaints, leading me to believe that the scheduled review will find little fault with the current scheme or its operation.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance how he will ensure any review of the rating system will not affect adversely the agricultural sector. **(AQO 343/16-21)**

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Last year's consultation paper issued by my Department as part of the ongoing review of the business rates system stated that "given the wider economic difficulties facing the sector, both now and over the long term, the rating of agricultural land and buildings is not considered to be an attractive option and it is thought that the sector should remain worthy of special treatment".

Your question refers to "any review". I have to say I am not really in a position to inhibit other reviews that may take place in the future. What I can tell you is that I too regard agriculture as a 'sacred cow' and under my watch, my Department will not be taking forward any rating policies that could adversely affect the farming sector.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance how public procurement can be structured to include a greater proportion of small and medium enterprises and community and voluntary organisations in the distribution of contracts. **(AQO 345/16-21)**

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Government is open to business. The latest figures show 4 out of every 5 central government contracts went to small and medium-sized enterprises – far in excess of the target in England of 25% of contract spend.

While I am pleased, in addition, that 63% of Government contracts were awarded to indigenous SMEs, I am committed to ensuring that we do all that we can to facilitate access to public procurement for more of these firms.

A fresh emphasis on broad market engagement and innovative solutions will help ensure procurement specifications are open to the contribution the voluntary and community sector can make to Programme for Government outcomes.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the effect of the respect for people social clause in public procurement contracts.

(AQO 346/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Respect for People social clause has been included in Government construction contracts since 2008. It has recently been updated and expanded into a Caring for People clause covering health and safety, fairness and inclusion, and skills and competences.

This is complemented by a new Buy Social clause which was introduced in April. It provides paid employment opportunities for long-term unemployed people and young people entering the labour market.

I recently met with representatives of the Participation and Practice of Rights to listen to its views on lessons learned from the implementation of social clauses in the delivery of the Girdwood project. I have asked CPD to consider these lessons and I am working with the Procurement Board to further embed social clauses. This is to ensure that social value is maximised for Programme for Government outcomes. Budget Review Group 2016-2021

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Finance what plans he has to establish a budget review group for the period 2016-21.

(AQO 347/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There are currently no plans to establish a Budget Review Group. The Executive will consider all relevant issues and collectively make decisions on the Budget.

I have already engaged with some of my Ministerial colleagues on their plans over the Budget period and these meetings have proved very constructive.

This new way of co-operative working is much more effective than the previous Budget Review Group process, which operated under the previous five-party mandatory coalition, and allows for more effective, efficient and timely decision making.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to outline the due diligence conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel before Frank Cushnahan, Richard Pengelly and Neil Adair were proposed as suitable representatives for Northern Ireland on the National Asset Management Agency Northern Ireland Advisory Committee.

(AQO 348/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Senior officials in my Department have previously confirmed in evidence provided to the Committee for Finance & Personnel in the last Assembly mandate that there is no record of advice either being sought by, or provided to then Minister Wilson in relation to his nominations to the NAMA Advisory Committee.

My officials have also indicated to me that they are not aware of the basis for those nominations, how they were arrived at, or any due diligence conducted.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his attempts to maximise European Union funding in light of the European Union Referendum vote.

(AQO 349/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes have been approved to the value of €269m and €283 million respectively. The Referendum vote has resulted in much uncertainty for those hoping to benefit from these programmes. It is my main priority to protect the full amount approved and I am doing all in my power to ensure that we obtain the maximum benefit from these programmes.

I have written, jointly with my counterpart in the South, to the European Commission, outlining our continuing support for the implementation of these programmes and we have requested a meeting to support our case.

I have also written to the British Chancellor of the Exchequer reinforcing our entitlement to the full value of the Programmes. I reiterated this position in meetings I had with the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU and the Secretary of State for the North. I have also had trilateral meetings with my counterparts in Scotland and Wales and we have agreed to work together to protect EU funding streams.

I have met with the European Investment Bank Vice President, Jonathan Taylor, to seek assurances that the EIB would continue to invest in the local economy, following the outcome of the EU referendum.

My officials have engaged with Treasury, seeking clarification on funding implications of the decision to leave the EU, and this will continue as we approach the Autumn Statement on 23 November. This work will include confirming to Treasury the extent of EU funding expected by the Executive in the years ahead.

I have held a number of roundtable meetings with business leaders in the North and have met a number of project applicants and stakeholders to encourage them to continue to progress their applications. I have assured them that I will do all in my power to maximise our EU funding drawdown.

On a weekly basis, I meet my officials to monitor progress on plans for the development and approval of programmes and I have instructed that they work with the Special EU Programmes Body, the Managing Authority for those programmes, to progress applications at pace so that final decisions can be made on projects. To assist this process, I have introduced

a number of steps to shorten the timescales for assessment of applications—increasing financial delegations given to departments and the provision of short term targeted expertise to ensure robust and timely economic assessment.

I intend to be fully involved in further discussions with the administrations in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Westminster and the European Commission on the issue of EU membership and I will vigorously defend our local interests in those discussions. I can assure you that I will continue to do all that I can to secure the maximum benefit from the funding that was allocated to these programmes at the outset.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the Northern Ireland Investment Fund.

(AQO 350/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I remain committed to the Investment Fund and see it as an important lever in promoting economic growth.

However, delivery of the Fund has been delayed due to uncertainty around the European Investment Bank role in advancing the Fund in the aftermath of the EU referendum. My officials are therefore currently considering alternative delivery models.

One of the alternative delivery options is currently with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for classification decision. Once ONS has provided its determination, the intention is then to move to procurement of an external fund manager. This is likely to take at least 6 months.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to meet his Scottish and Welsh counterparts.

(AQO 351/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I met with my Scottish and Welsh colleagues on 11th July this year to discuss a number of issues of joint concern including the implications of the EU referendum on our budgets.

I am also planning to host a meeting of the Finance Ministers on Friday 21st October.

Department of Health

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health whether a scoping exercise has been carried out on the proposal to locate a health hub in Strabane.

(AQW 2721/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): Information gathering and stakeholder engagement for this facility was carried out in 2014 and 2015 however any detailed scoping will be carried out as part of the business case process.

Whilst the Health and Social Care Board's draft Strategic Implementation Plan for Primary Care Infrastructure includes a proposal to locate a Health Hub in Strabane, the ability to take forward business cases will be dependent on the evaluation of the Lisburn and Newry pilot projects and the agreement of the Executive budget which is currently under development.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the measures her Department is taking to ensure that GPs supply medical evidence to welfare appeal tribunals.

(AQW 2725/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The General Medical Services contract between GP practices and the Health and Social Care Board includes a requirement for GPs to provide certain medical reports for social security purposes. Officials from my Department are engaging with the Department for Communities (DfC), which has overall responsibility for the assessment of social security claims and appeals, to consider how their medical evidence requirements can best be met.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to reinstate the coronary care dedicated unit at the Downe Hospital; and to outline the rationale for this decision.

(AQW 2728/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of services at the Downe Hospital. The Trust took a decision in November 2014 to close the coronary care ward in the Downe Hospital as part of its financial contingency measures. The cardiology function in the Downe Hospital is provided in one of the medical wards and the Trust has no plans to reopen the coronary care ward.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Health whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has been approached by any community, elected or business community representatives to open a shop or cafe at the Downe Hospital; and what was the outcome.

(AQW 2729/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: This property asset is owned by the South Eastern HSC Trust (the Trust) who has confirmed that it has been approached by elected representatives and businesses to open a shop and/or cafe at the Downe Hospital site. The Trust has

advised all interested parties that once it has taken a decision to lease this vacant space, this process will be taken forward with advice from Land & Property Services and the appointed Estate Agent.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Health whether her Department or the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust plans to change the current delivery model of the out-of-hours GP service at the Downe Hospital.

(AQW 2730/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no plans to change the current delivery model of the out of hours GP service at the Downe Hospital.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health why service requirements, medical equipment and technical fit-out requirements for Helicopter Emergency Medical Service operations were not included in the tendering documents issued by Air Ambulance NI for an aviation service provider; and for her assessment of the tendering process.

(AQW 2741/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The purpose of the recent Europe-wide tender process undertaken by AANI was to identify an aviation service provider with appropriate experience in providing HEMS services. A detailed contract specification is now being developed with the appointed provider.

My Department has no role in the procurement of goods and services for the health service. The Business Service Organisation's Procurement and Logistics Service (PaLS), which acts as the Centre of Procurement Expertise for all HSC bodies, provided guidance to the charity to ensure that the competition adhered to public procurement rules, and provided my Department with the necessary assurances in this regard. The charity also benefitted from the advice and vast experience of the Association of Air Ambulances ('Triple A') throughout this process.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) why it has not been possible, as part of the Commissioning Plan 2016/17, to commission an extension of the Regional Mechanical Thrombectomy service to 24/7 availability for Stroke patients; and (ii) when it will be possible to do so.

(AQW 2756/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Further expansion of this service will require additional resources to train and recruit additional specialist interventional and diagnostic radiology consultants and other specialist staff. This service development will have to be carefully considered within the context of ongoing budget pressures and other competing HSC services requiring new investment in the years ahead.

A Regional Review of Stroke Services has been undertaken by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). My Department is working with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Public Health Agency (PHA) to develop a new model for stroke services in light of the RQIA's recommendations. Following public consultation, I will make a decision regarding the implementation of the new model.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Health how many patients have been treated by mechanical thrombectomy.

(AQW 2757/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no specific clinical coding guidance here to identify mechanical thrombectomy, as such it is not possible to provide information on the number of patients who have undergone this procedure.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Health to outline what consideration her Department has given to a short breaks policy for children with disabilities and their families.

(AQW 2771/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department recognises the importance of short breaks for children with disabilities and their families. My Department provided funding of £1.57m for the financial year 2016/17 to the Family Fund, which provides a wide range of goods and services including short breaks focused on supporting the needs of children with a disability and their families in the north of Ireland.

The Health and Social Care Trusts have a delegated statutory function to provide respite and short breaks in line with assessed need and this is subject to ongoing monitoring and performance management by the Health and Social Care Board.

In addition, over the last three years the Board has invested significant funding of £7.5 million to support children with disabilities and their carers, and this includes the funding of short breaks and respite care.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the review into the Individual Funding Request.

(AQW 2772/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following public consultation on the findings of an evaluation into the Individual Funding Request process, a clinically led Task and Finish Group was established to take forward work to revise the IFR process under formal project management structures and arrangements. This work is well advanced and I expect my officials to report to me in the autumn and I will publish the new Individual Funding Request policy as soon as possible.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail waiting lists for Allied Health Professionals, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, over the last five years.

(AQW 2775/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The tables overleaf detail the waiting lists for Allied Health Professionals by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust at 31 May in each of the last five years.

Table 1

HSC Trust	Waiting time (weeks) at 31 May 2012					Total
	0 – 3	>3 – 6	>6 – 9	>9 – 13	>13	
Belfast	2,985	1,868	945	424	63	6,285
Northern	3,824	2,680	998	161	13	7,676
South Eastern	2,337	2,122	686	300	83	5,528
Southern	2,748	1,659	1,142	454	127	6,130
Western	2,017	1,829	906	230	37	5,019
Total	13,911	10,158	4,677	1,569	323	30,638

Source: HSCB

*Please note that figures were collected fortnightly and therefore figures reported are those closest to 31 May

Table 2

Year	Waiting time (weeks) at 31 May 2013*					Total
	0 – 3	>3 – 6	>6 – 9	>9 – 13	>13	
Belfast	3,646	2,257	828	254	11	6,996
Northern	3,890	3,123	1,519	562	21	9,115
South Eastern	3,090	1,933	746	183	9	5,961
Southern	2,827	2,327	1,565	816	49	7,584
Western	2,139	1,932	877	358	146	5,452
Total	15,592	11,572	5,535	2,173	236	35,108

Source: HSCB

*Please note that figures were collected fortnightly and therefore figures reported are those closest to 31 May

Table 3

Year	Waiting time (weeks) at 31 May 2014					Total
	0 – 3	>3 – 6	>6 – 9	>9 – 13	>13	
Belfast	3,370	1,987	1,954	1,516	1,197	10,024
Northern	3,806	2,790	2,289	917	818	10,620
South Eastern	3,226	1,945	1,282	349	42	6,844
Southern	2,985	1,747	1,935	977	271	7,915
Western	2,372	1,763	1,797	1,457	807	8,196
Total	15,759	10,232	9,257	5,216	3,135	43,599

Source: HSCB

Table 4

Year	Waiting time (weeks) at 31 May 2015					Total
	0 – 3	>3 – 6	>6 – 9	>9 – 13	>13	
Belfast*	2,968	2,038	1,266	1,470	2,581	10,323
Northern	3,778	3,054	1,725	1,931	3,384	13,872

Year	Waiting time (weeks) at 31 May 2015					Total
	0 – 3	>3 – 6	>6 – 9	>9 – 13	>13	
South Eastern	2,924	2,368	1,078	463	232	7,065
Southern	3,012	2,583	1,863	1,664	2,032	11,154
Western	2,320	2,203	1,336	1,089	2,027	8,975
Total	15,002	12,246	7,268	6,617	10,256	51,389

Source: HSCB

*The Belfast HSC Trust was unable to provide figures for Dietetics at 31 May 2016

Table 5

Year	Waiting time (weeks) at 31 May 2016					Total
	0 – 3	>3 – 6	>6 – 9	>9 – 13	>13	
Belfast	3,649	2,432	1,838	2,187	3,186	13,292
Northern	4,013	2,913	1,855	1,784	7,407	17,972
South Eastern	3,707	2,824	1,587	712	290	9,120
Southern	3,111	2,543	2,036	2,400	3,866	13,956
Western	2,485	2,294	1,654	1,361	2,320	10,114
Total	16,965	13,006	8,970	8,444	17,069	64,454

Source: HSCB

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of current staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2792/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of current staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	No: of staff grievances
BHSCT	21
NHSCT	18
NIASCT	17*
SEHSCT	19
SHSCT	3
WHSCT	14*

* includes 1 x group grievance

The number of (i) staff grievances heard in the last two calendar years; the (iii) number unfounded and the number upheld, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	Grievances 2014 & 2015	Not Upheld	Upheld
BHSCT	45	29	16
NHSCT	47	32	11(4)*
NIASCT	12	6	0 (6)*
SEHSCT	32	24	5 (3)*
SHSCT	22	10	8 (4)*
WHSCT	39	19	9 (5)*

* figures in brackets indicate partially upheld grievances

There were no staff grievances that were (ii) subsequently found to have no evidence and required a report to senior management.

Information on the average length of time from notification to conclusion of staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years is not readily available and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health whether the process of procurement and recruitment for the air ambulance service has both begun and progressed.

(AQW 2801/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Air Ambulance NI recently carried out a Europe-wide tender process to identify an aviation service provider with appropriate experience in providing HEMS services. A detailed contract specification is now being developed with the appointed provider, Babcock Mission Critical Services.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health for an update on the progress towards doctor-led air ambulance provision.

(AQW 2802/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I will make a further announcement about progress towards a doctor-led HEMS and the commencement of the service after I have been fully briefed on the clinical and patient safety aspects of the service by my Chief Medical Officer.

In the meantime the Ambulance Service continues to work closely with health commissioners and other HSC Trusts to plan for the implementation of HEMS and ensure that it operates in a joined-up way with the Major Trauma Network, in order to deliver the optimal standard of care for patients. The process of recruitment of clinical leads for the Trauma Network is underway, however, to date appointments have not been made.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health whether trauma clinical leads have been recruited by the Trauma Network board for the provision of air ambulance service.

(AQW 2803/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I will make a further announcement about progress towards a doctor-led HEMS and the commencement of the service after I have been fully briefed on the clinical and patient safety aspects of the service by my Chief Medical Officer.

In the meantime the Ambulance Service continues to work closely with health commissioners and other HSC Trusts to plan for the implementation of HEMS and ensure that it operates in a joined-up way with the Major Trauma Network, in order to deliver the optimal standard of care for patients. The process of recruitment of clinical leads for the Trauma Network is underway, however, to date appointments have not been made.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health whether a partnership agreement has been made with Air Ambulance NI regarding the respective roles in the provision of an air ambulance service; and when the partnership agreement will be published.

(AQW 2805/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the Member to my announcement of 23 August 2016 regarding the appointment of the charity partner for the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed between AANI and the Ambulance Service which outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of both organisations. This will be finalised and signed off when I have been fully briefed on the clinical and patient safety aspects of the service by my Chief Medical Officer.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the number of people resident in West Tyrone currently awaiting a complete home care package; (ii) whether her Department will ensure that the Western Health and Social Care Trust develop a clear strategy for recruiting carers; and (iii) whether her Department will work in closer partnership with independent providers to provide complete home care packages for people that require support in their own home seven days a week.

(AQW 2820/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) There are currently five people in West Tyrone waiting on a full domiciliary care package.

(ii) In recent years the Western Trust has embarked on a programme of reform to modernise its domiciliary care service, including the development of reablement home care teams, and a new model of working arrangements for its domiciliary care staff to support a good work life balance for these staff.

(iii) The Western Trust, when implementing its new tender arrangements in the coming months, will be working closely with independent domiciliary providers to ensure that adequate staffing is in place to meet the assessed needs of clients.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to list each occasion in each of the last five years when the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service fell short of full staff compliment, including the (i) date; and (ii) number of staff short of full compliment experienced on that date.

(AQW 2829/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health (i) how many medical professionals in each Health and Social Care Trust have received bereavement training; (ii) when the training was undertaken; and (iii) the name of the training provider.

(AQW 2842/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: All medical students at Queen's University Belfast undertake bereavement training delivered by the NI Hospice and Marie Curie as a mandatory component of the current 4th year Cancer Studies course for Medicine.

Bereavement training is also provided to medical trainees as part of a compulsory module at Foundation Year 2 stage, delivered by Professor Max Watson, Consultant in Palliative Care.

The NI Medical and Dental Training Agency also provides additional bereavement training to all GP trainees as part of their programme curriculum, which is set by the Royal College of GPs.

Further bereavement training is available to fully qualified medical professionals within their respective Health and Social Care Trusts, delivered by groups including: the Child Bereavement Trust; the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity; and Trust bereavement coordinators.

Due to the various arrangements in place across Trusts, information on the numbers of medics who have availed of bereavement training opportunities is not held in a comparable manner.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health how many bereavement midwives are employed in each Health and Social Care Trust; and to outline their role.

(AQW 2843/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

Belfast HSC Trust

Belfast HSC Trust Maternity Services employ one band 7 midwifery sister, 30 hours weekly.

The band 7 midwifery sister post:

- provides support and guidance for bereaved women and their families,
- identifies opportunities for meaningful involvement of women and their families in relation to the development of care and services,
- ensures effective systems are in place to gain women's feedback on their experience of maternity care,
- establishes and maintains effective communication with the risk and governance midwife, Belfast Trust complaints department and the lead midwives for the Wards/ Departments, the Delivery Suite/Midwife Led Unit and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, in order to identify women who may benefit from the opportunity of a debriefing session/ bereavement support,
- establishes and maintains effective communication with outside agencies and services, and psychology and chaplaincy services within the Belfast Trust, in order to provide support and assistance for women and their families,
- is integral to the organisation of the Annual Belfast Trust Service of Remembrance.

Northern HSC Trust

The Northern HSC Trust have no bereavement midwives employed, however do have a Trust wide bereavement co-ordinator.

South Eastern HSC Trust

The South Eastern HSC Trust employs one bereavement midwife who works 30 hours per week.

The bereavement midwife post:

- provides a confidential counselling service to grieving couples who have been bereaved through early pregnancy loss, stillbirth, neonatal death or the death of a child,
- provides a confidential counselling service to women who are pregnant and have lost a loved one at this vulnerable time of pregnancy,
- provides support and counselling for women who receive bad news,
- provides multidisciplinary staff support and bereavement training,
- establishes the bereaved parent's liaison group, Forget Me Not group, to facilitate a high standard of support for the bereaved.

Southern HSC Trust

The Southern HSC Trust have no bereavement midwives employed but are seeking funding to do so. However, a number of midwives have undertaken the Bereavement and Loss module at Queen's University. The Clinical Education Centre also offer study days on bereavement for all midwives and the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death charity (Sands) in conjunction with the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) run a photographic workshop and also an annual joint conference to which midwives attend.

Western HSC Trust

The Western HSC Trust have no bereavement midwives employed, however do have a bereavement co-ordinator.

The bereavement co-ordinator post:

- develops bereavement care, standards and training for all types of bereavement, including miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death,
- co-ordinates the Western HSC Trust implementation of the HSC Strategy for Bereavement Care through the Western Trust Bereavement Forum.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health how many organisations and arm's-length bodies within her departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and how an established recruitment agency is considered for inclusion on this list.

(AQW 2844/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Business Services Organisation's Procurement and Logistics Service (BSO PaLS) conduct procurement exercises on behalf of HSC organisations.

All Arms' Length Bodies within HSC utilise the recruitment agency frameworks awarded by BSO PaLS which offer opportunities to companies to bid for business subject to the application of full and proper procurement processes. BSO PaLS utilise the Open Tender procedure for procurement of recruitment agency services. A Tender advertisement is published in the Official Journal of the European Union, providing details of the tender requirements, where tender documentation can be accessed and provides a full list of the organisations on whose behalf the tender is being published. Successful bidders applying for a place on a Framework will be offered a place based on their overall score. Once the Framework has been established then there can be no new entrants until the Framework agreement is renewed.

Companies interested in bidding for business with HSC organisations can find information on the BSO website along with the procurement plan for the coming 12 months as well as general advice on the tendering process.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of the nine key recommendations of the Review of GP-Led Primary Care Services in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2864/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I fully appreciate the challenges facing GP-led services and I am committed to developing a plan that will ensure their long-term sustainability. I am currently considering the findings and recommendations of the GP-led care working group's report within the context of the development of my vision for the future of health and social care and future funding priorities for my Department.

A number of investments have already been made in recent years in the areas identified by the working group's report. The number of GP training places has been increased from 65 per year to 85, the biggest increase in more than ten years, and a new scheme has been put in place to retain GPs in general practice.

In addition my Department is investing up to £14m by 2020/21 to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs. I also recently announced an additional £900k to support the work of GP Federations. GP Federations will help practices work together to increase their resilience and meet rising demand.

There have also been significant developments in information technology aimed at reducing GPs' administrative workload, freeing up GP time for those patients who most need to see them, and making it easier for patients to access their GP practice.

I am determined to build on these investments to ensure everyone here continues to have access to sustainable, high quality GP services.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Health what progress has been made in increasing the Full Time Equivalent recruitment of General Practitioners since January 2016; and to detail the Full Time Equivalent increase target by 2020.

(AQW 2865/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are currently 1,706 General Practitioners in the North of Ireland, compared to 1,683 at 1 January 2016. The figures include principal, salaried and locum GPs. Figures for the number of Full Time Equivalent GPs are not available.

Commissioning of training in General Practice, provided through NIMTDA, is currently informed by a workforce review of training in General Practice undertaken in 2014. The Review recommended that the GP training programme be expanded from the then annual level of 65 to 111 by 2019/20.

In January 2016, investment of £1.2 million per year was announced to increase the number of GP training places by 20 to 85 each year effective from 1 August 2016, the biggest increase in more than ten years.

In October 2015, my Department established a working group to review GP-led services in the North. The Group's report, which was published in March 2016, recognised the need to increase the number of GPs working in the north and identified a range of actions including the development of a costed plan to achieve an annual intake of 111 GP training places by 2019/20 as recommended by the workforce review. The working group's report did not however set specific targets for increases to the GP workforce.

I am considering the findings of the GP-led care review and am committed to working with GPs to ensure everyone here has access to sustainable, high quality GP services.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Health whether the plan to supplement the existing General Practitioner workforce through overseas recruitment has been produced with particular consideration to the United Kingdom's impending exit from the European Union.

(AQW 2866/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no HSC-wide plan in place to supplement the existing General Practitioner workforce through overseas recruitment.

However, the Southern HSC Trust is currently developing plans to recruit from overseas for its GP Out of Hours service which is being taken forward whilst the implications for the north of Ireland of the referendum result on EU membership remain to be seen

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Health what measures her Department will implement to support rural and small GP practices.

(AQW 2867/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has made a number of investments in recent years to help address the pressures facing GPs, including smaller practices and those in rural areas where many of these challenges are more acutely felt.

The number of GP training places has been increased from 65 per year to 85, the biggest increase in more than ten years, and a new scheme to retain GPs in general practice has been put in place.

In addition my Department is investing up to £14m by 2020/21 to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs.

During 2016/17 more than £7m has been invested in GP services, as well as up to £10m made available in financial transactions capital for improving premises.

I recently announced an additional £900k to support the work of GP Federations. GP Federations will help practices work together to increase their resilience and meet rising demand and as such have the potential to be of particular benefit to small, rural practices.

All of these investments will help to address the pressures facing GPs in rural areas, and officers from the Health and Social Care Board are working closely with those rural practices which face particular challenges.

The recent review of GP-led care services made a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the pressures on the GP workforce, including rural practices. I am considering the findings of the GP-led care review and am committed to working with GP colleagues to ensure everyone here has access to sustainable, high quality GP services.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health whether his current department budget for 2016/17 will allow for the implementation of the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidance of three treatment cycles of IVF; or whether a phased approach of two treatments will be considered.

(AQW 2872/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am mindful of the distress caused by fertility problems. However, implementation (NICE) Clinical Guideline on Fertility (CG156) would have significant cost implications for HSCB which have to be carefully considered within the context of ongoing budget pressures and other competing HSC services requiring new investment in the years ahead.

While I am currently unable to provide a timescale for implementation of the guideline, I am keeping the situation under review. I have asked my officials to provide me with a detailed briefing on the current situation, to which I will give full consideration. I can advise you that I intend to work towards implementing optimum number of cycles as recommended by NICE guidelines.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health how many people have accessed the regional gender identity service and the regional Knowing Our Identity youth service in each Health and Social Care Trust over the last ten years.

(AQW 2875/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Gender Identity Service is a regional service based in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The table below outlines the number of people who accessed the regional gender identity service over the period 15 September 2006 to 15 September 2016:

Age Band	Total Referrals
5-15	2
16-64	1433
65+	32

These figures cannot be broken down by Trust.

The under 18 Gender Identity Dysphoria Service - Knowing Our Identity was established in August 2014. Since August 2014 a total of 134 patients have accessed the Knowing Our Identity service and can be broken down by Trust as follows:

Trust	Total Referrals
Belfast	35
Northern	27
South Eastern	27
Southern	20
Western	25

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health how many clients accessed genito-urinary medicine clinics in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last ten years; and what percentage of these clients were (i) men who have sex with men; (ii) commercial sex workers; (iii) young people; and (iv) black and minority ethnic people.

(AQW 2877/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: From 2008/2009 onwards, information relating to outpatient activity has been collected on the basis of appointments rather than clinics.

Information on the number of appointments within the genito-urinary medicine specialty, broken down by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, from 2008/09, are available on the Department of Health website at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/hospital-statistics-outpatient-activity-statistics-201516>

Information relating to parts (i) – (iv) is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health what guidance has been issued to health professionals by her Department since the court ruling in 2013 that granted same-sex and unmarried couples the right to apply for adoption.

(AQW 2878/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following the 2013 Court of Appeal judgment guidance was issued in the form of Information Notes in July 2013 and February 2014 to all adoption agencies, including Health and Social Care Trusts, instructing them to accept applications from unmarried couples (including same-sex couples) and from civil partnership couples. Information was also updated on the Department's website.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health which local hospitals are second-trimester foetal anomaly ultrasound services available; and in which hospitals are these services offered to pregnant women as a matter of routine.

(AQW 2905/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The second trimester ultrasound scan is a routine service which is offered to all pregnant women and is available in all hospitals in the North which have a maternity unit; namely:

- Belfast Trust: Royal Jubilee Maternity Service and Mater Hospital.
- Northern Trust: Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals.
- Southern Trust: Craigavon Area, Daisy Hill, Armagh Community and South Tyrone Hospitals.
- South Eastern Trust: Ulster, Lagan Valley and Downe Hospitals.
- Western Trust: Altnagelvin Hospital, Tyrone County Hospital and South West Acute Hospital.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health whether she will take steps to increase women's representation on the Abortion Working Group.

(AQW 2906/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I agreed the membership of the Working Group on Fatal Fetal Abnormality with the Justice Minister on 5 July 2016. The key determinant in agreeing the membership of the Group related to the professional roles and policy responsibilities of the members.

The Working Group has worked on an outreach basis to seek the views of women and their partners with experience of fatal fetal abnormality, either through the work currently ongoing within the Public Health Agency or directly with the women themselves.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health whether he will take steps to ensure the Abortion Working Group includes medical personnel who deal on a daily basis with women in the situations most relevant to the Group's remit.

(AQW 2908/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I agreed the membership of the Working Group on Fatal Fetal Abnormality with the Justice Minister on 5 July 2016. The key determinant in agreeing the membership of the Group related to the professional roles and policy responsibilities of the members.

The Working Group has engaged with health and social care professionals with direct experience of caring for women with a diagnosis of Fatal Fetal Abnormality.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health whether the Abortion Working Group will engage in outreach work with women who chose abortion when faced with fatal foetal abnormality and women who would have done so had it not been for the existing laws on abortion.

(AQW 2909/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Working Group on fatal fetal abnormality sought to ensure that the broadest possible range of views of those with experience of fatal fetal abnormality was considered as part of their work. Through the PHA and directly, the group consulted with and sought the views of women who chose to continue their pregnancies and women who decided otherwise.

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Health how much money has been recouped by each Health and Social Care Trust from EU countries for the treatment and care of their citizens, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2931/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The European cross-border healthcare scheme is managed by the Department of Health in England on behalf of the devolved administrations. The table below sets out the amounts repaid to each Trust over the last 3 years and includes European Health Insurance Card reporting incentive scheme payments.

Health & Social Care Trust	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Belfast	125,997	251,118	153,828
Northern	Nil	6,925	23,171
Southern	101,432	315,641	372,815
South Eastern	18,614	42,132	6,757
Western	46,927	83,496	79,020
Total	£292,970	£699,312	£635,591

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health what measures are being taken by her Department to develop a MS Network to provide enhanced holistic care to people living with the condition.

(AQW 2932/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following a diagnosis with MS, patients have access to the full range of core community health and social care services across the north of Ireland. A Neurological Care Advice Service Network is newly established and provides information, support and advice for patients with neurological conditions, including MS, across the north. It is their role to help guide patients, their families and carers through the health, social and voluntary services and to help them access the most appropriate services.

A dedicated Telephone Advice Line went live in January 2016 and is another avenue for service users, including those with MS, to access the Neurological Care Advice Service. The Neurological Care Coordinator has responsibility for this service and an answer phone service is also available for out of hours enquiries.

My Department currently has no plans to establish an MS Network.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health what plans are in place to address the shortage of MS nurses.

(AQW 2933/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board in partnership with relevant stakeholder organisations and patient representatives has undertaken a commissioning review of MS services. This review was to assess the current service delivery for patients with MS with the aim of establishing agreed patient pathways to allow more consistent service provision across the region. It is recognised that, consistent with NICE clinical guidelines, services for patients with MS should be co-ordinated using a multidisciplinary approach and that care should involve professionals who can best meet the needs of the patient at each stage of the pathway.

There are currently 12 WTE MS Nurses funded across the North. As part of the next steps arising from the review undertaken the HSC Board will be exploring how best to develop closer working arrangements across Trusts and between Trusts and primary care with a view to ensuring a more consistent multidisciplinary approach to service provision across the region.

The immediate priority for nursing is to ensure that specialist MS nursing staff are available in each Trust area and the HSCB will continue to work with Trusts over coming months to address the issue.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health how many MS specialist nurses and consultants are available in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2934/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below details the number and whole time equivalent (WTE) of MS specialist nurses and consultants in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust.

HSC Trust	MS Specialist Nurses	MS Specialist Consultants
Belfast	6 (5.1 WTE)	5 (3.85 WTE) Consultant Neurologists with a sub-specialty interest in MS
Northern	1 (0.5 WTE)	1 (1.0 WTE) Consultant Neurologist providing services for neurology conditions including MS. 2 visiting consultants with a special interest in MS (part of the Trusts outreach service).
South Eastern	2 (2.0 WTE)	2 (1.6 WTE) Consultant Neurologists, 1 with a specialist interest in MS
Southern	2 (2.0 WTE)	0
Western	2 (1.66) WTE	0 MS specific Consultants. All Neurologists have general neurology clinics.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health whether Human Resources in Health and Social Care Trusts abide by the medical reports and recommendations compiled and provided by Occupational Health in staff and personnel sickness, including (i) diagnosis; (ii) prognosis; (iii) support for return to work including phasing; (iv) compliance with disability discrimination; and (v) reasonable adjustment.

(AQW 2935/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Any actions required as a result of Occupational Health assessments in relation to (i) diagnosis, (ii) prognosis, (iii) support for return to work including phasing, (iv) compliance with disability discrimination and (v) reasonable adjustments, are carefully considered by individual Health and Social Care Trusts in conjunction with any other specialist advice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health (i) how many staff grievances have been heard in the last two calendar years; (ii) how many were subsequently found to have no evidence and required a report to senior management; and (iii) how many of these subsequent cases were (i) unfounded; and (ii) upheld, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2936/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of current staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	No: of staff grievances
BH SCT	21
NH SCT	18
NI AST	17*
SEH SCT	19
SH SCT	3
WH SCT	14*

* includes 1 x group grievance

The number of (i) staff grievances heard in the last two calendar years; the (iii) number unfounded and the number upheld, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	Grievances 2014 & 2015	Not Upheld	Upheld
BH SCT	45	29	16
NH SCT	47	32	11(4)*
NI AST	12	6	0 (6)*
SEH SCT	32	24	5 (3)*
SH SCT	22	10	8 (4)*
WH SCT	39	19	9 (5)*

* figures in brackets indicate partially upheld grievances

There were no staff grievances that were (ii) subsequently found to have no evidence and required a report to senior management.

Information on the average length of time from notification to conclusion of staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years is not readily available and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, in each of the last three years, how many incidents in mental health units involving inpatients have occurred in which PSNI were required to attend as a result of an alleged criminal offence, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2939/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health what are the waiting times to see a MS consultant in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2940/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment are collected on the basis of the specialty of the consultant, not diagnosis of the patient. Therefore, it is not possible to detail the waiting times to see a MS consultant in each Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health why the blood donation session from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm in Kilrea on 9 September 2016 was cancelled at short notice; and what other sessions in the last 12 months have been cancelled in similar circumstances.

(AQW 2943/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Only the afternoon blood donation session in Kilrea on 9th September was cancelled, due to acute staff shortages. The session scheduled for the evening on that date went ahead, and a total of 69 donations were collected.

Since October 2015, 37 blood donation sessions across the North of Ireland have been postponed or cancelled due to staffing challenges.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what provision is being made and advice is being given on accommodating unaccompanied child refugees with foster parents between now and May 2021.

(AQW 2948/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is assumed that this is a reference to the 'National Transfer Scheme' launched by the British Home Office in July 2016 to secure a more even distribution of caring responsibilities for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and unaccompanied refugee children who are looked after children across local authorities.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Executive Office and British Home Office to consider the implications of extending the Scheme to the north of Ireland. This will include consideration of the type and nature of support and advice which would need to be given to Health and Social Care Trusts, which would become responsible for their care, other providers of services to looked after children, and our universal services, including schools. Any decision to accept unaccompanied refugee children will depend on the capacity within our children's social care system to effectively meet their individual needs. As with all looked after children, unaccompanied refugee children would be placed in the care placement that is most appropriate for their assessed needs to achieve the best outcomes for them.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Health (i) how her Department defines Acquired Brain Injury; (ii) whether there is a stipulation to record this on medical records; and (iii) how many people are diagnosed with Acquired Brain Injury.

(AQW 2953/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) An Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) in the widest sense may be defined as any damage to the brain that is sudden in onset and that occurs after birth. It is therefore differentiated from congenital brain injuries and progressive degenerative conditions affecting the central nervous system.

The term ABI can be used to describe traumatic brain injuries such as those caused by car accidents, falls, sporting injuries or assaults and non-traumatic injuries, for example those caused by infections, stroke, brain tumours or hypoxic injuries.

(ii) It would be conventional professional practice to record any significant medical issues such as ABI on medical or other similar treatment records (e.g. Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Dentistry etc).

(iii) The number of people diagnosed and living with ABI in the north of Ireland is estimated to be over 2000 per year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health what statistics her Department recognises as the rate of prevalence of individuals living with borderline personality disorder for the purposes of planning and delivering health services.

(AQW 2955/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Borderline Personality services are delivered in line with NICE guideline CG78, which estimates that borderline personality disorder is present in just under 1% of the population, and is most common in early adulthood.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health how many people have been employed as a (i) Speech and Language Therapist; (ii) Physiotherapist; and (iii) Occupational Therapist in (a) Oakfield School and Assessment Centre; (b) Harberton School; and (c) Glenveagh School, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2966/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is assumed part (a) of this question refers to Oakwood School and Assessment Centre, not Oakfield.

The tables below detail the number and whole time equivalent (WTE) of occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists employed at Oakwood, Harberton and Glenveagh schools, in each of the last five years.

Oakwood School and Assessment Centre

Year	Occupational Therapy		Speech & Language Therapy		Physiotherapy	
	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount
2015/16	1.8	2	2.34	4	1.38	3
2014/15	1.8	2	2.34	4	1.38	3
2013/14	1.8	2	2.24	4	1.38	3
2012/13	1.8	2	2.24	4	1.38	3
2011/12	1.8	2	2.24	4	1.38	3

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

Harberton School

Year	Occupational Therapy		Speech & Language Therapy		Physiotherapy	
	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount
2015/16	2	2	1.74	3	0	0
2014/15	2	2	1.72	3	0	0
2013/14	2	2	1.72	3	0	0
2012/13	2	2	1.72	3	0	0
2011/12	2	2	1.72	3	0	0

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

Glenveagh School

Year	Occupational Therapy		Speech & Language Therapy		Physiotherapy	
	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount
2015/16	1.6	2	2.82	4	1.34	3
2014/15	1.6	2	2.82	4	1.44	4
2013/14	1.6	2	2.82	4	1.54	4
2012/13	1.6	2	2.82	4	1.34	3
2011/12	1.6	2	2.82	4	1.34	3

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health whether she will help fund domestic violence support in PSNI stations as part of the joint Stopping Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Strategy.

(AQW 2969/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of the implementation of the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy, my Department, in association with other Departmental stakeholders and victims representatives, will consider a wide range of potential options as to how best to direct resources to support all victims of domestic violence.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of people referred for breast cancer screening in West Tyrone, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 2971/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of people referred for breast cancer screening in West Tyrone is not available. Women are invited automatically every 3 years when their GP Practice is called in the cycle of screening.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to make bariatric surgery available on the Health Service for people with potentially life-threatening obesity and for whom other treatments have failed.
(AQW 2993/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2015, my Department endorsed NICE Clinical Guideline 189 (CG 189) which contained revised guidelines on the assessment and management of obesity. The Health and Social Care Board is currently considering the commissioning implications of implementing CG 189. Decisions on this will have to be carefully considered within the context of ongoing budget pressures and other competing HSC services requiring new investment in the years ahead.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health what is the average length of time from notification to conclusion of staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 3011/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of current staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	No: of staff grievances
BHSCT	21
NHSCT	18
NIASCT	17*
SEHSCT	19
SHSCT	3
WHSCT	14*

*includes 1 x group grievance

The number of (i) staff grievances heard in the last two calendar years; the (iii) number unfounded and the number upheld, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	Grievances 2014 & 2015	Not Upheld	Upheld
BHSCT	45	29	16
NHSCT	47	32	11(4)*
NIASCT	12	6	0 (6)*
SEHSCT	32	24	5 (3)*
SHSCT	22	10	8 (4)*
WHSCT	39	19	9 (5)*

* figures in brackets indicate partially upheld grievances

There were no staff grievances that were (ii) subsequently found to have no evidence and required a report to senior management.

Information on the average length of time from notification to conclusion of staff grievances in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years is not readily available and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Health what criteria are used to establish the fitness for hospital discharge of elderly patients who have poor mobility and live alone.
(AQW 3103/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Decisions about the medical fitness of a patient to be discharged are a matter of clinical judgement, which rests with the clinicians responsible for their care, in consultation with multi-disciplinary colleagues as appropriate. Each

patient is assessed on an individual basis. Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have arrangements in place for person-centred discharge planning to facilitate the effective, timely and safe discharge of patients from hospital. Discharge planning will include an assessment of what the patient's care needs are likely to be and what support they may need. If there are difficulties for the patient in returning home, HSC staff will discuss with the patient options such as domiciliary care, housing adaptations or residential or nursing home care.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health to detail the waiting time for a hip replacement operation in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3151/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on waiting times for a hip replacement operation, in weeks, at 30th June 2016, the most recent date for which official statistics are available, is shown in the following table.

HSC Trust	Weeks Waiting					
	0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-52	>52
Belfast	62	263	229	160	651	119
South Eastern	<5*	0	0	0	0	0
Southern	31	53	54	23	89	12
Western	50	78	92	42	191	206

Source: DoH Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

* In line with Branch policy, cell sizes have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

Hip replacement surgery is not carried out within the Northern HSC Trust.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of GPs.

(AQW 3153/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A number of steps have been introduced to increase the number of GPs.

The number of places on the GP training programme commissioned each year through the Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) has been increased by 20 to 85 from 2016/17. A revised Induction and refresher scheme for GPs has been developed to assist GPs not currently practising in the north of Ireland to return to practice.

A new GP retainer scheme has been developed to encourage doctors to remain in general practice. The 25 places made available have all been filled.

In addition, I am currently considering the findings of the GP-led care review.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health for an update on staff recruitment for the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin; and to outline the posts that are currently vacant

(AQW 3154/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The total funded establishment required for the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin is 215.8 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE). Of this total, 89.89 WTE staff have been recruited by Western Health and Social Care Trust. These include medical staff, as well as those in the Medical Physics, Therapeutic Radiography and Nursing professions. 85.80 WTE positions are currently in progress.

There are currently a number of vacancies across several disciplines, equating to 41.11 WTE. The Trust is working to recruit the remaining posts during October 2016 and to have staff in post by November 2016.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of looked after children in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 3155/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: At 31 March 2016 there were 555 looked after children in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. This figure is provisional and potentially subject to change.

Looked After Children Statistics are published annually in the statistical bulletin, 'Children's Social Care Statistics for NI', which can be found at the following link on the Department's website:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children>

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of beds available in the Western Health and Social Care Trust for looked after children.

(AQW 3156/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is assumed that "number of beds" relates to the number of registered placements available for looked after children.

Table 1, overleaf, details the number of beds in residential care homes and the number of approved foster care places available for looked after children in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. Please note that these are not exclusive as other placements, e.g. being placed with a parent or supported independent living, may also be considered for the child.

Table 1

Placement Type	No. of beds/places
Residential Care 1	56
Foster Care 2	679

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority & HSCB Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.5.2

- 1 Figure at 30th June – please note that this figure is provisional and potentially subject to change
- 2 Figure at 31st March 2016 – please note that this figure is provisional and potentially subject to change

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health how many people presented to Altnagelvin Emergency Department for drug or alcohol related conditions during the weekend of Friday 9 September 2016 to Sunday 11 September 2016.
(AQW 3157/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Between midnight on Friday 9th September and midnight on Sunday 11th September 2016, 20 patients attended Altnagelvin Area emergency care department with drug or alcohol related conditions.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health what work her Department has undertaken to support people who have contracted the Zika virus.
(AQW 3158/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: For most people Zika virus is a very mild short-lived infection lasting around two to seven days. There is no specific treatment for Zika virus other than supportive measures such as rest, drinking plenty of fluids and taking medicine, such as paracetamol, as directed to control the symptoms.

The Zika virus is an infection primarily transmitted by Aedes mosquitos, which are not native to Ireland, so the risk to the population here is considered to be extremely small. In line with predictions a small number of local people have now tested positive for Zika Virus. All of these individuals had recently returned from a Zika-affected country.

Over the last 10 months the Public Health Agency has issued several letters to health professionals concerning the Zika virus, this includes specific advice and actions in relation to pregnant women. The PHA will continue to monitor the situation and will advise on any further appropriate actions.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the bereavement training needs of nurses working in maternity; and whether she will increase training provision.
(AQW 3164/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Bereavement training is delivered regionally at the Clinical Education Centre. Courses available are:

- Bereavement & Loss in Midwifery Practice (midwives only)
- Bereavement, Grief and Loss (all staff)
- Dealing with Distressed, Bereaved & Grieving Relatives for Health Care Assistants
- Dealing with Distressed, Bereaved & Grieving Relatives for Registered Nurses
- Loss, Grief & Bereavement for Registered Nurses and Healthcare Assistants working with Children (WHST).

My Department has also published regional Bereavement Guidance for the care of parents and their families after the experience of miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.

Training needs for staff are assessed by individual employers.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health on how many occasions, in each of the last three years, was a first response to a 999 medical call made by Response Officers from the PSNI rather than personnel from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.
(AQW 3165/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of occasions officers from the police service rather than personnel from the ambulance service were the first to respond to a 999 medical call is not available.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the overtime arrangements for Northern Ireland Ambulance Service staff; and the impact these arrangements are having on staff.

(AQW 3166/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Ambulance Service HSC Trust (NIAS) offers overtime to frontline staff to cover shifts which cannot be covered by normal internal processes such as the use of relief staff. The Trust also has in place an overtime policy to support the management of situations where needs arise.

NIAS is currently reviewing staff shift patterns and absences, and recruiting to vacancies, in order to decrease reliance upon overtime to cover shifts.

NIAS is extremely grateful for the ongoing commitment from members of staff who work overtime during periods of high demand throughout the year.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1453/16-21, how many medical surgery patients there are in Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 3170/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: On Sunday 19th June between the hours of 08.00 – 20.00, there were 367 medical surgery patients in Antrim Area Hospital.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1453/16-21, how many medical-surgical wards there are in Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 3171/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are fourteen medical-surgical wards in Antrim Area Hospital.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of (i) improvement notices; and (ii) failure to comply notices that have been issued by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to private nursing homes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3189/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The following table provides details of the number of improvement notices and failure to comply notices issued by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to nursing homes for the period 1 April 2012 to 19 September 2016.

Year	Number of Improvement notices issued to nursing homes	Number of Failure to comply notices issued to nursing homes
2012-13	0	45
2013-14	0	4
2014-15	0	51
2015-16	0	9
2016-17	0	2

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of times the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has cancelled the registration of a private nursing home in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3191/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: During the past five years the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has not cancelled the registration of any nursing home as a result of enforcement action.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 2778/16-21, what aftercare support is available for women following a termination of pregnancy.

(AQW 3207/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Health and Social Care Trusts provide access to aftercare support for women following a termination of pregnancy depending on individual needs.

Support and services offered include: psychological support; confidential counselling; midwifery support, including services from a bereavement midwife or bereavement co-ordinator; services from obstetrics and gynaecology staff; leaflets providing signposting information to voluntary organisations; and, services from the patient's GP or community midwife. These services are funded from within each HSC Trust's budget.

There are no plans to collect the statistics you refer to. The data cannot be separately extracted from current HSC information systems.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 2778/16-21 and following the publication of Guidance for Health and Social Care Professionals on Termination of Pregnancy in Northern Ireland, whether the statistics requested will now be collected.

(AQW 3208/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Health and Social Care Trusts provide access to aftercare support for women following a termination of pregnancy depending on individual needs.

Support and services offered include: psychological support; confidential counselling; midwifery support, including services from a bereavement midwife or bereavement co-ordinator; services from obstetrics and gynaecology staff; leaflets providing signposting information to voluntary organisations; and, services from the patient's GP or community midwife. These services are funded from within each HSC Trust's budget.

There are no plans to collect the statistics you refer to. The data cannot be separately extracted from current HSC information systems.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 2778/16-21, what funding has been set aside for Health and Social Care Trusts to provide access to aftercare support for women following a termination of pregnancy.

(AQW 3209/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Health and Social Care Trusts provide access to aftercare support for women following a termination of pregnancy depending on individual needs.

Support and services offered include: psychological support; confidential counselling; midwifery support, including services from a bereavement midwife or bereavement co-ordinator; services from obstetrics and gynaecology staff; leaflets providing signposting information to voluntary organisations; and, services from the patient's GP or community midwife. These services are funded from within each HSC Trust's budget.

There are no plans to collect the statistics you refer to. The data cannot be separately extracted from current HSC information systems.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health what action she will take to alleviate pressures on domiciliary care in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3215/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has received additional investment consecutively over the past five years to address the growth in demand for domiciliary care services. It is anticipated that this additional investment alongside the implementation of new models of reform for the delivery of domiciliary care, will improve responsiveness and access to domiciliary care in the Western Trust area.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the provision of an air ambulance service.

(AQW 3217/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Planning is underway by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) and Health and Social Care Board to implement a doctor-led, daylight hours Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) in line with the AAA Framework for a High Performing Air Ambulance Service 2013. A service specification and a Memorandum of Understanding between NIAS and the charity partner AANI have been developed; procurement of an experienced HEMS service provider has been completed; recruitment of Trauma clinical leads has commenced; and a business case for the implementation of the service is being finalised.

I will make an announcement about the details of the operating model and service commencement once I have been briefed by the Chief Medical Officer regarding the clinical and patient safety aspects of the service.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the bids made by providers for the provision of Domiciliary care within the Western Health and Social Care Trust since 2013.

(AQW 3219/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A total of 18 tenderers made bids for the provision of independent sector domiciliary care within the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The content of each bid is commercially sensitive.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health whether libor funds will be utilised to provide a Helicopter Emergency Medical Service for Northern Ireland; and to detail the deadlines or dates which exist for drawing down these funds.

(AQW 3421/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Chancellor's banking fines award to the HEMS charity, AANI, comprises £3.5m to establish and run the service in its first 22 months of operation, and a further £1m in matched funding to sustain operations for 18 months thereafter. No deadline has been specified for utilising these funds.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the decision of her predecessor to keep Health and Social Care Trust residential homes open; and how she will safeguard these homes.

(AQW 3603/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My predecessor, Simon Hamilton MLA, asked the Health and Social Care Board to halt and review the process on the review of statutory residential care homes, as a precautionary measure. The Health and Social Care Board has completed its review and I will consider the outcome in due course. I have not made any final decisions on proposals for the future role and function of statutory residential care homes.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future of Health and Social Care Trust nursing homes and residential care homes in Mid Ulster.

(AQW 3657/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Board has been leading on a regional review on the future role and function of statutory residential care homes. I have not yet made final decisions on proposals for any of the homes included in the review. The review does not extend to nursing homes.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health what assurances she can give that the stroke unit and its services will remain at the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 3661/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to the recent answer provided to AQW 2369/16-21.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health how she is addressing urgent breast cancer referrals in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3718/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that the Southern HSC Trust has experienced challenges in meeting the 14 day referral target and work is on-going to address this. In the short term, a number of Trusts have provided additional clinics to see Southern Trust patients during August 2016 and September 2016. Discussions are also due to take place in October 2016 to identify longer term solutions to providing a sustainable breast service across the north to ensure that patients are seen within the required timescales, given the staffing challenges in breast services.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health what action she will take to reduce the waiting lists for hearing loss appointments.

(AQW 3877/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Health and Social Care Trusts have put plans in place to address the Audiology waiting list backlog to ensure that no patient over 55 years old is waiting longer than 9 weeks for access and 13 weeks to have a hearing aid fitted, once diagnosed, by 31 March 2017. It is expected that these plans will be implemented from October 2016.

The Health and Social Care Board has advised that is now using in-year resources earmarked for the hearing loss pilot to fund delivery of the HSC Trusts' waiting list backlog plans and it is working with the Trusts, my Department and British Academy of Audiology to review the current workforce and produce a workforce plan to ensure the future sustainability of HSC services.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for an update on (i) the potential closure of Pine Lodge Residential Care Home; and (ii) her Department's review of residential care.

(AQW 4071/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) I have not yet made final decisions on proposals for any of the residential care homes under review, including Pine Lodge.
- (ii) My predecessor asked the Health and Social Care Board to halt and review the process on the review of statutory residential care homes, as a precautionary measure. The Health and Social Care Board has now completed its review and I will be giving it careful consideration.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) how many Freedom of Information requests he has received since coming to office; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by his Special Adviser; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, his Special Adviser.

(AQW 2421/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):

- (i) From 25 May 2016 to 7 September 2016 the Department for Infrastructure has received 122 requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- (ii) As at 7 September 2016, 92 responses have issued.
- (iii) None.
- (iv) None.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail his Department's most recent cost estimate for the upgrade of the A5.

(AQW 2450/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The full costs of the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme will be significantly influenced by the timing of delivery of the various phases of the scheme.

The current cost estimate for Phase 1a (New Buildings to north of Strabane), based on a construction period of 2017 to 2019 is £150m. The cost estimate for Phase 1b (south of Omagh to Ballygawley) based on a similar timeframe is £225m, while the estimate for Phase 2 (north of Strabane to south of Omagh), based on a construction timeframe of 2021 to 2023 is £495m.

These estimates do not include scheme development costs to date nor those that will be incurred between now and the currently anticipated commencement of construction on site in late 2017.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the provision of an official car to him and the payment of his driver, to detail the current arrangements, including costs and funding.

(AQW 2511/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department provides an official car for my use and meets the associated vehicle running costs. Sinn Féin provide a driver service for which my Department will be invoiced on a monthly basis.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether any guidelines exist as to the distance which for health and safety purposes should apply under CTY 10 of PPS 21 in separating a proposed dwelling from slurry tanks on an active farm.

(AQW 2737/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that there are no specific planning policy requirements in relation to the distance of a dwelling from slurry tanks on a farm.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and policy CTY10 of PPS21 (retained under the transitional arrangements of the SPPS) allow for a new dwelling on a farm where a number of criteria are met, including that a new dwelling to be visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm. An exception to this policy allows for an alternative site elsewhere on the farm, away from established buildings where there are either health and safety reasons or plans to expand the farm business.

Where an alternative site is proposed on health and safety grounds, applicants are required to submit appropriate and demonstrable evidence from a competent and independent authority, such as the Health and Safety Executive or Environmental Health Department of the local council to justify the siting. In such cases, the council planning authority will consider proposals on a case by case basis against the policy contained within the SPPS, PPS21, the local development plan and all other material considerations such as health and safety evidence and the siting of the proposed dwelling in relation to the existing group of buildings on the farm. The weight afforded to each of the material considerations is ultimately a matter for the decision maker.

It is also worth noting that having considered the emerging issues from the recent Calls for Evidence, I have decided to commence a priority review of strategic planning policy for Development in the Countryside (and Renewable Energy). This review will involve detailed research, stakeholder engagement and public consultation to help inform the policy development process. Furthermore, in bringing forward detailed operational planning policies within their local development plans (whilst taking account of the SPPS), councils have the flexibility to tailor their policies, including those for development in the countryside, to their local circumstances so that they are more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the recent call for evidence of Spatial Planning Policy Statement into development in the countryside, to detail how she intends to address (i) the issue of depopulation in rural areas; (ii) the needs of rural businesses and sporting bodies to survive; and (iii) the need for non-farming rural dwellers to live in the countryside.

(AQW 2740/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The aim of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) with regards to the countryside is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between the protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities. The responses to the recent Call for Evidence on strategic planning policy for Development in the Countryside highlight the ongoing public interest in this subject area.

Having considered the key matters raised, I have decided to commence a review of strategic planning policy for Development in the Countryside (and Renewable Energy). I have instructed my officials to proceed with the necessary preparatory work

which will involve research being undertaken to help inform the policy development process. The review will of course consider the issues raised in this question insofar as relevant to strategic planning policy. During the review process there will be opportunities for stakeholder engagement and public consultation next year and any new policy will be taken through the normal Assembly and Executive Committee process.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that councils, in bringing forward Local Development Plans for their area, will provide detailed operational planning policies for a range of subject policy areas, including development in the countryside, economic development, and open space, sport and recreation. As long as a council's local planning policy takes account of strategic planning policy, then councils are free to develop their own approaches to deal with the local issues they face.

As I have previously stated, I am committed to ensuring that the SPPS delivers for local communities and the north as a whole and that the planning system addresses the present as well as the long term future needs of our society, including for rural communities.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he plans a strategic review of the renewal process for blue badges. (AQW 2882/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am not planning a strategic review of the renewal process for Blue Badges at present.

The current Disabled Person Badge Scheme, Blue Badge renewal criterion, is based on the previous and present welfare benefits systems, which require assessments to be undertaken regularly, irrespective of the nature of the disability. Additionally, the Blue Badge scheme in the north is aligned to the scheme in Britain that requires all Blue Badges to be renewed every three years. As a result Item 5 of The Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles), Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 made under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 states that "a disabled person's badge shall be issued for a period of three years from and including the date on which it is issued."

There are benefits of having a system in place that reviews all applicants' requirements on a cyclical basis. These benefits include:

- Having badges in circulation that have been subject to regular assessment;
- Removing badges that have become no longer valid from circulation (thus reducing fraudulent use of the badge) where the applicant has moved out of the country or is deceased; and
- Maintenance of an up to date record on all Blue Badge holders.

I should also like to point out, that following a consultation in 2012 on Blue Badges the following Blue Badge processing needs were identified:

- new application form
- new processing system
- provision of a full on-line application facility
- link to the GB's Blue Badge Improvement Service (BBIS)

The current position regarding meeting these needs is as follows:

- The new Blue Badge Processing system has been developed and is in use since July 2016.
- An online application facility has been developed and went live on 23 September 2016.
- Officials are working with The Department for Transport (GB) to resolve the contract issues and allow NI access to the BBIS service in April 2017.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what action his Department is taking to enable taxi meter calibration and sealing to be carried out by authorised calibration centres to alleviate pressures on vehicle test centres. (AQW 2922/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department initially considered this approach, with the intention of establishing a network of approved taximeter installers, but following consultation with Departmental Solicitors, was advised that insufficient powers existed in the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 to do so.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what arrangements are in place to accommodate passengers travelling on the Derry to Belfast rail service when passenger capacity is exceeded. (AQW 2946/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink closely monitors and forecasts demand patterns to best predict when additional train capacity is required. Plans are then put in place to provide additional carriages.

In instances where there is an unexpected increase in demand exceeding capacity Translink attempts to provide alternative transport options. This can be influenced by the time of day, fleet/staff availability and the time of the next alternative timetabled rail/bus service.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of using Barnett consequential funds stemming from HS2 to combat coastal erosion.

(AQW 2957/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am not aware of any Barnett consequentials from the HS2 project that have been provided to the Executive. However, any Barnett consequentials for the NI Executive that derive from additional spending on comparable services in England are unhypothecated and as such it is for the Executive to decide where that additional funding should be allocated.

However, I will continue to press for additional funding for the combat of coastal erosion and other key projects to support the work of my Department.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the Republic of Ireland's commitment of £75 million for the A5 project remains in place after the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

(AQW 2960/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As part of the 'A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan' the Irish Government reaffirmed its support for the A5WTC by its £75 million funding commitment.

At the North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting on 4 July 2016, immediately after the European Union referendum vote, the continued commitment of the Irish Government and the NI Executive to the Fresh Start Agreement and investing in infrastructure, including the A5, was noted.

The A5 scheme remains unaffected by the decision of those in England and Wales to leave the European Union and I look forward to discussing its progression at the next North South Ministerial Council Transport Sectoral meeting.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the progress on discussions with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to ensure speeding fines issued in Northern Ireland can be collected in the Republic of Ireland and vice versa.

(AQW 2962/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is not responsible for the collection of speeding fines and as such I have had no discussions with my southern counterpart on this particular issue.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline the uptake of the Cairnshill Park and Ride scheme; and (ii) whether there are plans to extend Park and Ride schemes to other areas of Belfast.

(AQW 3019/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Since it opened in November 2010, the daily use of Cairnshill Park & Ride has grown steadily. On a weekday there are, on average, approximately 460 cars parked in Cairnshill Park & Ride, with over 500 cars on busy days. I expect these numbers to continue to grow as more motorists realise the benefits of using public transport for at least part of their journey into Belfast.

Following a review of the implementation of Park & Ride projects, my Department is currently developing a Strategic Park & Ride Delivery Programme for the next four years which will deliver further additional Park & Ride and Park & Share spaces across the region, many of which will serve those travelling into Belfast.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has proposals to update rural planning policies.

(AQW 3023/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The responses received to the recent Call for Evidence have provided a useful insight into the operation and impact of current rural planning policy. I have carefully considered the emerging issues from the responses, and earlier this week announced a priority review of strategic planning policy for Development in the Countryside (and Renewable Energy), as currently contained within the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

I am committed to ensuring that the SPPS delivers for local communities, including rural communities and the North as a whole, and that the planning system addresses the present as well as the long term future needs of our society. The review will ensure that we have the most effective strategic planning policy for the countryside in the North. It is worth noting that Councils are now responsible for bringing forward local planning policies through their new Local Development Plans including policies for Development in the Countryside.

My officials are now progressing work necessary to inform the review which will include detailed research. There will be opportunities for stakeholder engagement and public consultation next year, and I encourage all interested parties to get involved in the strategic policy development process.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department plans to legislate to ensure taxi meter serial numbers are linked to vehicle VIN numbers to ensure legal compliance with current or future regulation.

(AQW 3029/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have no plans to legislate this requirement at present. However, the benefits of recording taximeter serial numbers will be considered as part of the planned review of taxi legislation.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why vehicle test centres must check and seal taxi meters at an additional cost of £35 to the owner / operator of the taxi.

(AQW 3030/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: DVA Vehicle Test Centres carry out Taximeter Tests to check the calibration of the taximeter to insure the taximeter adheres to the maximum fare and they carry out a mechanical check of the functionality of both the taximeter and the printer. If the test is successful the taximeter is then sealed. The sealing of the taximeter helps ensure that the taximeter cannot be altered after the test, thereby enhancing consumer protection.

The £35 taximeter test fee was established on the basis of full cost recovery over a five year period, where the costs of providing 9000 taximeter tests would attract a total estimated cost of £315,000. We cannot provide details of the breakdown of this fee in isolation as it is part of the overall vehicle testing account of £31,000,000.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many carriages are available for use by Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQW 3042/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways has a total of 143 passenger carrying carriages consisting of:

- 69 x Class 3000, made up from 23x3 car sets
- 60 x Class 4000, made up from 20x3 car sets
- 14 x Class 9000 Enterprise Carriages (forms 50% of the Cross Border fleet. Iarnród Éireann owns the other half of this fleet).

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of trains operated currently by Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQW 3045/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways operate 38 trains on local services and 3 Enterprise trains in conjunction with Irish Rail on a daily basis from Monday to Friday.

On Saturdays 21 trains operate and 3 enterprise trains. On Sundays 15 trains and 3 Enterprise trains.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what costs, if any, are levied by his Department on ferry companies crossing the Irish Sea.

(AQW 3066/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no remit in the operation, funding or legislative overview of cross channel ferries. The role of my Department is focused on the provision of legislative and governance framework within which harbour facilities and services across the North are maintained and developed, whereas shipping is a reserved matter under the Department for Transport in London.

Any issues regarding pricing structure and charges of ferry services are subject to consideration by the competition authorities. You may wish to contact the Consumer Council who should be able to provide guidance on this issue. Contact details for Consumer Council are as follows:

The Consumer Council, Floor 3, Seateam House, 28-32 Alfred Street, BELFAST BT2 9EN

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what action is being taken by his Department to support and improve ferry crossing infrastructure.

(AQW 3068/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no remit to support or improve the operation, funding or legislative overview of cross channel ferries. My Department is responsible for ferry services within the North, namely the Strangford-Portaferry and Ballycastle-Rathlin ferries.

A new ferry to provide services between Strangford and Portaferry is currently being built by Cammell Laird Shipbuilders, Birkenhead, at a cost of some £6.2 million. In addition, a new ferry to provide services between Rathlin Island and Ballycastle is being built by Arklow Marine Services at a cost of some £2.8 million. Both of these ferries are due to come into service shortly. It has also been necessary to upgrade the Rathlin Harbour to accommodate the new ferry at a cost of some £1 million. This is being funded jointly with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. A new slipway and moorings have been constructed at Strangford Harbour at a cost of some £845,000.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what consideration has been given to resident parking scheme pilots outside Belfast, including Bangor and Holywood.

(AQW 3074/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am aware of the desire by the residents of Bangor and Holywood for controlled parking in their areas to address all day parking.

My Department is currently focusing its efforts on the implementation of residents' parking schemes in parts of Belfast and in Derry and Antrim.

Unfortunately, I am unable to indicate a timescale when the implementation of future schemes, including Bangor and Holywood, might be taken forward, as this is dependent on the successful implementation of these initial schemes.

My officials have added Bangor and Holywood to the list of areas for future consideration.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Transport Hub for Belfast, including (i) when he expects a design to be finalised; (ii) when he expects construction to begin; (iii) whether an indicative budget has been agreed for the project; and (iv) whether the project is dependent on European Funding.
(AQW 3078/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The design for planning purposes is expected to be substantially completed by March 2017. Completion of planning approval is anticipated to be around September 2017.

Some enabling works have already commenced with others scheduled to commence in mid 2017, subject to funding approval. The main station works are scheduled to start in mid-2018, subject to funding approval.

A budget estimate based on current design stage has been established. The final budget will be determined on completion of the design phase.

The preliminary stage of this project did benefit from some EU funding.

It had been considered that future EU funding could have provided part funding for this project. The Belfast Hub has, however, been identified as a flagship project and I will consider all potential options going forward.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the roads not yet adopted by his Department in West Tyrone, broken down by town.
(AQW 3092/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I attach a list of live developments and backlog sites for the West Tyrone Constituency. Please note that the development addresses provided are those used in the bond and agreement documentation and that these are based on the address submitted as part of the planning permission. In some cases these now differ from the development name adopted by the developer.

A copy of the information will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what assessment has been made of air quality in Main Street, Dungiven over the last twelve months.
(AQW 3097/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Monitoring or assessment of air quality at a local level is the responsibility of the relevant Council. Overall responsibility for the north lies with the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

In its March 2008 Air Quality Action Plan, Limavady Borough Council (now Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council) examined a range of measures which could, in theory, be deployed to impact positively upon air quality within Dungiven, whilst, at the same time, ensuring road safety was not compromised. Having considered each of these measures, Transport NI agreed with the Council that the construction of a bypass was the only practical method to reduce traffic levels in the village, and thus the achievement of the Local Air Quality Management objectives, as set out in the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 [as amended] and the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

In May of this year my Department appointed a consultant to assist with the procurement and delivery of the flagship A6 Derry to Dungiven dualling project. Work is currently underway to determine the extent of the Derry to Dungiven scheme that can be delivered within the funding allocations contained in the December 2015 Budget Statement, with priority being given to commencing construction with a bypass of Dungiven and progressing westwards towards Drumahoe.

Subject to making the statutory orders, approval of the final business case and successful procurement, it is possible that the first phase of the Derry to Dungiven scheme could commence in the latter part of 2018/19.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will ensure a measured standard British mile is used to check if a taxi meter is calibrated properly.
(AQW 3104/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not use a measured standard British mile during the calibration check, as this specific distance does not relate to the regulated fare charge. The taximeter calibration check and related fare charge is assessed against a measured 880 yards and 1,776 yards respectively.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the Metro routes where the Irish language is used to indicate the route. (AQW 3106/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: All buses that operate on Translink's Metro 10 (Falls Road) corridor display bilingual destination signage in English and Irish. This is the only corridor within Translink's network that uses Irish language signage at present.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether all road signage and markings, including safety braking surfaces, are reinstated as previously positioned when a road or section of a road is resurfaced. (AQW 3110/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am not aware if your enquiry relates to a particular scheme however, in general, following the laying of the final coat in any resurfacing scheme, road signs and markings are usually reinstated as per the original layout unless the road geometry has changed as part of the scheme. The timing of this reinstatement will depend on a number of considerations including weather conditions and contractor availability.

In the case of high friction surfacing, or anti-skid material, there may be other considerations. Depending on the particular location and the materials used, the resurfacing scheme may have removed the need for the high friction surface altogether by providing an acceptable level of skid resistance on the affected road.

Where reinstatement is required, again depending on the type of material used, a period of trafficking on the newly laid surface may be recommended before re-application of the high friction surfacing. Trafficking helps wears away the surface bitumen and expose the aggregate to help produce a good bond between the road surface and the anti-skid treatment, thereby reducing maintenance needs in the future.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW52344/11-16, what is the penalty for failure to comply with the specified requirements in these instances. (AQW 3125/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: All licensed taxi operators are required to comply with the booking record requirements contained within the Taxi Operator Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. Operators that fail to comply with these requirements shall be guilty of an offence.

DVA enforcement officers conduct checks on booking records, both at the roadside and at commercial premises, to ensure compliance with the regulations. Booking record offences are generally dealt with by means of an Enforcement Notice, which requires an operator to take remedial action, or Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN). A FPN may be issued to an operator for failing to keep prescribed records at an Operating Centre or failing to comply with an Enforcement Notice. These attract £60 and £120 fines respectively. A £60 FPN may be issued to a driver for failing to record or notify their operator of a taxi booking. DVA may also pursue these matters through court where on conviction an offender is liable to a maximum fine of £1,000 for each offence.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the current projected cost of the Strathroy link road project. (AQW 3133/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The projected cost for the construction of Strathroy Road link is currently £7.2 million. This includes construction and lands related costs, currently estimated at around £6m as well as project management and delivery costs currently estimated at around £1.2 million.

The new road is programmed to be complete and available to traffic in mid 2018.

Expenditure on the project to date is currently approximately £1m and has been primarily in relation to design fees and ground investigation works.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the planned completion date of the Strathroy link road project. (AQW 3135/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The projected cost for the construction of Strathroy Road link is currently £7.2 million. This includes construction and lands related costs, currently estimated at around £6m as well as project management and delivery costs currently estimated at around £1.2 million.

The new road is programmed to be complete and available to traffic in mid 2018.

Expenditure on the project to date is currently approximately £1m and has been primarily in relation to design fees and ground investigation works.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how much of the budget allocated to the Strathroy link road project has been spent on the project to date. (AQW 3137/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The projected cost for the construction of Strathroy Road link is currently £7.2 million. This includes construction and lands related costs, currently estimated at around £6m as well as project management and delivery costs currently estimated at around £1.2 million.

The new road is programmed to be complete and available to traffic in mid 2018.

Expenditure on the project to date is currently approximately £1m and has been primarily in relation to design fees and ground investigation works.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether preparatory work is being carried out by his Department to ensure areas will be protected from bad winter weather, particularly those areas which suffered serious flooding in the last year.

(AQW 3138/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: It is worth saying that my Department is continuously alert to the threat of flooding as such events don't only occur in the winter. This approach and, in particular the role of Lead Government Department which my Department fulfils has also already provided positive benefits in ensuring the overall Government response to flooding emergencies is as good as it can be. This was recently recognised in the recent NIAO report on Flood Prevention and Management and I plan to build on this success.

DfI Rivers prepares for winter flood conditions through its programme of regular inspection and maintenance of watercourses, culverts and flood defence structures. TransportNI carry out maintenance to their road gullies and likewise NI Water maintain their drainage assets as funding allows. Multi Agency emergency response plans are in place and emergency stores and equipment are fully stocked and prepared.

There is also significant liaising between DfI Rivers, TransportNI and NI Water to identify where drainage and flood protection infrastructure issues exist to determine what practical measures can be taken to reduce flood risk.

The three agencies rely heavily on the multi-agency response which is co-ordinated by the district council or, in emergencies which have a wide-spread effect across different localities, through central strategic co-ordination arrangements. The help of communities can also not be underestimated during flood events.

All these measures help us to be prepared for winter floods and I hope this provides assurance that my department is proactive in this area.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what steps his Department is taking to address the backlog of blue badge applications.

(AQW 3139/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am fully aware and extremely appreciative of the needs of the people who rely on their Blue Badges. I wish to assure you that my Department is doing everything that is reasonably practicable to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. This includes the following measures:

- Employing additional staff to process Blue Badge applications (five Agency staff presently with another one due to start in the next few weeks);
- Preference is being given to first time applications whilst other cases are dealt with in date order as we currently have approximately 9900 applications to be processed;
- Applicants that hold an expired badge and have sent in a renewal application are being advised that traffic attendants on street and in council car parks will not issue parking tickets to any badge displayed that has expired after 1 May 2016. This information is also available to the public on the NI Direct website;
- The main organisations, such as The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and The Department of Health, who have responsibilities for disseminating information to hospitals and businesses including private car park operators, have also been informed about the situation and were again notified on 15 September 2016.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many company cars does Northern Ireland Railways currently have for employee use.

(AQW 3142/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Northern Ireland Railways currently has no company cars for employee use. However, it currently has one pool car that is used for operational reasons across the NIR network. This car is not allocated to a specific employee.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many managers are employed by Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQW 3143/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are currently 14 Managers employed by Northern Ireland Railways.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the current management structure for Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQW 3144/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways is led by the Head of Rail. Reporting into the Head of Rail are the following:

- Rail Services Manager responsible for Service Delivery Managers and Line Supervisors.
- Traction Manager responsible for train crew resources, conductors and traction supervisors.
- Head of Standards & Compliance responsible for operational standards, safety assurance and operations systems.

- Group Operational Training Manager responsible for training and rail simulation.
- Planning & Performance Manager responsible for rail validation systems and timetable planning.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many staff currently work for Northern Ireland Railways.
(AQW 3145/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are currently 445 members of NIR Operational Staff. This includes:

- Managers
- Professional/Technical Staff
- Supervisors
- Enterprise Train Managers
- Customer Service Coordinators
- Conductors
- Train Drivers
- Clerical

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the health and safety; and (ii) risk assessments that were completed by his Department in relation to placing and removing taxi roof signs from class B taxis / wheel chair accessible vehicles and 7/8 seater vehicles including black taxis.

(AQW 3162/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A taxi roof sign requirement was in place for all vehicles outside of Belfast prior to the new Taxi Licence regulations that commenced on 31 May 2016; including for larger vehicles like wheelchair accessible taxis. Even within Belfast all non-Belfast Public Hire taxis, many of which are larger taxis, were required to have roof signs.

The roof sign requirements are not, therefore new, but rather have only been extended to apply to all Class A and Class B taxis. These proposals were subject to consultation in 2011 and health and safety was not raised by any respondents as an issue, nor am I aware of correspondence relating to this issue being received by the Department.

As such, no health and safety assessments or risk assessments were carried out in relation to the new taxi roof sign requirements.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2016/16-21, (i) why Rivers Agency advised the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland to not designate the Termon River at the June meeting; and (ii) what criteria was used in this decision.

(AQW 3167/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In assessing whether to recommend designation of watercourses for maintenance at public expense, the main criteria used in designating a watercourse takes account of flood risk, agricultural and urban drainage needs and the capabilities of riparians to undertake improvements or maintenance to address existing flooding or drainage issues at their own expense.

These criteria are subject to the overriding condition (in the case of flood defence and drainage schemes) that the cost of the works would satisfy appropriate appraisal criteria, in quantifiable cost/benefit terms.

A visual survey was carried out of the reach of the Termon River under consideration between Lower Lough Erne and the downstream face of the A35 Bridge. Assessment of the watercourse identified that the watercourse has a gravel and rock bed without any signs of major shoaling. There was some obstruction due to lack of maintenance from minor shoaling and vegetation and trees in evidence, however maintenance of the bank of the river in the north would only achieve limited improvement without similar maintenance on the Donegal bank. The watercourse was free flowing with sufficient freeboard to facilitate adequate land drainage.

It was further identified that storm flows in the watercourse channel are impeded to a degree by the capacity of a disused railway bridge downstream of the village. Removal of the historic bridge structure would require a cross border agreement with authorities in the south of Ireland. At a recent meeting between DfI Rivers and the Office of Public Work, (OPW is the lead body in the south of Ireland for the coordination and implementation of policy on the management of flood risk) there was discussion on the possibility of providing an additional flood relief arch through the raised railway embankments that cross the floodplain at the disused railway bridge. This would provide increased capacity. There will be further discussion on this option and on which side of the border it should be constructed should there be a cost beneficial scheme. Designation of the entire watercourse is not necessary to undertake such a scheme.

A review of DfI Rivers flood callout records did not identify flooding to property in the north and to our knowledge only one property in the south was threatened. DfI Rivers considers that works are not likely to achieve a significant benefit to land drainage or flood risk and that therefore there is insufficient cost / benefit to justify designation.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2020/16-21, (i) to outline why the damage to Roscor Viaduct has not been repaired; (ii) whether he will consider marking the viaduct as a priority case and include it in this year's bridge strengthening programme; and (iii) whether his Department will be sourcing external funding for this.

(AQW 3169/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As stated in my reply on 18 July 2016 investigations and analysis are ongoing in relation to the strengthening and repair of Roscor Viaduct.

Work to establish the preferred engineering solution and associated costs is expected to be complete in 2017. Progression of a scheme thereafter will depend on the availability of funding and the priority of the scheme when compared to other similar bridge strengthening works.

It is unlikely that external funding for this work will be forthcoming.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline when a decision will be made in response to the Tidal Urban Clearway proposal for the Antrim Road put forward by Antrim Road traders at a meeting with his officials on 7 March 2016.

(AQW 3181/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A proposal to amend the existing clearway is currently under active consideration and my Department's TransportNI has undertaken a number of surveys to gauge the impact of any potential changes. A report on the benefits and disbenefits of has been compiled and I would hope to be in a position to confirm my intentions later this autumn.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether he proposes to review the policy that Residents' Parking Schemes cannot proceed if there are any objections; and (ii) if so, to detail on what date he proposes to make a statement to Members on the outcome of such a review.

(AQW 3197/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A Residents' Parking scheme imposes a stringent level of parking control within the area covered by the proposed scheme. My Department's Residents' Parking policy is underpinned by the requirement for residents support for proposed schemes; consequently it is essential to gauge the level of support before developing a detailed scheme proposal.

When introduced, a Residents' Parking scheme prohibits all parking with the exception of any vehicle displaying a valid permit or, in some cases, a valid parking ticket. Permit numbers need to be tightly controlled, and a scheme needs to be rigorously enforced if it is to work for the benefit of local residents.

This is made clear to affected residents through both informal and formal consultation. Informal consultation will include letter drops and open evenings where officials are available to answer queries and explain the reasoning behind the scheme. Schemes will only progress to the legislative stage where there is a clear majority in favour of the scheme.

Formal consultation is part of the legislative process for making the necessary traffic regulation order, when the scheme is advertised in the local press and the Department invites views on it. The process is set out in the primary legislation and this clearly states that the Department must consider all representations received. If, following communication with objectors, the Department is unable to overcome the objections, then it must decide to progress with the scheme, re-advertise the scheme, hold a public inquiry or abandon the scheme. In some cases the Department may commence development of an alternative scheme design and recommence the informal consultation process.

The existence of objections to a residents parking scheme will not of itself prevent the scheme being taken to the detailed design stage and that the consideration of representations must be considered at the legislative stage as would be the case for an order for any form of traffic regulation.

Given that the formal consultation process is specified in primary legislation, I can confirm that I have no plans to change what is an accepted and democratic process for implementing traffic regulation orders.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on plans to prepare for winter regarding gritting and snow clearance.

(AQW 3227/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Prior to the start of each winter service season, my Department carries out a significant amount of pre-planning to ensure a state of readiness for the incoming winter. Currently, staffing arrangements are being finalised, pre-season checks on winter service equipment are almost complete and salt stocks are currently being replenished.

My Department commits significant resources to its winter service programme and every night, from the end of October until the middle of next April, up to 300 people will be on standby ready to salt main roads, helping drivers across the north to cope with the wintry conditions. Contracts will also be in place to enable contractors and farmers to help to clear roads during periods of prolonged snow.

While my Department targets the limited resources available for winter service on the busier main through routes, salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public, on a self help basis, on other routes adopted or maintained by my department, which do not qualify for inclusion onto the gritting schedule. Utilising this policy, my Department currently provides approximately 4,800 salt bins and almost 50,000 grit piles on public roads.

In addition, my Department has arrangements with all local councils across the north to salt city and town centre footways during times of prolonged ice and snow, and these councils will be contacted to ensure continuity of this service for the incoming winter season should conditions dictate.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he intends to publish his Department's Greenway strategy.
(AQW 3237/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I intend to publish my Strategic Plan for Greenways later this month. This plan will provide a framework to assist both central and local government to develop local schemes as part of a greenway network for the entire region.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline Northern Ireland Railway's plans to increase passenger numbers for the future.
(AQW 3260/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways has developed a Network Utilisation Plan aligned with the Departmental Strategy. Within the document, NI Railways has outlined future proposals for growth including increased fleet and investment in infrastructure all of which will be subject to the availability of the necessary funding.

In the short term, NI Railways continue to maximise passenger growth through commercial initiatives including promotions and innovative use of technology. Passenger journeys have increased by 75% in the past 10 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many passengers used Northern Ireland Railways over the last three years.
(AQW 3261/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink does not monitor the number of passengers using its services but rather it records the number of passenger journeys.

The number of passenger journeys undertaken on Northern Ireland Railways over the last three years is detailed in the NITHC Annual Report & Accounts which is available in the Assembly Library.

To assist the member the figures reported in the Annual Accounts are as follows:

- 2016: 13.5m
- 2015: 13.4m
- 2014: 12.5m

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans does Northern Ireland Railways have to extend train timetables and journeys.
(AQW 3262/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Any additional services or extension to the operational day would be subject to demand and securing the necessary additional revenue subsidy required to support any expansion of services.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of train stations.
(AQW 3263/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways has 54 locations including train stations and halts.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the staff training programmes run by Northern Ireland Railways.
(AQW 3264/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways staff training programmes vary in content and duration depending upon the role the member of staff is employed to perform. The content can differ significantly from staff employed to undertake customer service/revenue collection duties through to more technical roles such as a conductor, train driver, signaller, signalling technician, mechanical engineer, etc. All new employees attend a 1 day induction course, followed by a detailed job specific training and assessment programme.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Cullybackey Park and Ride facility.
(AQW 3277/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink has commenced work towards the construction of a Park and Ride facility at Cullybackey Railway Station.

A detailed design review and risk assessment had raised concern that additional traffic introduced by the Park and Ride facility, could potentially cause blocking over the automatic crossing. This assessment, combined with increased crossing incidents, has led Translink to conclude that the level crossing at Cullybackey Station should be upgraded, before the Park and Ride project is commissioned. The crossing upgrade involves significant railway signalling alteration works which could take some time to complete.

Translink has however considered ways of improving the position in the short term. Translink has received the draft report of a recent independent safety assessment carried out to assess the likely impact of opening a limited Park and Ride adjacent to Cullybackey Level Crossing. The report is positive and Translink is currently developing a plan for the Cullybackey Park and Ride, to be issued by October.

I have asked Translink to keep me informed of developments.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the assessment his Department has undertaken on the impact of a ducted propeller ferry vessel on Carlingford Lough in the Greencastle area.

(AQW 3279/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As part of the transfer of planning functions in April 2015, the planning application for construction of a ferry terminal and ancillary development at Greencastle to allow operation of a vehicular ferry across the mouth of Carlingford Lough transferred to Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NM&DDC - application reference P/2013/0434/F). The terminal was granted planning approval by the Council in June 2015. The assessment of the application including matters such as the impact of a ducted propeller ferry would be a matter for Council to consider as part of the processing of the planning application.

I would advise that any questions you have about the assessments undertaken for the application should be raised directly with Mr Liam Hannaway the Chief Executive of Newry Mourne and Down District Council. Mr Hannaway can be contacted at:

Downshire Civic Centre, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick, BT30 6GQ

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he can confirm that explosives will not be permitted to be used during the construction of the terminal for the proposed ferry service from Greencastle to Greenore.

(AQW 3289/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As part of the transfer of planning functions in April 2015, the planning application for construction of a ferry terminal and ancillary development at Greencastle to allow operation of a vehicular ferry across the mouth of Carlingford Lough transferred to Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NM&DDC - application reference P/2013/0434/F). The terminal was granted planning approval by the Council in June 2015. The assessment of the application including matters such as the use of explosives during the construction phase would be a matter for Council to consider.

I would advise therefore that any questions you have about the use of explosives during construction of the terminal should be raised directly with Mr Liam Hannaway, the Chief Executive of Newry Mourne and Down District Council. Mr Hannaway can be contacted at:

Downshire Civic Centre, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick, BT30 6GQ

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has commissioned any studies into the long term strategic plan for the Belfast to Dublin railway line.

(AQW 3321/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I plan to carry out a feasibility study on the enhancement of the Enterprise service within the period of this mandate, subject to the necessary funding being available. Such a study would have to be prepared in partnership with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Irish Rail.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has an up-to-date policy on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles within local airspace.

(AQW 3328/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Authority for policy and regulation of aviation services in the north of Ireland is a reserved matter and rests with the Department for Transport and the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), as its agent. The CAA is the statutory corporation which oversees and regulates all aspects of civil aviation in Britain and the north of Ireland, including the use of unmanned aerial aircraft (more popularly known as drones).

Should my Department be made aware of any alleged breach of policy in relation to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, my officials will liaise with the appropriate authority to enable effective investigation.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will implement the recommendation of the A6 Toome-Castledawson Inquiry with regards funding for professional support for persons facing compulsory acquisition, in particular in relation to the A5 Western Transport Corridor inquiry.

(AQW 3329/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The issue of providing financial or other assistance for objectors to assist in lodging their objections to a road scheme is regularly raised and indeed was raised by the Human Rights Commissioner during the last A5 Inquiry. While my Department would have the discretion to provide such assistance the costs would be uncontrollable, inquiries would be prolonged and more difficult to manage. It is also the case that my Department, on behalf of the public, expends significant resources before deciding on the route of any new road. Having spent such public funds developing road proposals, for the

greater good, it would be inappropriate to provide financial or other assistance to objectors to develop arguments against the same road proposals. My Department's long established policy, which is in line with the policy in England, Scotland and Wales, is that costs of professional representation incurred by an objector will only be awarded in favour of the objector when the Department accepts a recommendation by an Inspector at a public inquiry to remove the threat of compulsory purchase from that objector's land.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 52344/11-16, whether he will launch an investigation into these circumstances to ascertain; (i) why DVA granted a taxi-operator licence on terms differing from other applications; (ii) why the standard requirement of regulation compliance was waived on this occasion; (iii) on how many other taxi-operator applications has there been a waiving of application rules; (iv) what criteria or specific circumstances DVA can take on board when deciding to waive application rules; and (v) what legislation exists covering discretion in these instances.

(AQW 3339/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A Taxi Operator Licence is only granted to an applicant when all application requirements have been met. I am satisfied that a Taxi Operator Licence was correctly granted to UBER, as they fully met the requirements of the application process.

All operator licences are granted subject to the following conditions. A Licensed Taxi Operator must:

- comply with all regulatory requirements contained within the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 and the Taxi Operators Licensing Regulations 2012;
- comply with relevant health and safety legislation;
- continue to comply with the 'fit and proper' criteria and comply with the instructions as listed in the Taxi Operator Handbook.

As is the case with all licence holders, UBER will be required to fully comply with all relevant legislative requirements.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans his Department has to create a train stop at the George Best City Airport.

(AQW 3349/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have started preparations for the development of a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. The plan will provide an opportunity to consider the roles that private cars, trains, buses and taxis can play in connecting George Best Belfast City Airport and Belfast International Airport.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure when will the commencement order for Review of Old Mineral Permissions be issued.

(AQW 3359/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The provisions for the review of old mineral permissions (ROMPs) in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 were carried forward from the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and have not been commenced.

At this point in time I have made no decision on the commencement of ROMPs provisions. I have instructed my officials to undertake a priority review of the issues surrounding old mineral permissions and will decide the way forward following consideration of this work.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the difference between a PSV test and a MOT test for a vehicle.

(AQW 3378/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The motor vehicle test, known as the MOT, is focused on general vehicle roadworthiness and includes elements such as brakes, steering, suspension, wheels and tyres, body work and chassis, visibility, lighting and electrical systems, seatbelts and safety equipment, exhaust and emissions.

The public service vehicle (PSV) test includes general vehicle roadworthiness but, in addition, also covers other passenger related elements such as access and egress, steps, seating, comfort, communication, plates and signs, fire extinguishers, and accessibility features and taximeters, as required.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what a meter test involves for taxi meters.

(AQW 3379/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Taximeter tests are conducted by vehicle examiners working in the Department's Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA).

A vehicle examiner will first ensure that there are no obvious vehicle defects and that the vehicle has been presented with an approved and suitably installed taximeter, printer and fare programme, before the commencement of the road test.

The road test involves the vehicle being driven around a predetermined test route where the taximeter fare programme charges are confirmed at two distance marker points. At the end of the road test the examiner will check the taximeter programme waiting time and the related fare charge before printing a technical report and customer receipt.

Details from the technical report are then recorded on the taximeter test verification plaque, which is affixed to the vehicle. The taximeter is then sealed to the vehicle, and the fare programme is sealed in the taximeter to prevent tampering.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure what action his Department is taking to ensure that any taxi roof signs or fares meters reported as stolen cannot be resold or used illegally.
(AQW 3380/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The PSNI has responsibility for investigating the handling of stolen goods. Should the use of stolen taxi roof signs or taximeters be suspected by or brought to the attention of DVA, my officials will engage directly with PSNI and support them in their investigations.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) all taxi meters to be fitted will be compliant with the Measuring Instruments Directive (MID) (European directive 2004/22/EC); and (ii) all meter types are approved by the National Measurements Office.

(AQW 3382/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department ensures that all taximeters presented for approval and subsequent use in licensed taxis are compliant with the European Directive 2004/22/EC (The Measuring Instruments Directive). Documentary evidence confirming the taximeter's compliance with this Directive may be provided by the National Measurements Office, or by other recognised Notified Bodies.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the roads not yet adopted by his Department in South Antrim, broken down by town.

(AQW 3428/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The following bonded Private Streets in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough have not yet been adopted by my Department.

Antrim Area:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ■ Millmount, Randalstown | ■ Linen Green, Antrim |
| ■ Castle Road, Randalstown | ■ Bushforde, Antrim |
| ■ Birchdale, Randalstown | ■ Windrush, Antrim |
| ■ Castle Avenue, Randalstown | ■ Laurelvale, Crumlin |
| ■ Shanes Terrace, Randalstown | ■ St John's Close, Crumlin |
| ■ Tresna Park, Randalstown | ■ Shelling Grange, Crumlin |
| ■ Millhouse Village, Antrim | ■ Portmore Hall, Crumlin |
| ■ Bush Manor, Antrim | ■ St Joseph's Court, Crumlin |
| ■ Lamonts Mill, Riverside, Antrim | ■ Red Row, Toomebridge |
| ■ Ballygore Road, Antrim | ■ Main Street, Parkgate |
| ■ Bush Road, Antrim | ■ Lands SW of Nutts Corner Roundabout |
| ■ Coyle Court, Antrim | ■ Lylehill Road, Templepatrick |
| ■ Grange Manor, Antrim | |

Newtownabbey:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ Hollybrook Hill, Hightown Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Glenavna, Shore Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Blackrock, Hydepark Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Glenview Avenue, glenville Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Glen Corr, Ballyclare Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Jubilee Drive, Ballyrobert Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Fairhill Crescent, Newtownabbey | ■ Foxtan, Ballycraig Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Deerfin Park, Newtownabbey (Site A) | ■ Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Deerfin Park, Newtownabbey (Site B) | ■ Clarke Lodge Mews, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Upper Hightown Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Dillons Avenue, Shore Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Abbey Retail Park, Newtownabbey | ■ Blackrock, Hydepark Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Arthur Crescent, Newtownabbey | ■ Glebecoole Park, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Glenview, Newtownabbey | ■ Greenacre Mews, Glebe Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Russell Court, Doagh Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Doagh Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Orwood Mews, Glebecoole Park, Newtownabbey | ■ Glebe Road East, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Glenville Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Fairview Court, Knockview Road, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Belfry View, Doagh Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Rathcoole Gardens, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Carnbank, Antrim Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Craiglands Drive, Newtownabbey |
| ■ Rogan Wood, Antrim Road, Newtownabbey | ■ Glenavna, Shore Road, Newtownabbey |

- Feldon Gardens, Mill Road, Newtownabbey
- Sealstown Road, Newtownabbey
- Fairview Court, Knockview Road, Newtownabbey
- Ballyduff Road, Newtownabbey
- Hydepark Road, Newtownabbey
- Jubilee Hall, Mill Road, Doagh
- Hillhead Road, Ballyclare
- Parkgate Road, Ballyclare
- The Longshot, Ballyclare
- Craighill Park, Ballyeaston Road, Ballyclare
- Ross's Lane, Ballyclare
- Craighill Park, Ballyeaston Road, Ballyclare
- Willendale, Doagh Road, Ballyclare
- Upper Gateside Grove, Victoria Road, Ballyclare
- Readers Park, Rashee Road, Ballyclare
- Riverhill Manor, Ballynure Road, Ballyclare
- Blackrock Boulevard, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Aylesbury Place, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Blackrock Grove, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Dermont Crescent, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Blackrock Square, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Blackrock Park Avenue, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Aylesbury, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Blackrock Lane, Hydepark Road, Mallusk
- Glenview Park, Glenville Road, Whiteabbey
- The Old Mill, Glenville Road, Whiteabbey
- Abbeycroft Road, Upper Glenville Road, Whiteabbey
- Glenview, Glenville Road, Whiteabbey
- Abbeycroft Road, Glenville Road, Whiteabbey
- Shore Road, Jordanstown
- Mount Pleasant Road, Jordanstown
- Mount Pleasant View, Jordanstown
- Meadowbank Farm, Jordanstown
- Woodfield, Mountpleasnat Road, Jordanstown
- Loughmoney Park, Rathcoole
- Ellisfield Mews, Main Street, Straid
- The Old Stables, Ballyrobert Road, Ballyrobert
- Ards Drive, Monkstown
- Gullivers Lane, Main Street, Ballynure
- Sandymount Green, Antrim Road, Glengormley

I trust you find this information helpful.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of times weeds have been treated during 2015 and 2016 in (i) Taghnevan; and (ii) Shankill, in Lurgan.

(AQW 3431/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: No weed treatment was carried out by TransportNI during 2015 due to financial restrictions, however, the treatment of weeds in 2016 started in July, with weeds in Taghnevan being treated on 6 September 2016 and weeds in the Shankill area treated on 21 September 2016.

Further targeted weed treatment will be carried out in the area as required.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline why there is no air transport strategy; and (ii) whether he has any plans to develop one.

(AQW 3437/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Aviation is a reserved matter therefore my Department does not have the power to produce a separate regional aviation strategy for our airports. I therefore have no current plans to develop such a strategy for the north of Ireland.

The Aviation Policy Framework (APF) which was published in 2013 is the overarching policy document for aviation within the UK. The Department for Transport (DfT) is currently reviewing the APF. The refreshed framework will provide strategic advice and guidance for the UK aviation sector and cover areas such as airports, safety, security, competitiveness, consumers, regulations and international aviation practices. As part of the consultation process for reviewing the APF, DfT have committed to engage fully with my Department to ensure that recognition and addressing of regional issues is appropriately considered within the new document.

DfT has indicated the intention to publish a revised framework in 2018.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what work is planned to increase the car parking provision at (i) Ballymena; and (ii) Cullybackey train stations.

(AQW 3455/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are currently no options to expand customer parking facilities at Ballymena Station due to the constrained nature of the site. Additional Park and Ride spaces will however be assessed by Translink as part of any future plans to develop Ballymena Bus & Train Station.

Translink has commenced work towards the construction of a Park and Ride facility at Cullybackey Railway Station.

A detailed design review and risk assessment had raised concern that additional traffic introduced by the Park and Ride facility, could potentially cause blocking over the automatic crossing. This assessment, combined with increased crossing incidents, has led Translink to conclude that the level crossing at Cullybackey Station should be upgraded, before the Park and Ride project is commissioned. The crossing upgrade involves significant railway signalling alteration works which could take some time to complete.

Translink has however considered ways of improving the position in the short term. Translink has received the draft report of a recent independent safety assessment carried out to assess the likely impact of opening a limited Park and Ride adjacent to Cullybackey Level Crossing. The report is positive and Translink is currently developing a plan for the Cullybackey Park and Ride, to be issued by October.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the future bus routes being considering by Translink.
(AQW 3459/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink continually monitor all bus routes to identify opportunities for providing additional services where demand is growing. This includes the addition of seasonal changes that occur in line with demand.

An example of this within North Down was the introduction of new direct summer services between Bangor and Newcastle operating daily (Wednesdays to Sundays) during the summer months. In September, additional services were introduced on Sundays for those routes operating between Bangor and Donaghadee and between Bangor and the Ulster Hospital.

Further to this, Translink are currently planning the implementation of Belfast Rapid Transit and this will provide a major change to the bus services that operate along routes in East and West Belfast.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure when the current carriage way at William Street, Donaghadee was constructed.
(AQW 3460/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I must advise the Member that my Department does not hold historical information of this nature as the current carriageway at William Street, Donaghadee was constructed prior to the reorganisation of local government in 1973.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 52344/11-16, to outline (i) if compliance has since been met and if not what action has or will be taken; (ii) how many enforcement checks have been carried out since the operator licence was issued; and (iii) whether a special agreement was reached or an exception was made in relation to this particular operator.
(AQW 3461/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Taxi apps are used by a number of licensed taxi operators to facilitate customers to make a taxi booking through an operating centre. There is no offence associated with using a taxi app but there is an offence for failing to keep prescribed records at an operating centre. The Taxi Operators Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 prescribe the particulars of a taxi booking that must be recorded although they do not specify a format in which records must be kept. The Department is satisfied that the electronic capture of booking information using a taxi app is acceptable.

To ensure record keeping requirements are being adhered to, DVA is committed to carrying out compliance checks at all commercial operating centres within 12 months of a Taxi Operator Licence being granted. There has been no enforcement checks carried out on Uber's booking records to date, however, a compliance visit at their operating centre has been scheduled in line with the above arrangements. Enforcement action will be taken where it is determined that compliance with record keeping requirements has not been adhered to.

No special agreement or exception has been made in relation to this operator.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure in reference to his speech during Assembly Question Time on 19 September 2016 where he stated that he had also been aware that rumours are being spread among taxi operators and drivers that the requirement to have an approved meter and printer is being scrapped (i) to outline when and how was he made aware of this; and (ii) for his assessment of whether the continual shifting of the enforcement commencement date contributed to a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of pending regulations.
(AQW 3462/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have been made aware of rumours that the taximeter requirements were being dropped both directly by members of the taxi industry and by officials, who are in regular contact with taxi operators and drivers.

The enforcement date for taximeters and printers has not continually shifted. The regulations requiring all Class A and Class B taxis to have an approved taximeter and printer fitted, tested and sealed came into effect on 31 May 2016. However, following representations from the taxi industry, concerned about the lead-in time for the new requirements, the former DOE Minister decided to defer full enforcement until 1 October 2016.

The industry has been advised of the requirements regarding taximeters and printers on a number of occasions this year through letters and emails to taxi drivers and taxi operators. The position was made clear, yet despite the advice and reminders, there is still a significant proportion of the industry unprepared.

On 20 September 2016 I announced that the legislation requiring taxis to have an approved meter and printer installed would be enforced from the 1 October 2016. However, in recognition of the concerns expressed by the industry about achieving this timescale, I have instructed DVA enforcement officers to take a light touch to enforcement at the roadside provided the driver can prove they have booked a test prior to 1 October 2016, even if the test date is not until later in the year.

I believe that by taking this decision I am giving yet again an opportunity to those drivers who have ignored previous advice to show evidence of their intention to become compliant by 1 October 2016.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to give consideration to permitting all taxis to make use of the bus lanes in Belfast.

(AQW 3482/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department commissioned a survey into the use of bus lanes in Belfast to help inform a decision on future access permissions for taxis. Three routes with bus lanes were surveyed to provide up-to-date information on bus journey times and how these routes are being used by all modes of traffic.,

The survey work was completed at the end of May and my Department received a copy of the study report at the beginning of July 2016. I am currently considering the report's findings and the potential impact of any change to the current taxi access arrangements on all bus lane users. I will decide which classes of taxi will be permitted access to bus lanes in due course.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will extend free travel on public transport to people that are partially sighted and to the aides that travel with them, as is the arrangement in parts of England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 3487/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am sympathetic to your call for a change to provide free travel for those who are partially sighted and for their aides similar to the arrangement in parts of England, Scotland and Wales. However, the position is that the concessionary fares budget remains under pressure and there is currently no provision within the budget to support any further extension of the scheme.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the locations in South Antrim where the car tax evasion vehicle is deployed; and (ii) the detection and prosecution rates for each location.

(AQW 3503/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) manages two Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) mobile camera units in the north of Ireland, on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea and under the terms of an Agency Agreement. The cameras are routinely deployed in or in the vicinity of all main postal towns or associated arterial routes on a rolling basis and taking cognisance of local circumstances and road safety conditions. The actual location for the camera setup on any particular road is determined by the ANPR operators on the day, taking account of local factors in place.

The locations in South Antrim are detailed below.

- A6 – Randalstown
- A6 – Templepatrick
- A26 – Nutts Corner
- A26 - Antrim

My Department does not hold information about the detection and prosecution rates arising from ANPR camera detections. The data from the cameras is forwarded directly to DVLA for upload onto their computer systems. This would fall within DVLA's remit.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the current weed spraying and grass cutting programme in South Antrim; and (ii) to detail the provisional programme for 2017-18.

(AQW 3504/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to announce that a full weed spraying programme has been completed in the Antrim and Newtownabbey area, and that the contractor is now in the process of treating remedial sites as directed by the local TransportNI Section Office.

I am also pleased to advise that we are in the process of completing a full grass cutting programme this year within Antrim and Newtownabbey which encompasses two rural and five urban cuts. The rural grass cut is almost complete and we will commence the fifth and final urban cut starting mid October.

In relation to similar work in 2017-18, I will discuss with Executive colleagues the requirements for resource funding to meet service delivery demands. These discussions are ongoing as part of the Programme for Government so I am currently unable to confirm service delivery levels for next year.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure , following several recent road fatalities in both Foyle and across Northern Ireland, to outline what his Department is doing to increase road safety awareness.

(AQW 3542/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department continues to take a range of actions to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads. These activities do not target specific geographies; rather they are designed to target the most at-risk cohorts of the entire population and the biggest killer behaviours on our roads.

I am also taking steps to implement the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act (NI) 2016 which makes provision for a new drink driving regime and a new Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Scheme. I am confident that, with the continued support of my road safety partners, phased implementation of the new drink drive regime will commence later this year. Informal engagement with key stakeholders on GDL has begun and a public consultation is expected to issue in 2017 with subordinate legislation to follow thereafter.

My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of rolling road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

Through its current portfolio of awareness campaigns, my Department focuses on problem areas, such as drink driving, speeding, carelessness and inattention, including mobile phone use while driving; and on groups which are over-represented in the casualty figures across the north of Ireland.

My Department also continues to provide a range of resources and schemes to be used by teachers in schools to allow them to improve road safety behaviours in children and young people.

Since April 2010 grant funding of over £760,000 has been awarded to 98 projects through the Road Safety Grant Scheme.

This year, nine projects have been awarded funding which will be delivered both locally and across the north as a whole.

I will continue to work with my Executive colleagues, the PSNI, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Ambulance Service and with other agencies and stakeholders to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries.

I recognise the continuing challenges of preventing casualties and as such my Department will continue to address the issues through various activities.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) any considerations his Department has given to introducing an hourly Enterprise Service between Belfast and Dublin; and (ii) how many additional trains are required to meet such a proposal.

(AQW 3617/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann have had discussions about introducing an enhanced frequency on the Belfast - Dublin rail corridor. It was recently agreed to protect the hourly train paths between the two cities.
- (ii) To introduce an hourly service, with no significant change to journey time between Belfast and Dublin, would require capital grant to purchase 3 additional Enterprise train sets. This would also require significant increased revenue subsidy to cover the associated operational costs for both companies.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why his Department has given its consent to a proposal to permit lorries of up to 16 tonnes to use Greencastle Pier Road, Kilkeel.

(AQW 3618/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI was consulted by Newry Mourne & Down District Council on the 15 October 2015 regarding an application to vary a number of conditions associated with a previous Planning Approval to provide a ferry service from Greencastle to Greenore.

One of these conditions restricted the ferry and associated car parking facilities from accommodating vehicles over 3.5 tonnes and the new planning application sought to remove this restriction.

Council subsequently agreed to replace the 3.5 tonne restriction with one which excluded Ordinary Goods Vehicles Class 2 from using the ferry service and associated car parking facilities.

While this restriction applies specifically to the ferry service and car park I can confirm that Greencastle Pier Road remains unrestricted as has always been the case before the Ferry Service Planning Approval was granted.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans there are to resurface Hunters Lane, Donaghadee.

(AQW 3630/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has a programmed scheme to resurface Hunters Lane, Donaghadee with preliminary drainage investigation having already been carried out. The preparatory works and final resurfacing are due to commence on 3 October 2016 with the work taking approximately 4 weeks to complete.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans to improve safety on the railway network following recent incidents of trespassing onto railway lines.

(AQW 3676/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Maintaining safety on the rail network here is the direct responsibility of Translink and my Department, as Rail Safety Authority, oversees this key area. Translink continually reviews information relating to trespass across the network which includes reviewing infrastructure and making alterations such as additional fencing or handrails. It is also important

for Translink to educate the public in the seriousness of trespass, its dangers and possible consequences. Translink do this through their publicity campaigns which more recently involved the release of video footage of an incident in Downhill, where although no-one was seriously hurt, the outcome could have been very different. Translink also carry out considerable work in the community with youth groups and schools. Where sufficient evidence can be obtained and it is considered to be in the public interest, Translink have a policy to prosecute trespass.

While it is essential to have an accessible rail network here, railway lines remain a dangerous place for pedestrians, and I encourage everyone to respect the safety and security of the rail line.

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much has been spent on hospitality by his Department since May 2016; and to provide a breakdown.

(AQW 3699/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The amount spent by my Department on hospitality since May 2016 is £3,716. No further breakdown is available.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding available for an informal crossing point with a pedestrian island at Scotch Quarter, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 3712/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Funding for minor traffic management works, such as pedestrian crossing islands, is allocated as part of the overall Traffic Management budget for a council area. Unfortunately the allocation for Mid and East Antrim this financial year is fully committed.

However, I am pleased to advise that the provision of an informal crossing point, with a pedestrian island at Scotch Quarter, Carrickfergus will be considered for inclusion in a future programme.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given the Critical Incident categorisation by PSNI due to an acute shortage of Public Protection Unit personnel in the Western District, what assurances she can give that agencies her Department, which work in conjunction with this unit, will remain functional and that public safety is not compromised.

(AQW 2793/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): The staffing of PSNI Public Protection Units across Northern Ireland is of course a matter for the Chief Constable. I am satisfied that the PSNI are working to ensure that operational capability in the Western District is maintained. Other relevant agencies, operating within the Public Protection Arrangements framework, continue to work in close cooperation with PSNI on assessing and managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in that District.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 31/16-21, (i) to provide the Terms of Reference for the Serious Further Offence Review; (ii) who carried out the Review; and (iii) to place a copy of the report in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 2795/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Serious Further Offences Review was completed by an Assistant Director of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. As a standard pro forma template is used in this type of review, there were no Terms of Reference.

The completed Serious Further Offences Review in this case contains sensitive and personal data about an individual or individuals (including victims), that would or might lead to the identification of those individuals. Accordingly, in accordance with the Data protection Act 1998, it is not appropriate to place a copy of these reports into the Assembly library.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to bring forward a voluntary exit scheme for prison officers.

(AQW 2896/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has recently completed a Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) which was open to staff across the NICS including Prison Officers. A number of officers availed of this scheme to leave the Service. There are currently no plans to offer a further Scheme specifically for Prisoner Officers.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2110/16-21, how this answer applies given that Serious Case Reviews are published.

(AQW 2937/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The reports on Serious Further Offence reviews, produced by Probation Board for Northern Ireland, contain sensitive and personal information about individuals, including the victims of crime. As previously advised, to publish copies of the reports could lead to the identification of these individuals, and breach their rights under the Data Protection Act 1988.

Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) produce reports on Serious Case Reviews. Whilst the executive summary of a Serious Case Review report is published, it is only after the particular case has been fully exhausted through the Courts. PPANI advise, by this time information on the individuals involved, is already in the public domain.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to define misogyny as a hate crime.
(AQW 2938/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am aware that a police force in England has categorised misogyny as a hate crime and that other forces are considering taking similar action.

The current approach to tackling hate crime in Northern Ireland is formed around the groups detailed in the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, namely religious belief, sexual orientation, disability, colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origins.

I have no plans to define misogyny as one of the monitored hate crime categories in Northern Ireland. While I have no doubt that there are crimes which are motivated by misogyny, I am satisfied that, in terms of providing support and services, the "Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland" Strategy provides adequate strategic and policy direction.

My Department chairs a multi-agency Hate Crime Delivery Group, which takes forward actions relating to hate crime arising from the Executive's Community Safety Strategy. This Group considers, amongst other areas, the application of the current hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland and will monitor the developments in England in this context.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of young people in juvenile justice centres that have been diagnosed with acquired brain injury.
(AQW 2951/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre does not keep specific statistics on young people within the Centre who have a formal diagnosis of Acquired Brain Injury.

There will be some young people in Woodlands who have presented on committal with a range of cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioural issues and who may have an Acquired Brain Injury diagnosis established prior to admission.

Support services for such young people are managed on individual plans by health and social care practitioners in Woodlands or through referral to relevant agencies which include the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team based in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre and the visiting Child Psychiatrist.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice whether she will conduct a review of the pilot scheme that provided domestic violence support in PSNI stations.
(AQW 2968/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The decision to develop and place a domestic violence support worker on a pilot basis within Lisburn and Castlereagh PSNI stations was an operational matter for the Chief Constable who has complete operational autonomy. Therefore it is not appropriate for me to conduct a review of the scheme. I am however, interested in this area and have asked for further information.

I understand that the Domestic Violence Liaison Worker Pilot Project commenced on 1 July 2014 and was jointly funded by Lisburn Policing and Community Safety Partnership, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (Supporting People Programme).

The project aimed to support PSNI's performance in dealing with victims of domestic/sexual violence, facilitate immediate and ongoing support for victims and provide signposting to other statutory and support services. Whilst the Pilot ended in June 2015, Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP, with the support of PSNI, has continued to fund the post.

I am advised that Lisburn and Castlereagh PCSP commissioned a desk-based review of the project earlier this year and that they have recently agreed to continue funding for the support worker post until 31 March 2017.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice what impact Brexit will have on north-south criminal justice co-operation.
(AQW 2975/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Building upon the existing north-south criminal justice cooperation is crucial to ensuring the best possible outcomes from any future Brexit negotiations and protecting the safety of the citizens of the island. My Department has excellent working relationships with representatives of the Irish Government. Brexit will, however, present challenges and the need to maintain close effective cooperation in the justice field is more important now than ever. I am particularly committed to maintaining the European Arrest Warrant and other EU mechanisms which support cross border criminal processes and information sharing. I will be working to achieve this with the Tánaiste for example through the Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice structures. We will also be working closely with the Westminster Government to ensure that the particular position of Northern Ireland in sharing a land border with Ireland is fully reflected in UK Brexit negotiations both in regard to criminal justice matters and more generally.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of whether the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 is adequate to protect and safeguard victims of stalking in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2991/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 provides a range of powers which are available to protect and safeguard victims of stalking in Northern Ireland.

The Order provides for the offences of harassment (with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment) and causing another person to fear violence (with a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment). It also enables a victim of harassment to seek an injunction or restraining order to prevent further harassment. Breach of an injunction or restraining order carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment.

I am, however, committed to ensuring that the law in this area is fully fit for purpose. As I announced during the debate in the House on 12 September, I have already asked my officials to review the operation of current law and also

the experience in England and Wales and Scotland where specific stalking offences exist.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice what action will be taken by her Department following the motion on stalking debated in the Assembly on 13 September 2016.

(AQW 2992/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 provides a range of powers which are available to protect and safeguard victims of stalking in Northern Ireland.

The Order provides for the offences of harassment (with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment) and causing another person to fear violence (with a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment). It also enables a victim of harassment to seek an injunction or restraining order to prevent further harassment. Breach of an injunction or restraining order carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment.

I am, however, committed to ensuring that the law in this area is fully fit for purpose. As I announced during the debate in the House on 12 September, I have already asked my officials to review the operation of current law and also

the experience in England and Wales and Scotland where specific stalking offences exist.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice whether she will encourage the Courts and Tribunal Service to include Strabane courthouse on its listings of venues for judicial review.

(AQW 2994/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The development of the County Court calendar began prior to the initiation of judicial review proceedings, and in consultation with the judiciary to meet business demand and maximise the use of judicial and administrative resources.

The judicial review remains distinct from this procedure, however, in response to the legal proceedings the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service have sought judicial approval to reinstate an appeal day in Strabane from November and each alternate month thereafter.

The amended calendar will issue imminently. Court calendars are subject to change at the direction of the County Court Judge to reflect business demands.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice how many organisations and arm's-length bodies in her departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and how an established recruitment agency is considered for inclusion on this list.

(AQW 3008/16-21)

Ms Sugden: All the organisations and arm's length bodies within my remit, that are listed on the List of Participating Bodies for CPD Collaborative Frameworks (<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/list-public-bodies-which-can-participate-cpd-collaborative-frameworks>), have access to the current NICS Temporary Worker contract to source their Temporary/Agency worker requirements.

This contract was set up through an open tendering competition run by The Department of Finance Central Procurement Directorate (CPD).

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what discussions have been held with Probation Service NI, Public Protection Arrangements NI and the PSNI on the placements of offenders and people remanded on bail that have been charged with offences, in non-offender registered hostels; and to list the dates of these meetings.

(AQW 3010/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The management of offenders is the operational responsibility of PBNI and PSNI and they have complete operational autonomy. It would be inappropriate of me to interfere on such matters and as a result I have not held discussions with either organisation in matters relating to the accommodation of offenders.

Non-approved hostels, known as direct access hostels, are run by the voluntary and community sector. In the event of Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) making a referral to a direct access hostel, PBNI will share background information on the offender, including offending history, with the hostel. This is done on a case by case basis.

If an offender is not subject to statutory supervision by PBNI, the matter of accommodation, including bail addresses, is the responsibility of the Police Service for Northern Ireland.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review into maximum sentences.
(AQW 3091/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Review of Sentencing Policy, which I announced on 9 June, will consider the appropriateness of the legislative framework for a number of categories of crime including the appropriateness of the maximum penalty available for certain offences which may result in death. The Review will also consider the referral of sentences for review on the grounds of undue leniency, and the extent to which current sentencing arrangements meet the objectives of an effective sentencing guidelines mechanism.

Officials are engaging with interested parties and victims' families to help inform policy development on these issues. Given the scope of the Review, this engagement process will continue over the coming months.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many attacks have there been on Orange Halls in each of the last five years; and how many people have been convicted as a result.
(AQW 3118/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Datasets held by my Department currently do not contain information on the location in which offences were committed and there is no offence specific to an attack on an Orange Hall; therefore, it would only be possible to identify convictions resulting from an attack on such buildings through a manual trawl of court records, which would incur a disproportionate cost. Information on the number of attacks on Orange Halls or Apprentice Boys' Halls in each of the last five years is available from statistics produced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. They have been provided here for information.

Attacks on Orange or Apprentice Boys' Halls 2011/12 – 2015/16

Year	Number of Attacks
2011/12	32
2012/13	27
2013/14	40
2014/15	17
2015/16	16

Source: PSNI

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the categorisation of a convicted sex-offender is standard across all relevant agencies, or if each agency can hold a different interpretation of risk.
(AQW 3147/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Relevant offenders referred into the Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI) are categorised following the completion of a standardised dynamic risk assessment tool utilised by all the agencies designated under the PPANI arrangements. The risk assessments are undertaken by assessors trained to an accredited standard in the use of the assessment tool.

The initial categorisation and re-categorisation of risk is made jointly by a multi-Agency Local Area Public Protection Panel. The agencies within the Department with responsibilities under the PPANI arrangements for risk assessment and management, and who may be represented on these Panels, are the Probation Board, Prison Service and Youth Justice Agency.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice which agencies in her Department are responsible for (i) the designation of the categorisation of sex offenders; and (ii) the re-categorisation or downgrading of sex-offenders.
(AQW 3148/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Relevant offenders referred into the Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI) are categorised following the completion of a standardised dynamic risk assessment tool utilised by all the agencies designated under the PPANI arrangements. The risk assessments are undertaken by assessors trained to an accredited standard in the use of the assessment tool.

The initial categorisation and re-categorisation of risk is made jointly by a multi-Agency Local Area Public Protection Panel. The agencies within the Department with responsibilities under the PPANI arrangements for risk assessment and management, and who may be represented on these Panels, are the Probation Board, Prison Service and Youth Justice Agency.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the decision to downgrade the category status of a convicted sex offender can be taken by an individual agency without consultation with other agencies.

(AQW 3242/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Decisions on the re-categorisation of offenders are made by a multi-Agency Local Area Public Protection Panel and not by individual Agencies.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what is the process or procedure for Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland when offenders they manage or monitor in the community fail to co-operate.

(AQW 3243/16-21)

Ms Sugden: An offender whose sentence requirements include statutory supervision, for example on post-release licence or a community Probation Order is subject to statutory sanctions for non-compliance with conditions aimed at minimising their risk to the public. The supervising Probation Officer can initiate a range of enforcement procedures commensurate with the risk posed. Those sanctions include formal warnings, initiating an application for recall to custody from licence or bringing proceedings for breach of community orders before the Court.

Where an offender is not subject to statutory supervision, as part of a current sentence, but has other statutory requirements in relation to sexual offences, for example in relation to notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 or a civil Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO), the PSNI can bring breach proceedings before the Court. If an offender does not currently have a SOPO but PSNI can evidence that an offender's current behaviour raises concern about an increase in the risk of serious sexual harm to the public, PSNI can seek to make an application to the Court for a SOPO to be imposed to prohibit risk-taking behaviour.

The commencement later this year of provisions in the Justice Act Northern Ireland 2015, for a Violent Offences Prevention Order (VOPO), will introduce a similar civil order mechanism of statutory restrictions and court enforcement action for offenders convicted of relevant violent offences who are found to be non-compliant with a VOPO's requirements.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1491/16-21, how many prosecutions were taken in each year; and how many charges under the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (NI) Order 1985 were subsequently dropped.

(AQW 3245/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The most recent five year period for which information in relation to convictions for offences recorded under the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (NI) Order 1985 is available, is 2011 – 2015. In this answer, information in relation to prosecutions and convictions at court in 2010 has also been provided, as, in AQW/1491/16-21, information was provided for the period 2010 – 2014, which was the most recent five year period available at the time.

Prosecutions and Convictions for offences under the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (NI) Order 1985

Year	Defendants Prosecuted	Defendants Convicted	Total Charges withdrawn
2010	17	1	39
2011	14	8	57
2012	2	-	1
2013	2	2	0
2014	6	5	3
2015	3	2	2

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to prosecutions and convictions which included at least one count of the offence specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to prosecutions and convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures for charges withdrawn relate to the prosecutions listed in the table and only include charges which were withdrawn by the prosecution. As a defendant may face multiple charges, they may consequently have more than one charge withdrawn.
- 5 Data are sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset with the exception of prosecution data for 2010 to 2012 and data on charges withdrawn 2010 to 2015 which have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what impact Martin Connolly's call to bring back the IRA has on his membership of Londonderry and Strabane Police and Community Safety Partnership.

(AQW 3248/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am aware that a formal complaint has been made regarding this issue. This is currently the subject of consideration by the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

While the complaint process is ongoing regarding this issue it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice whether she has any further plans to address legal highs.
(AQW 3265/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Psychoactive substances, commonly and misguidedly termed “legal highs” became illegal on 26 May 2016, when the Psychoactive Substances Act came into effect in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The Act makes it an offence to produce, supply or offer to supply any psychoactive substance if the substance is likely to be used for its psychoactive effects, regardless of its potential for harm.

Prior to the commencement of this Act, the PSNI worked with my Department and a range of partner agencies including Belfast City Council, and the Public Health Agency to tackle the issue of psychoactive substances which were being sold over the counter from head shops across Northern Ireland. Under The General Product Safety Regulations 2005, orders were granted against head shop owners as safety and labelling information was deemed to be inadequate. This resulted in the closure of all head shops and a number of successful prosecutions for selling these substances.

I understand that since the introduction of the Psychoactive Substances Act, two people have been charged with possession of new psychoactive substances and files are currently with the PPS. A further two people are currently on pending further investigation, including forensic analysis of the substances seized. The PSNI continue to mount operations to identify, detect and disrupt the sale of new psychoactive substances.

My Department is currently working on initiatives with the PSNI, Councils and other agencies to increase awareness and inform communities of the dangers of taking psychoactive substances.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice to detail any restrictions on the timings of firework displays under current legislation.
(AQW 3270/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 Regulations (as amended) is the current legislation governing the possession, purchase, sale, acquisition and use of fireworks and Regulation 4(1) covers the requirement to have a licence issued by the Department.

Although there is no specific provision in the 2002 Regulations which restricts the timings of firework displays, the Department does have the power under Regulation 6(2) that provides that “A licence under regulation 4(1) shall be in such form and subject to such conditions bearing on health and safety as the Department of Justice may require.”

The Department will not normally approve a licence to allow a display between 11pm and 7am.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice what work she is doing to ensure the Arlene Arkinson inquest proceeds as quickly as possible with full disclosure.
(AQW 3374/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The ongoing inquest is a matter for the Coroner and therefore it would be inappropriate for me to become involved what are judicial proceedings.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail her role in the appointment of David Gordon as Executive press secretary.
(AQW 3385/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The appointment of Mr David Gordon is entirely within the remit of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Whilst I was aware of this I played no active role in the process.

I welcome the appointment of Mr Gordon and look forward to working with him.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice what action her Department is taking in conjunction with key agencies to reduce the level of rural crime.
(AQW 3444/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department’s Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017 contains a commitment to making rural communities safer by reducing opportunities to commit crime. It also highlights my Department’s commitment to supporting the outcomes of the Executive’s Rural White Paper and Action Plan, led by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), to support and sustain rural communities and to deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that will contribute to safer rural communities.

The Rural Crime Partnership, which consists of representatives from my Department, the PSNI, NFU Mutual, the Ulster Farmers’ Union and DAERA, delivers actions taken forward at a strategic level to support safer rural communities.

Complementing the work of my Department’s Organised Crime Task Force, the cross-jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force, whose core membership is drawn from the PSNI, An Garda Síochána, National Crime Agency, Home Office Immigration

Enforcement, HMRC, Irish Revenue Commissioners and UK Border Force, identified rural crime as a priority crime area for the period 4 April to 4 October 2016.

During April 2016, a cross border operation was mounted, which included numerous cross border vehicle checkpoints between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to detect and deter rural crime.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships have delivered a wide range of initiatives to address crimes in their local areas, and my Department will continue to work with key partners in addressing rural crime.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for offences relating to benefit fraud in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 3445/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to benefit fraud may be prosecuted under the Social Security Act 1975, the Child Benefit Act 1975, the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 or the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992.

The most recent five year period for which information in relation to convictions at court for offences relating to benefit fraud is available is 2011 – 2015.

Convictions at court for offences relating to benefit fraud by Court Division, 2011 – 2015

Court Division	Convictions				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	41	47	38	30	36
Ards	55	34	42	31	32
Armagh and South Down	31	43	33	30	20
Belfast	286	279	232	137	99
Craigavon	58	61	41	43	29
Fermanagh and Tyrone	41	42	26	32	30
Londonderry	55	64	54	56	22
Total	567	570	466	359	268

Note:

- 1 Figures relate convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified, whether or not they were the principal offence at conviction.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures include prosecutions brought by PPS on behalf of PSNI and other bodies.
- 5 Data for 2014 - 2015 are sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset while data for 2011 - 2013 have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Justice to outline her plans to downgrade or close courthouses in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

(AQW 3545/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The decision to rationalise the court estate in 2015 did not envisage any reduction in court services at Dungannon courthouse. The original proposal to close Enniskillen courthouse was replaced by a recommendation for re-designation to a court hearing centre. This was implemented with effect from 1 August 2016 however all scheduled court sitting days in Enniskillen remain unchanged.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the backlog in Crown Court cases.

(AQW 3555/16-21)

Ms Sugden: On 31 January 2016 there were 895 active Crown court cases that had not been progressed because either the solicitor or counsel had come off record or the defence has been unable to engage counsel due to the legal aid dispute. As of 9 September 2016 the number of such cases had reduced to 240. NICTS continue to work closely with the Judiciary to manage the disposal of these cases as expeditiously as possible.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding. (AQW 3572/16-21)

Ms Sugden: No bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank and no bids are currently being prepared. Under structural funding, two justice-related projects are part funded (40%) by the European Social Fund and delivered by Extern in partnership with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Details of other justice-related projects receiving non-structural funding are listed below:

EU Funded Projects (Non-Structural)

Project Name	Funding Programme	Organisation Name	Drawdown (€)
DESTRIERO	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	102,579.20*
HOMER	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	706,960*
SLÁNDÁIL	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	42,000*
SECTOR	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	138,776*
EMORE	Rights, Equality and Citizenship	Institute of Conflict Research	37,000*
TENSOR	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	726,125*
MEDIA4SEC	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	81,250*
GAP	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	47,000*
GAP	Horizon 2020	Upskill Enterprise Ltd	115,000*
CONTEXT	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	49,417*
CONTEXT	Horizon 2020	Probation Board for Northern Ireland	47,191*
Peace Training	Horizon 2020	Institute of Conflict Research	101,250*

* The figures represent the amount of drawdown agreed by the Commission, but may differ from the actual drawdown totals due to changes that may arise during the project lifespan.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice how her Department is working to prevent vulnerable young people being drawn into paramilitary activity. (AQW 3590/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) Board is leading work on behalf of the Executive to develop a programme to prevent vulnerable children and young people being drawn into paramilitary activity. My Department will contribute to this programme as appropriate.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice whether the Department of Education is a member of the Tackling Paramilitary Activity Cross Departmental Programme Board. (AQW 3591/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Cross Departmental Programme Board includes representatives from all Executive Departments, including the Department of Education.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review of protocols, practice and legal requirements for engaging with representatives of paramilitary groups. (AQW 3592/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Executive, Policing Board and Chief Constable have agreed to commission such a review. We will be working to agree our approach and terms of reference for the review before appointing a suitable expert to conduct the review.

It should also be noted that the PSNI's Code of Ethics already provides a framework by which to assess grounds for engagement.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to introduce an offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in intimate or familial relationships, similar to section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 in England and Wales. (AQW 3646/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As Minister of Justice I have identified that Domestic Violence and Abuse is a key priority for my tenure.

On 12 September 2016, I announced in the Assembly my intention to introduce a specific offence in Northern Ireland to capture coercive and controlling behaviour. As I mentioned at the time, further work on the shape of the offence is required, therefore I cannot confirm at this stage whether it will mirror the provisions set out in section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 for England and Wales.

I will however ensure that the new offence provides equal protection to victims here in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review of the legislation on serious and organised crime in Northern Ireland that was to commence in July 2016.

(AQW 3720/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Tackling organised crime is a priority for my Department.

Recommendation C2 of the Fresh Start Panel's report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland stated that the Department of Justice should urgently review the legislation relating to serious and organised crime in Northern Ireland to make sure that it is as effective as possible, with a view to introducing draft legislation to the Assembly in the current mandate.

This review is now underway and will draw on and learn from, amongst others, the approaches and experiences in neighbouring jurisdictions in Great Britain and Ireland in order to identify the most effective legislative model for Northern Ireland. Officials are currently scoping existing legislative models.

I expect to be in a position to consult on policy proposals by the end of this financial year in order to determine the appropriate next steps regarding draft legislation.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Easton asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the number of meetings of the Independent Financial Review Panel, since its formation; and (ii) the total cost to the Assembly incurred by each panel member.

(AQW 2787/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Independent Financial Review Panel met 58 times during the period of its tenure from 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2016.

The costs incurred by the Assembly Commission in relation to the fees of each of the Panel Members for the period 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2016 were:

- Mr Patrick McCartan - £42,752.79
- Dr Henrietta Campbell - £24,454.40
- Mr Alan McQuillan - £29,246.64 Independent Financial Review Panel: Cost of Trips Claimed by Members

Mr Easton asked the Assembly Commission to detail the cost of trips claimed for by each member of the Independent Financial Review Panel since its formation.

(AQW 2788/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): During the period of its tenure from 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2016, the Assembly Commission incurred the following costs in relation to trips undertaken by Panel Members:

- Mr Patrick McCartan - £509.18
- Dr Henrietta Campbell - £136.99

No costs were incurred in relation to Mr Alan McQuillan.

Mr Easton asked the Assembly Commission to detail the cost of any hospitality claimed by each member of the Independent Financial Review Panel since its formation.

(AQW 2789/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): During the period of its tenure from 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2016, the Assembly Commission incurred a cost of £535.72 in relation to hospitality for the Independent Financial Review Panel as a body. Figures are not available for individual Panel Members.

Mr Easton asked the Assembly Commission to detail the mileage claimed by each member of the Independent Financial Review Panel, since its formation.

(AQW 2790/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): During the period of its tenure from 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2016, Panel Members claimed mileage costs as follows:

- Mr Patrick McCartan - £1,727.90
- Dr Henrietta Campbell - £1,179.10

- Mr Alan McQuillan - £27.90

Mr Easton asked the Assembly Commission to list the claims made by each member of the Independent Financial Review Panel for phone usage, mailing or taxi usage since its formation.

(AQW 2791/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): During the period of its tenure from 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2016, the Assembly Commission did not incur any costs in relation to phone usage or mailing for Panel Members.

In relation to taxi usage, the Assembly Commission incurred the following costs in relation to Panel Members:

- Mr Patrick McCartan - £42.94
- Dr Henrietta Campbell - £80.00

No costs were incurred in relation to taxi usage for Mr Alan McQuillan.

Lord Morrow asked the Assembly Commission to detail the current sickness absence terms and conditions for Assembly secretariat staff.

(AQW 3012/16-21)

Mr Hussey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Terms and conditions of employment for Secretariat staff (including any payments made to staff who are absent from work due to sickness) are agreed between the Commission and staff representatives.

The terms and conditions for Secretariat staff include an Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) scheme. OSP is payable in addition to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) but the total paid when sick will not exceed normal pay. OSP can continue at the rate of normal pay for 6 months (183 days) during any 12 month period. Thereafter, half pay can be paid subject to a maximum of 12 months (365 days) paid sick absence in any 4-year period.

If an employee exhausts OSP on full pay and half pay and the Commission is satisfied from medical evidence that there is a reasonable prospect of recovery and return to work, a Pensionable Rate of Pay (PROP) may be paid. Payment of PROP is paid at a rate not exceeding the amount of pension (if any) for which an employee would have been qualified if they had been retired on ill-health grounds when normal paid sick absence was exhausted or half pay if that is less. It can be paid (continuously or in broken periods) for up to a maximum of 12 months from the end of the payment of OSP. However, payment of PROP may only be considered provided that Occupational Health Service confirm that an employee is currently unfit for work but that a return to work is anticipated.

Mr Chambers asked the Assembly Commission whether it plans to increase the awareness of the location of the five defibrillators in Parliament Buildings; and for its assessment of whether five defibrillators is adequate for a building of this scale.

(AQW 3087/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission currently has 5 defibrillators in Parliament Buildings and 20 staff are trained to use them. A list of the locations where they are sited is held on Assist and all trained staff are aware of their location. We have also indicated on the noticeboards around the building the location of each defibrillator.

In addition to this, the Assembly has registered the defibrillators with the ambulance service on their website <http://www.nias.hscni.net/our-services/test-2/>

Health & Safety Branch representatives have liaised closely with other Departments and external organisations; the number of defibrillators held at Parliament Buildings is deemed to be adequate and compares satisfactorily with other public buildings.

Consequently, there are currently no plans to increase the number of defibrillators within Parliament Buildings but the situation will be kept under review.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission to outline the steps it will take to ensure that the interruption that occurred to live video and audio streams on 21 September 2016 will not be repeated.

(AQW 3730/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly generates a substantial amount of video and audio content from its Plenary and Committee business, up to 52 hours per week when the Assembly is sitting.

Since increasing the number of live streams available from 2 to 3 in April 2013, the audio outage experienced on 21 September is the first time such a problem has occurred.

The Communications Office has kept this type of occurrence to such a minimum due to the daily monitoring and ongoing checks already in place. Each day the Communications Office allocate the feeds to the live streams, test the streams and

monitor them throughout the day, reporting any issues to the Information Systems Office (ISO) who provide support for the streams internally.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide a 100% guarantee that there will never be any interruption to the live streams. There are multiple points of potential failure in getting the video and audio on the live streams i.e. the 3rd party who provide the streaming bandwidth, the signals for the video and audio come from Assembly Broadcasting and the ISO provide software, hardware and a web link to get the video and audio to the 3rd party supplier. However, every effort is made to manage all elements feeding into the system and ensure as far as possible that disruption to the service is avoided.

The disruption to the live streams on 21 September 2016 were caused by 2 separate issues – firstly, a misconfiguration in the software used to channel the audio to the stream and secondly, an unrelated hardware fault.

The hardware fault has been fixed and the Communications Office will continue to work with colleagues in the ISO to further test and check the configuration of the streams as part of the normal daily checks. They will also look at how the internal hardware and software can be upgraded and what additional contingencies can be put in place to make the live streaming service more resilient.

Throughout the outage the internal TV distribution system - NIATV - was unaffected and users in Parliament Buildings were able to watch and listen to Committee meetings as normal.

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) why the live streams of video and audio of committee meetings were interrupted on the 21 September 2016; and (ii) how long did the interruption last.

(AQW 3731/16-21)

Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) The interruption to the live streams on 21 September 2016 were caused by 2 separate issues – firstly, a misconfiguration in the software used to channel the audio to the stream and secondly, an unrelated hardware fault.

The audio on live stream 3 failed at around 12:00pm on 21 September 2016. At this point live stream 1 and 2 were unaffected. The fault was reported to the Information Systems Office (ISO), who provide support for the streaming services, immediately. They attempted to resolve the issue however during their attempts the audio on streams 1 and 2 were subsequently affected. The ISO advised that we contact our 3rd party streaming providers, however they were only able to confirm that the issue was internal with the feeds being provided by the Assembly. On a second attempt the ISO were successful in resolving the issue and were able to restore the audio to stream 1 and 2 by 2:

- (ii) 30pm. During continuing checks on the hardware undertaken by the Assembly broadcasting team a further fault was discovered which was fixed and the audio to stream 3 restored by 3pm.

Throughout the disruption the Communications Office advised external users via twitter of the status of the problem. We were able to retrieve the audio content from a back-up system in each committee room which allowed us to upload all affected content from the Committee meetings to the niassembly.tv website as quickly as possible, mitigating the inconvenience for users. We were able to do this as meetings were ongoing ensuring all of the audio was made available.

Throughout the outage the internal TV distribution system - NIATV - was unaffected and users in Parliament Buildings were able to watch and listen to Committee meetings as normal.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 7 October 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the Assembly processes followed in introducing the Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (NI) 2016.
(AQW 3275/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): This Order was made under the powers conferred on us by section 23 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 is not subject to scrutiny by the Assembly. The Order will be printed in the annual volume of Statutory Rules.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to which disciplinary code the new Executive press secretary will be subject.
(AQW 3362/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The disciplinary procedure in relation to the Executive Press Secretary is contained within the terms and conditions of the appointment.

Mr Ford asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the job description of the newly appointed press secretary.
(AQW 3392/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The job description of the new Executive press secretary is as follows.

Executive Press Secretary – Job Description

The role of the Executive Press Secretary is to provide trusted and well informed media advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Executive.

The Executive Press Secretary will act as a spokesperson for the FM/dFM providing regular on the record briefings articulating the Ministers' agreed position on the relevant issues as well as promoting their wider vision and key messages.

The individual will also be responsible for developing communications policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic Executive Communications Service.

Main duties will include:

- The provision of strategic advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Executive Ministers and senior officials on all aspects of communications and presentational issues.
- Regularly briefing media on behalf of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ensuring their agreed position, priorities and key messages are accurately communicated to the public and key stakeholders.
- Developing policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic communications service, using insight and evaluation to improve all communications activities ensuring that a strategic and comprehensive approach is taken to all Executive communications.
- Ensuring that all communications activities enhance the profile and reputation of the Executive.
- The provision of practical solutions for managing the reputation of the Executive, ensuring that issues are dealt with quickly and proactively.
- Building and maintaining a strong, strategic, external communications network across a wide range of stakeholders including journalists, commentators and opinion formers, NGO's and the Private Sector to ensure Executive messaging is given appropriate priority.
- Developing influential working relationships with both National Governments and devolved administrations.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the position of Head of the Executive Information Service has been filled; and through what process this position was filled.

(AQW 3394/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Director of Communications and Executive Support role, from which the postholder recently announced his retirement, has not yet been filled as the current postholder will not retire until October 2016.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Age Goods, Facilities and Services legislation.

(AQW 3414/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Public consultation on proposals to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services closed on 8 October 2015. Following finalisation of the policy content of the proposed legislation the options available for bringing this legislation before the Assembly will be considered.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the Racial Equality Strategy.

(AQW 3551/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 was published in December 2015 with an ambitious but achievable programme of proposed actions. One such action is the establishment of the Racial Equality Subgroup. This Subgroup is intended to function as a strong voice within government on issues specifically affecting minority ethnic people, migrants and race relations.

Representatives from the minority ethnic sector have been identified with a view to ensuring representation of the larger ethnic groups (as per the 2011 census) and other groups which may be considered particularly vulnerable (for example, asylum seekers and refugees). We attended the inaugural meeting of the Subgroup which took place on 14 September.

Other key actions include the establishment of Departmental Racial Equality Champions and an associated shared learning forum. This will facilitate a cohesive approach to establishing appropriate ethnic monitoring. These Champions have been identified and will liaise directly with the Subgroup. A meeting of the Racial Equality Champions will be convened shortly.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a comprehensive job description for the Executive press officer.

(AQW 3558/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The job description of the new Executive press secretary is as follows.

Executive Press Secretary – Job Description

The role of the Executive Press Secretary is to provide trusted and well informed media advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Executive.

The Executive Press Secretary will act as a spokesperson for the FM/dFM providing regular on the record briefings articulating the Ministers' agreed position on the relevant issues as well as promoting their wider vision and key messages.

The individual will also be responsible for developing communications policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic Executive Communications Service.

Main duties will include:

- The provision of strategic advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Executive Ministers and senior officials on all aspects of communications and presentational issues.
- Regularly briefing media on behalf of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ensuring their agreed position, priorities and key messages are accurately communicated to the public and key stakeholders.
- Developing policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic communications service, using insight and evaluation to improve all communications activities ensuring that a strategic and comprehensive approach is taken to all Executive communications.
- Ensuring that all communications activities enhance the profile and reputation of the Executive.
- The provision of practical solutions for managing the reputation of the Executive, ensuring that issues are dealt with quickly and proactively.
- Building and maintaining a strong, strategic, external communications network across a wide range of stakeholders including journalists, commentators and opinion formers, NGO's and the Private Sector to ensure Executive messaging is given appropriate priority.
- Developing influential working relationships with both National Governments and devolved administrations.

Mr Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding.

(AQW 3576/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office has not made any bids to the EU Investment Bank and none are currently being prepared.

The PEACE IV Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. The application process is currently ongoing and no projects have yet been awarded funding.

The Executive Office is the accountable department for the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) which is the lead partner for the Victims element of the PEACE IV programme, worth €17.6m.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on introducing legislation on Goods, Facilities and Services.

(AQW 3688/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Public consultation on proposals to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services closed on 8 October 2015. Following finalisation of the policy content of the proposed legislation the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly will be considered.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Executive was not represented alongside the other devolved administrations at the 58th Session of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

(AQW 3841/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: In common with other main UN human rights treaties, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) requires the State Parties to it, including the UK, to make periodic reports detailing how the rights are being implemented. These reports are examined by a body of independent experts- the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). The CESCR considered the Sixth Periodic Report of the UK on the implementation of ICESCR at its 36th and 37th meetings held in Geneva on 15 and 16 June 2016. It is regular practice for the CESCR to examine these Reports in the presence of officials from the reporting State.

The Ministry of Justice had coordinated the reporting process on behalf of the UK State Party, and the UK's written response forwarded to the UN did not contain input specific to the Northern Ireland Executive.

Whilst a decision was not taken on this occasion to send a specific representative from the Executive to Geneva to take part in the oral examination of the UK's sixth Periodic Report, we are committed to engaging actively with the reporting process in the future, to promote the many positive actions here and ensure the good work being taken forward to protect human rights is reported back to the United Nations.

Mr Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an up to date Executive Office departmental organisation chart.

(AQW 3904/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: An up to date departmental organisation chart is available on the Executive Office website at: www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/departmental-organisation-chart

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their commitment to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3990/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The development of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is an expected matter and is, therefore, the responsibility of the UK Government. However, we are aware that the UK Government proposes to replace the Human Rights Act 1998 with a British Bill of Rights. As details emerge on the proposals, we will wish to discuss them with the Westminster Government.

Mr McCrossan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how their Department allocated the £45 million Urban Villages fund.

(AQW 3999/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Subject to final budget decisions, we expect a substantial programme of capital investment in Urban Villages, which would see in the region of £45million capital in total delivered in partnership with district councils and other government departments over the next 4 years.

A pipeline of capital projects is being developed for each of the five Urban Village areas in partnership with the local community and other stakeholders. The scope and scale of these projects may differ across each area, but they will be the key projects which can support the aims of the Urban Villages initiative in each place, and which improve the physical environment build community capacity and foster positive community identities.

The Urban Villages revenue stream includes an extensive range of early stage design activities and feasibility studies to identify capital projects; enhance their potential benefits for the wider community and expedite delivery in subsequent financial years. This revenue stream is also supporting the development of community based partnerships, on the ground projects which tackle key actions identified in each Strategic Framework, and enabling the development of cross-cutting strategic initiatives to enhance impact in all Urban Village areas and provide a template for successful approaches elsewhere.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 2710/16-21, for a breakdown of the total costs. (AQW 4126/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The total cost of the Panel was £110,290.

£71,685 was attributable to salaries, travel and subsistence costs for panel members and £38,605 on salaries for the secretariat.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) any meetings she has had with representatives of the fishing industry since the referendum on membership of the European Union; and (ii) any scheduled meetings. (AQW 2597/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):

- (i) Since the referendum on membership of the European Union I have formally met with representatives of the fishing industry as detailed below.
- a On 9 August 2016 I met with fishing industry representatives when I visited Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie.
 - b On 13 September 2016 I co-chaired, with the Economy Minister Simon Hamilton, the first meeting of the Brexit Consultative Committee on which the fisheries sector is represented.
- (ii) In addition to planned bi-monthly meetings of the Brexit Consultative Committee, meetings have also to be arranged with the producer organisations to discuss the implications of the EU referendum.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, with specific regard to the local bird population, to outline the methodology or scientific studies that the NIEA employed regarding its input into the decision on planning application LA06/2016/0523/F for an outdoor target shooting range at Ballymacormick Road, Bangor. (AQW 2745/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Ards and North Down Borough Council did not request advice from NIEA in respect of the local bird population. A specific consultation request was made regarding site drainage only and NIEA provided advice to the council on this matter to assist the council's determination.

All consultation requests received by NIEA are screened against NIEA's records and statutory duties under planning legislation. Guidance is published on the planning portal and DAERA webpages. As the proposed development site is over 700 metres from designated sites important for seabirds and waders, officials were satisfied that there were no impacts on designated sites or concerns about the local bird population that should be advised to the council.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the quantity; (ii) the importer; and (iii) the final destination of beef imported from (a) Botswana; and (b) Brazil in each of the last three years. (AQW 2815/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: DAERA cannot provide the information requested. Beef imported from a third country such as Botswana or Brazil can be traded and moved freely within the European Union following clearance at a Border Inspection Post in any member state. The meat entering through Belfast port could therefore be moved on immediately to another EU territory. Conversely meat traded here could have entered the EU through any member state.

DAERA therefore only holds information on beef imported directly into Northern Ireland through Belfast Port. This is detailed in the table below.

Imports of Beef from Botswana and Brazil through Belfast Port Border Inspection Post from 2013 to 2015

Country	Botswana		Brazil	
	No of Consignments	Quantity (kgs)	No of Consignments	Quantity (kgs)
2013	0	0	1	23,711
2014	2	45,125	1	25,002
2015	8	183,950	0	0

Due to commercial confidentiality we are not able to release the identity of importers.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether she is aware of the infestation of willow beetle affecting residents outside Donaghcloney; (ii) whether investigations have been instigated by her Department; and (iii) to outline what regulations exist to protect the residents affected.

(AQW 2834/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I was recently made aware of the nuisance caused by willow beetles to those living along the Ballnabragget Road near Donaghcloney. A Forest Service official visited the site which is adjacent to a plantation of Short Rotation Coppice willow in late August. Although no regulation exists to control willow beetle, I understand that the farmer who manages the willow and also lives on the Ballynabragget Road, is in contact with some of his neighbours. He has removed a row of coppice in his fields nearest their homes to help mitigate the issue and has plans to coppice the willow in the spring 2017 in order to reduce the crop to near ground level.

I understand that the population of willow beetles varies considerably from year to year and that a heavy infestation in one year does not mean that it will be repeated the following year.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail how many organisations and arm's-length bodies within her departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and (ii) to outline how an established recruitment agency is considered.

(AQW 2845/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: There are five organisations or arms length bodies within my Department's remit. None of these offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff.

All permanent posts are filled through open recruitment competition and temporary/short term workers posts through recruitment agencies.

It is within the remit of the Department of Finance, Central Procurement Division to manage a central contract, which was awarded by tender, for NICS temporary/short term workers. Organisations or arms-length bodies within DAERA use this contract as the need arises.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the average farm business borrowing as of 1 April, broken down for each of the last five years.

(AQW 2890/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Average farm business borrowings for the years between 2010/11 and 2014/15 are presented in table below. These are the latest available figures and are based on farm accounts collected as part of the Northern Ireland Farm Business Survey (FBS). The FBS is a representative sample of farms larger than 0.5 Standard labour requirements. The borrowing figures presented are the closing balances for accounting years with an average end date of mid-february.

Table 1: Average Bank Borrowing per Farm (£ per farm)

Year	£ per farm
2010/11	34,547
2011/12	36,990
2012/13	34,987
2013/14	37,553
2014/15	38,657

Source: Farm Business Survey

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the total farm business borrowing as of 1 April, broken down for each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 2891/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Published figures from the British Bankers Association (BBA) indicate that total borrowing of the agriculture, hunting and forestry sector in Northern Ireland on 31 March in each of the past five years (for which data is available) is as follows:

As at 31 March	£ million
2011	807
2012	797
2013	805
2014	909*
2015	922

*Note that there was a methodological change in the collection process between 2013 and 2014. From Quarter 2 of 2013 all borrowings to Northern Ireland Agriculture was collated from banks based on the postcode of the borrower as opposed to the registered headquarters of the lending organisation. This change should provide more accurate figures, though the figures for 2014 and 2015 are not strictly comparable with the figures for previous years.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what discussions her Department has had with DEFRA and HM Government regarding ongoing financial support for farmers post-Brexit.

(AQW 3038/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Over the past weeks and months I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of Ministers to discuss some of the important issues that need to be resolved in the months ahead. I spoke to Andrea Leadsom and met with George Eustice for an early useful discussion in the immediate aftermath of the referendum result.

I also met with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, James Brokenshire, and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, earlier this month. I impressed upon them the importance of the Agri-Food sector to our economy and sought an assurance that we would be kept closely and directly involved in the agricultural, environmental and fisheries policy and trade agendas as they unfold over the coming months and years.

I received a positive response and I believe that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State in particular has an important role to play in ensuring that our voice is heard loud and clear around the Cabinet table in Westminster. We agreed to work closely on key aspects of policy development, trade and support arrangements.

My officials are in ongoing contact with their counterparts in DEFRA and HM Government and will continue with these discussions as we move through the exit process.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many types of seeds her Department has sent to the Salvard Global Seed Vault in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3113/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has not deposited any seed with the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in the last five years.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation budgetary allocation for 2016/17; and (ii) to outline what projects and initiatives will this fund.

(AQW 3127/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework, entitled 'Supporting Rural Communities', was launched in March 2016 and will support initiatives to address the three key TRPSI Framework priorities of access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation from 2016 onwards. An opening budget of £4m was allocated to fund the TRPSI Programme for the 2016/17 financial year.

An Action Plan outlining initiatives to be developed and supported during the 2016/17 financial year of the new Framework was also launched.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what training her staff receive in completing answers to Assembly Questions in line with departmental guidance.

(AQW 3241/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Formal classroom based training is available for staff responsible for completing answers to Assembly Questions. This training is designed and delivered by the NICS Centre for Applied Learning (CAL). In addition, there is also the facility for line managers to arrange "workplace / at their desk" training and guidance to ensure that staff are properly equipped to answer Assembly Questions in line with Departmental Guidance.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what steps her Department will take to protect the increasing mussel beds in Mill Bay and the environmental designations of Carlingford Lough in view of the proposal to construct a concrete pier and the increased vessel movements.

(AQW 3278/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department already offers protection to the shellfisheries in Carlingford Lough, in that the vast majority of the northern shore lies within a shellfish water protected area.

A full Environmental Impact Assessment has been completed, which considered the possible impacts on shellfisheries within the Lough including Mill Bay. Mitigation has been incorporated into the marine licence to protect the shellfishery.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what action her Department is taking to protect the honey bee population.

(AQW 3284/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Bee Health Inspectors in my Department support Northern Ireland's beekeepers by delivering an annual programme of surveillance, inspection and enforcement for the control of notifiable pests and diseases in support of protecting bee health. This is undertaken in conjunction with Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) who provide science and diagnostic support. This will be further informed by a recently commissioned research project titled "Reducing the incidence of honeybee foulbrood diseases".

During 2016 to date, inspectors have completed inspections at 115 apiaries. This has so far resulted in the confirmation of notifiable disease at 16 apiaries, comprising 13 American Foulbrood (AFB) and 3 European Foulbrood (EFB). Disease control measures were undertaken including colony destruction and movement controls.

Inspectors, with the support of local beekeepers, have established sentinel apiaries in support of the early detection of the quarantine pests Small hive beetle and Tropilaelaps mites, harmful pests not known to occur here. This has been supported with the inclusion of a regularly updated disease map on our web pages detailing the approximate locations of outbreaks, in order to make beekeepers aware of any increased risk of disease to their colonies.

Three additional inspectors are currently being trained which will increase our inspection capability for notifiable diseases.

Beekeepers also have an important role in maintaining healthy colonies, and working in partnership with UBKA and INIB my officials have provided specialist training on disease identification. To date four events led by my Bee Health officials have taken place.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline why the Marine Licence issued for the Greencastle to Greenore ferry permits multiple vessels to be used when the applicant will only be using one vessel.
(AQW 3313/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Marine Construction Licence issued by my Department licenses the construction of ferry terminal facilities. The marine licensing process covers deposits in the sea below the mean high water spring tide level. In this case it includes the construction of a concrete suspended pier and slipway to allow vehicular access to a ferry. The licence also permits floating navigational markers to delineate appropriate channel boundaries and provide safety to navigation.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her new departmental headquarters at Ballykelly will be funded solely from her departmental budget.
(AQW 3400/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Sufficient funding has been allocated to DAERA for the period to 31 March 2017. The balance will be secured as part of the next Budget exercise.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether they will expedite the public inquiry into environmental crime, first agreed by the Assembly in March 2014.
(AQW 3434/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As I have stated on a number of occasions, including AQW 1778/16-21, the previous Executive had considered suggestions for a public inquiry into waste management and disposal arrangements in Northern Ireland, prompted by the discovery of illegal dumping at Mobouy. However, in light of the focus on dealing with the issues through implementation of the Mills Report, concern about the undefined costs of an inquiry and ensuring that any criminal proceedings were able to take their course, no agreement was reached before the end of the last mandate.

My Department will continue to focus on ensuring that the improvements emanating from the Mills review are built upon, and to develop remediation plans for the Mobuoy site.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to provide a breakdown of the funding received through the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme by rural community and voluntary groups in Upper Bann in 2015-16.
(AQW 3446/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A total of £27,852.93 was awarded to 22 rural community and voluntary organisations in the Upper Bann constituency area through the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme during the 2015/16 financial year. A breakdown of the funding awarded, following two separate calls for applications (phase 1 and phase 2), is provided in the table below.

Phase 3 of the Scheme remains open for applications until the 30 September 2016.

Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme 2015 – Phase 1

Organisation	Grant Paid
Derrytrasna Senior Citizens Group	£1,449.64
Diamond Senior Citizens Club, Portadown	£839.71
Kilmacrew & District Rural Community Group	£1,260.55
Loughgall Women's Institute	£1,500.00

Organisation	Grant Paid
Loughshore Care Partnership	£1,500.00
Maghery District Hall Committee	£1,419.84
The Aghaderg Circle of Friends, Loughbrickland	£358.00
The Birches Cosy Club , Portadown	£789.00
Total	£9,116.74

Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme 2015 – Phase 2

Organisation	Grant Paid
Aghagallon Community Centre	£1,500.00
Ballydougan Patchwork and Craft Group	£1,190.00
Ballymacanellen Community Asssocation	£1,500.00
Bleary Farmers Hall Committee	£1,400.00
Donaghcloney Royal British Legion	£1,285.20
Donaghcloney Rural Craft Group	£994.50
Garvaghy Rural Development Group	£1,249.50
Magheralin Hall Company	£1,500.00
Mullabrack Rural Community Group	£1,500.00
Richmount Playgroup	£1,337.22
Richmount Rural Community Association	£1,462.00
Scotch Street Youth Club	£1,141.29
St Michaels Gaelic F C, Magheralin	£1,176.48
The Wood Rural Development Association, Portadown	£1,500.00
Total	£18,736.19

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) how many cattle thefts, or reports of missing cattle, have been recorded with her Department in the (a) 2013-14; (b) 2014-15; (c) 2015-16; and (d) 2016-17 financial years to date; and (ii) how many of these cattle were recovered.

(AQW 3453/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The table below shows the number of bovine animals reported and recorded on the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) as missing or stolen for each of the last three financial years and the current financial year to date. The table also shows the total number of animals still recorded as lost / stolen.

Financial Year	Total number of Incidents	Total number of cattle lost / stolen	Total number of animals still recorded as lost / stolen
2013 – 2014	1,707	4,258	4,131
2014 – 2015	1,592	3,484	3,404
2015 – 2016	1,415	3,072	3,025
2016 – to date	352	759	753

APHIS does not differentiate between missing or stolen cattle.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how much funding has been awarded to each environmental group in each year from money raised by the plastic bag levy.

(AQW 3484/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The following tables provide details of the funding provided from the the carrier bag levy income over the last three financial years (2013-14 to 2015-16), since the introduction of the levy in April 2013, to non government organisations to deliver environmental projects.

Funding Recipient	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Grand Total
Acceptable Enterprises Ltd		15,850		15,850
Alliance Youth Works	30,266	26,879	6,675	63,820
Ardaluin Regeneration Trust	30,000	24,596		54,596
Ardboe Community Projects			4,307	4,307
Ardnashee School & College		5,000		5,000
ArtsEkta	10,000			10,000
Ballinderry Rivers Trust		16,965	37,900	54,865
Ballyholland Sunshine Club			6,800	6,800
Ballyhornan & District Community Association (BDCA)	28,730			28,730
Ballymaconnelly Renewal Group	19,964			19,964
Ballynure and District Community Association	12,593			12,593
Bann Valley Community Group	10,000			10,000
Bann Valley Community Group / Clady Angling Club		18,000		18,000
Bat Conservation Ireland			5,000	5,000
Beech Hill US Navy & Marine Corps Friendship Association	9,975	952		10,927
Belfast Buildings Trust	8,900			8,900
Belfast Hills Partnership	78,451	57,327	66,958	202,736
Bellanaleck Community Group			2,102	2,102
Beltrim Charitable Trust		1,224	4,129	5,353
Benburb District Community Association		8,618		8,618
Beragh Care Development Association	15,000			15,000
Beragh Red Knights GAC			8,000	8,000
Blackhead Angling Club	5,375			5,375
British Trust for Ornithology	38,420	43,021	55,437	136,878
Broughderg Area Development Association		14,145		14,145
Broughshane Improvement Committee	16,135			16,135
Burrenbridge Community Group	9,100			9,100
Business in the Community	81,971	244,204	73,567	399,742
Butterfly Conservation	15,000	68,232	53,623	136,855
Camphill Community Glencraig	6,900			6,900
Campsie Residents Association		4,969		4,969
Carntogher Community Association	26,962	25,683		52,645
Carrickfergus Gasworks Preservation Society	4,460	3,969		8,429
Carrickfergus Regeneration Partnership		14,600		14,600
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	75,010	154,224	176,300	405,534
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health	9,700			9,700
Cinemagic	9,150			9,150
Clanrye Group	9,500			9,500
Climate Northern Ireland (CNI)	7,408			7,408
Cloughey and District Community Association	845	836		1,681
Cloughmills Community Action Team	8,162	5,000		13,162

Funding Recipient	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Grand Total
Colin Glen Trust	50,500	1,000	100,000	151,500
Compass Advocacy Network		22,511	8,719	31,230
Conservation Volunteers NI	37,671	48,567	40,447	126,685
Copeland Bird Observatory	30,000	34,983	3,045	68,028
Corrymeela Community			8,000	8,000
COSY Club	4,045			4,045
County Armagh Wildlife Society (CAWS)			7,442	7,442
Creggan Country Park Enterprises Ltd	19,550	17,385	7,350	44,285
Devenish Partnership Forum			7,955	7,955
Doury Road Development Group			3,000	3,000
Dromore Beekeepers' Association (DBKA)	9,600	433		10,033
ECO-UNESCO	5,000			5,000
Education For Sustainable Development Forum		19,708		19,708
Enagh Youth Forum	8,000	3,529	7,000	18,529
Enniskillen Angling Club	4,998			4,998
Erne & Melvin Enhancement company (EMEC)	5,700	5,850		11,550
Erne East Community Partnership Ltd			8,000	8,000
Erne Rivers Trust		630	6,800	7,430
Fabb (For a Better Bangor)	2,750	250		3,000
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens	11,797	13,394		25,191
Fermanagh Red Squirrel Group (FRSG)		4,961		4,961
Field Studies Council	34,165	33,430		67,595
Forthspring	2,582	2,664		5,246
Forum for Alternative Belfast cic	12,300			12,300
Foyle Civic Trust		25,982		25,982
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust			7,011	7,011
Friends of Derrymore	9,928			9,928
Friends of Grove Park	2,150			2,150
Glebe House Harmony Community Trust	7,824	384		8,208
Glenravel & District Community and Residents Association	18,700			18,700
Glens Angling Club	28,650			28,650
Glens Red Squirrel Group	12,450	3,599	8,000	24,049
Glenshane Care Association Ltd			7,990	7,990
Gortnaghey Community Association		7,350		7,350
Gracehill Moravian Church		6,750		6,750
Gracehill Old School Trust	27,000			27,000
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership			7,894	7,894
Greater Village Regeneration Trust			7,455	7,455
Groundwork Northern Ireland	55,971	1,363		57,334
Guildhall Press		15,900		15,900
Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland		7,548		7,548

Funding Recipient	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Grand Total
Harmony Community Trust		15,443	7,970	23,413
Hearth	4,500			4,500
Hearth Housing Association	27,940			27,940
Hearth Revolving Fund	17,700	39,421		57,121
Hillsborough and District Cttee	9,500			9,500
Holywell Trust	6,500			6,500
Inland Waterways Association of Ireland: Newry & Portadown branch	1,765			1,765
Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful	128,000	415,833	250,000	793,833
Kells Connor & Glenwherry Angling Club	1,996			1,996
Kilkeel Development Association			3,985	3,985
Killeter & District Development Trust	9,350			9,350
Lagan Canal Trust	10,000	15,912		25,912
Lagan Valley Regional Park	22,150		42,120	64,270
Learmount Community Development Group Ltd		4,800		4,800
Lecale Conservation		1,586		1,586
Liberty Consortium		9,022	8,000	17,022
Ligoniel Improvement Association	20,300			20,300
Limavady Community Development Initiative	27,500			27,500
Lough Erne Wildfowlers Council			6,000	6,000
Lough Fea Grouse Conservation Trust	10,000			10,000
Lough Neagh Partnership	57,392	43,512	28,051	128,955
Loughmacrory Community Development Association	14,200	7,020		21,220
Lower Shankill Community Association		8,500		8,500
Magheramason Community Development Association		2,322		2,322
Marine Conservation Northern Ireland	18,518	404		18,922
Marine Conservation Society		9,565		9,565
Megargy and District Game and Conservation Society	10,000	617		10,617
Mid Ulster Enterprises (Creggan) Ltd	10,000	15,414		25,414
Millisle Youth Forum	10,000			10,000
Molly and Mia Foundation		2,340		2,340
Moortown St Malachys GAC			8,000	8,000
Mornington Community Project			8,000	8,000
Mountaineering Ireland	8,300	12,915		21,215
Mourne Heritage Trust	206,186	162,416	221,749	590,351
National Trust	173,985	33,138	70,750	277,873
Natural Copeland	6,600			6,600
Newtownabbey Educational Guidance Centre	4,992			4,992
NI Forest School Assoc			8,000	8,000
North West Red Squirrel Group			2,551	2,551
Northern Ireland Environment Link	140,000	195,333	214,166	549,499

Funding Recipient	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Grand Total
Northern Ireland Freshwater Taskforce	4,307			4,307
Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group	14,900	29,340	54,395	98,635
NOW	4,990			4,990
One Million Trees in One Day	30,000			30,000
Outdoor Recreation NI	116,645	85,640	127,000	329,285
Owenkillew Community Development Association			4,884	4,884
Owenkillew Development company ltd	23,876			23,876
Parkgate and District Community Group	10,000			10,000
Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAWNI) c/o Ulster Wildlife		12,000		12,000
Pettigo and District Angling Association	1,304	2,242		3,546
Phoenix ADHD Project		7,197		7,197
PLACE	27,401	9,785		37,186
Portglenone Enterprise Group	1,570		5,656	7,226
Positive Futures	9,395			9,395
RAPID (Rural Area Partnership in Derry) Ltd	11,595	6,825		18,420
Rathlin Development & Community Association	8,500	4,450		12,950
Resource Centre Derry	15,000			15,000
Richmount Rural Community Association	9,750			9,750
Riding For the Disabled Association (Coleraine and District Group) Ltd		286		286
Ring of Gullion and Cooley's Red squirrel group			5,841	5,841
River Blackwater Catchment Trust	27,410	7,893		35,303
River Care Ltd		9,217	17,557	26,774
River Valley Development Association Ltd (RVDA)	16,828			16,828
Roe Angling Limited	9,993			9,993
Roe Valley Community Property Ltd	10,000	2,048		12,048
Rosemount & District Welfare Rights Group			5,000	5,000
RSPB	173,898	144,160	162,533	480,591
Saintfield Development Association	8,500	8,000		16,500
Scouts NI - Strangford District			5,500	5,500
Share Discovery Village	9,330	6,376		15,706
Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust	8,750	27,966		36,716
Sion Mills Community Forum			7,980	7,980
Sixmile Water Trust	2,982			2,982
Sixmilecross Enterprise Ltd		20,000		20,000
Skegoneill & Glandore Common Purpose		6,000		6,000
Something Special			8,000	8,000
Speedwell Trust	4,606	12,647		17,253
Springwell House			2,215	2,215
St John's Drumnaquoile GAC			8,000	8,000
St Mary's Youth Club			7,000	7,000

Funding Recipient	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Grand Total
Strangford Community Association			8,000	8,000
Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership	52,300			52,300
Suffolk Community Forum	1,850		4,992	6,842
Sustainable Northern Ireland	10,100	18,841		28,941
Taghnevan Community Development Association			8,000	8,000
The Drapers' Towns Partnership Ltd	20,681	48,164	7,481	76,326
The Edge Youth Club		2,699		2,699
The Follies Trust		4,050		4,050
The Rainbow Project			7,600	7,600
The Woodland Trust	17,057	26,049		43,106
TIDAL			8,000	8,000
Tobin Youth Centre (Moortown) Ltd			7,959	7,959
Traad Wildlife and Conservation Club	9,995			9,995
Transition Town Whitehead	8,490		4,694	13,184
True Harvest Seeds		2,071		2,071
Ulster Architectural Heritage Society	25,920	8,965		34,885
Ulster Wildlife	64,425	250,006	183,130	497,561
Ulster Workhouse and Famine Trust Lisnaskea	13,356	2,000		15,356
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	5,800			5,800
Victoria Bridge Cross Community Forum		2,055		2,055
Victoria Street and Surrounding Area Action Group			7,996	7,996
West Belfast Partnership Board	7,997	7,102		15,099
Willowbank Organic Producers Ltd			7,978	7,978
Windsor Women's Centre			7,998	7,998
Woodland Trust	18,000	45,444	89,388	152,832
WRAP		225,540	231,282	456,822
Grand Total	2,754,185	3,073,040	2,632,307	8,459,532

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how more environmental groups can apply for funding from money raised by the plastic bag levy for the remainder of this financial year.

(AQW 3485/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The primary funding mechanisms that have been used in recent times to assist environmental and community groups with projects that will benefit the environment are the Environment Fund and the Challenge Fund. These funds return money generated from the proceeds of the Carrier Bag Levy to not for profit organisations to deliver environmental projects.

The call for applications to the 2016/19 Environment Fund closed in December 2015 so it is unavailable for new applications. The Department is currently considering the scope and options for launching a Challenge Fund this year alongside other priorities for expenditure. If a fund is to be launched it will be publicly advertised and details of the fund and how to make an application will be made available.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) all funding mechanisms that can assist community groups with projects that will benefit the environment; (ii) the level of funding available; (iii) how community groups apply; and (iv) any relevant deadlines.

(AQW 3486/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department is not the only organisation that delivers outcomes for the environment in Northern Ireland and it offers funding to a number of delivery partners to undertake environmental projects including community groups.

The primary funding mechanisms that have been used in recent times to assist community groups with projects that will benefit the environment are the Environment Fund and the Challenge Fund. These funds return money generated from the proceeds of the Carrier Bag Levy to not for profit organisations to deliver environmental projects.

The Environment Fund helps organisations deliver strategic and large scale environmental projects tackling the most acute environmental priorities in Northern Ireland. This Fund is used to enable organisations to deliver projects that protect and improve the quality of our landscapes, habitats, species, air and water and which promote and deliver resource efficiency, civic pride and access to the natural environment. It provides funding for up to 3 years and does not contain any eligibility funding cap. The call for applications to the 2016/19 Environment Fund closed in December 2015 so it is unavailable for new applications.

In previous years the former Department of the Environment ran a Challenge Fund to enable schools and community groups to support the delivery of small scale projects to improve local environments and provide environmental education. I am aware that the level of grant offered previously has varied from year to year: in 2015/16 the maximum levels were £8k for Community Action Projects and £4K for Environmental Education Projects. Previous funding caps went as high as £30k.

The Department is currently considering the scope and options for launching a Challenge Fund this year alongside other priorities for expenditure. If a fund is to be launched it will be publicly advertised and details of the fund and how to make an application will be made available.

Other funding mechanisms that are not associated with Carrier Bay Levy monies include the Forest Expansion Scheme which provides support to encourage woodland planting of five hectares and larger. The closing date for applications this year was 30 September 2016.

The LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme may also provide funding opportunities but it is delivered on the ground by Local Action Groups rather than directly by DAERA.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) how much revenue has been raised by the 5p plastic bag tax in each year since its inception, broken down by constituency; and (ii) a breakdown of all costs associated with the scheme since its inception.

(AQW 3489/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) The table below provides a split of the total carrier bag levy income (c£14m) over the three financial years since the introduction of the levy.

Financial Year	Carrier Bag Levy Income (£)
2013-14	4,155,908
2014-15	4,664,099
2015-16	5,170,835
Total	£13,990,842

A further split by constituency cannot be provided as the Department does not collect or hold information at a constituency level.

- (ii) The table below lists the costs associated with the administration and enforcement of the levy over the three years.

Financial Year	Salaries (£)	Other running costs (travel, premises etc) (£)	Total costs (£)
2013-14	379,606	80,467	460,073
2014-15	480,321	66,161	546,482
2015-16	474,309	47,470	521,779
Total	1,334,236	194,098	1,528,334

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what safeguards are in place to ensure the legitimacy of Basic Payment Scheme applications to avoid fraudulent claims.

(AQW 3517/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has implemented a robust and thorough range of administrative and On The Spot controls to ensure that applicants for the Basic Payment Scheme meet the eligibility criteria set out in European Commission Regulations.

These controls require all applicants to be registered with my Department as a farm business. The registration process itself requires businesses to have the appropriate legal, commercial, economic and operational arrangements in place to exist as an entity separate from any other farm business. The Basic Payment Scheme also requires applicants to be actively farming all of the land claimed and over 3,000 businesses were selected for detailed checks in 2015.

In addition, all applications for the Basic Payment Scheme are subject to 30 administrative checks such as duplicate field checks and measures to ensure Greening requirements are met.

Each year, 5% of applications are subject to a full land eligibility inspection.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how her Department ensures that waste from the commercial and industrial sectors is not being illegally disposed of, given they do not record the amount of waste produced or where this waste is being produced.

(AQW 3519/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Under the Waste & Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, subsequent regulations and the Duty of Care Code of Practice, all persons and organisations handling waste material, including those in the commercial and industrial sectors, have a 'duty of care' with respect to waste.

The duty of care system is a self-regulatory one, where those disposing of and transporting the waste are obliged to complete waste transfer notes detailing the recipient, nature and amount of each quantity being moved, the documents accompanying the waste during transit. However, movements of hazardous waste must be pre-notified to my Department prior to movement through the completion of a prescribed document. Once the waste has been received at its destination a copy of the document must be sent to my Department. A similar system must be followed when the movements cross international boundaries. In addition the majority of waste facilities receiving waste must provide my Department with summaries detailing waste input and output.

All commercial carriers of controlled waste must also have a valid registration of waste carriers' certificate; they must only transport waste to a suitably authorised site, therefore complying with the duty of care obligations outlined above.

Undoubtedly, the approach would be enhanced by a more comprehensive core data set. However, there is currently no obligation on the commercial and industrial sectors to report waste arisings.

The duty of care system is monitored by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, with regular checks of documentation, receiving sites and operational interventions based on data monitoring, reports and intelligence. Non compliances are dealt with following the Departmental enforcement policy using a variety of enforcement tools.

In addition, it is important to note that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency deploys significant resources, including its Environmental Crime Unit, to tackle all forms of waste crime. The approach to waste crime is primarily intelligence-led and is underpinned by a variety of inputs and assessments, including waste streams.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the biosecurity risks presented by hunts passing through a number of farms, particularly when permission has not been granted.

(AQW 3560/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Animal diseases can spread from farm to farm mechanically on contaminated footwear, clothing, equipment, vehicles, humans and animals.

It is theoretically possible for a hunt to spread disease but hunting mostly takes place outside the grazing season reducing the potential for disease spread.

To avoid spreading disease hunts should make every effort to consult with landowners in advance and should not cross pasture that may have been contaminated by diseased animals.

Farmers/landowners are encouraged to protect their livestock by implementing the 'Biosecurity Code for Northern Ireland Farms' which is published on the DAERA website. This includes guidance for official visitors to farm properties and recreational users of farmland.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of whether hunts pose a risk of spreading Bovine TB in rural areas.

(AQW 3561/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Hunts pose a minimal risk of spreading Bovine TB in rural areas. TB infection is extremely rare in either horses or dogs and direct contact with cattle is minimised. The risk posed by indirect spread caused by infectious material being carried from one farm to another is very low. However, in the event of damage to boundary fences it would be expected that these should be repaired by the hunt to prevent possible spread by cattle breaking into adjoining fields and having contact with cattle in other herds.

In summary the overall risk is low if adequate precautions are taken.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to give her assessment of the problem of hunts passing through farmlands where no permission to do so has been sought or granted.

(AQW 3562/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Hunt clubs should liaise with farmers and landowners to maintain good relationships within rural communities. The Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2012 places an onus on farmers to protect their animals from predators and risks to their health. Sheep worrying by dogs is a well known risk and all sheep farmers are aware of this risk.

To ensure good biosecurity on farms, it is important that animal diseases do not spread from farm to farm mechanically on contaminated footwear, clothing, equipment, vehicles, humans and animals.

Although it is theoretically possible for a hunt to spread disease, hunting mostly takes place outside the grazing season, therefore reducing the potential for disease spread. To avoid spreading disease hunts should make every effort to consult with landowners in advance and should not cross pasture that may have been contaminated by diseased animals.

Farmers and landowners are encouraged to protect their livestock by implementing the Biosecurity Code for Northern Ireland farms which is published on the DAERA website. This includes guidance for official visitors to farm properties and recreational users of farmland.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department would consider monitoring the number and location of hunts.

(AQW 3563/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has no statutory responsibility to monitor the number and location of hunts and has no current plans to do so given that hunts pose a minimal risk in the spread of disease.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to the River Faughan, Londonderry, to detail (i) how many times have water quality tests been carried out; (ii) how many times has there been an incidence of pollution and what was the determined cause; (iii) how many times a fish kill has been recorded and what was the determined cause; and (iv) how many persons and/or companies have been prosecuted for causing effluent to enter the watercourse or any other pollution incident, broken down in each of the last five calendar years.

(AQW 3580/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- i) In the period 2011 - 2015 the River Faughan has been sampled on 60 occasions at up to seven sites on any one occasion. Sites are sampled on a monthly or quarterly basis as part of a scheduled programme. The most recent annual classifications (2015) for water quality parameters are good or better for all sites.
- ii) Over the period September 2011 to date there have been 84 confirmed incidents of pollution within the Faughan catchment. The causes of the incidents are broken down in Table 1.

Table 1. Cause of Pollution Incidents Within Faughan Catchment 2011 - 2016

Year	No of Incidents with confirmed Pollution	Poor Working Practice	Unknown	Breach of Consent	Equipment Failure	Inadequate Equipment	Other	Accident/ Emergency	Negligence	Deliberate Dumping	Weather	Malicious 3rd Party Damage
2011	17	4	6	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0
2012	13	4	2	0	0	1	1	4	1	0	0	0
2013	21	1	6	0	4	0	1	3	0	3	3	0
2014	13	3	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0
2015	13	1	4	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	1
2016 (to Date)	7	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	84	16	25	1	9	2	4	11	1	6	8	1

- iii) Over the period September 2011 to date there have been two confirmed fish kills in 2016. Both of these incidents are sub judice as such the cause of the incidents cannot be provided.

iv)		Prosecutions:
	2012	None
	2013	2 Ongoing; 1 case heard (£250 fine 19/03/2015)
	2014	1 Ongoing
	2015	None
	2016	2 Sub justice

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail the cost of relocating Forest Service Headquarters to Enniskillen; (ii) to detail the number of posts transferred and number of posts filled; and (iii) whether Forest Service will continue to manage their Department from Enniskillen.

(AQW 3612/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) The cost of relocating Forest Service Headquarters to Enniskillen was £512k;
- (ii) The number of Forest Service HQ posts which relocated to Enniskillen was 40. Where a member of staff could not transfer with their post, those posts have since been filled by staff who wished to work in Enniskillen;
- (iii) Forest Service will continue to manage its business across Northern Ireland from its new headquarters in Enniskillen.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many legal cases have been initiated for allowing or causing Japanese Knotweed to spread in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3626/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Under Article 15 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 it is an offence to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' Japanese knotweed or any other invasive plant listed in Part II of Schedule 9 of this legislation. The Order does not define the natural spread of such a plant as an offence.

My Department does not keep information regarding prosecutions taken forward by the P.S.N.I. However, my Department officials may be asked to provide advice on a technical basis in potential prosecution cases. My officials are aware of only one case that was initiated for allowing or causing the spread of Japanese Knotweed in N.Ireland. This was taken by the PSNI in Londonderry in 2012 and the individual involved received a conditional discharge. Further details can be obtained from the Public Prosecution Service N.I.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail any prosecutions in relation to (i) Japanese Knotweed infestation; and (ii) inappropriate disposal in the last five years.

(AQW 3641/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) My officials have informed me that in August 2012 there was a prosecution in Londonderry of an individual for 'causing or allowing to grow' Japanese knotweed by transporting soil from a development site to another area. This case was taken by the PSNI and the individual involved received a conditional discharge. Further details can be obtained from the Public Prosecution Service N.I.
- (ii) With respect to the second part of your question, the Department has not taken any prosecutions under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, as amended, in relation to inappropriate disposal of Japanese Knotweed in the last five years.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what steps she intends to take to ensure that a register of the location of Japanese Knotweed and other non-native invasive weeds is created.

(AQW 3642/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR) collects, manages and makes available environmental records of native and non native species. Citizens can record their observations directly on the website detailed below and there is a section specifically for invasive species. It can be found at the following link <http://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/>.

My Department funds CEDaR. CEDaR is a partnership between my Department, National Museums NI (where CEDaR is physically located) and the recording community. CEDaR encourages citizens to submit their records and during the Private Members Motion debate on 20th September I appealed for people to upload further data.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what action his Department is taking in conjunction with key agencies and bodies to address the illegal dumping of waste.

(AQW 3653/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Officials within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency enforcement and regulation teams are enjoying an unprecedented level of co-operation with their counterparts throughout the British Isles and beyond.

Demonstrating their commitment to maximise resources and optimise investigative opportunities, NIEA is working closer than ever with colleagues across a broad range of government departments and agencies.

Key to this is NIEA's Strategic Partnership with the PSNI, which is going from strength to strength as it approaches its fifth anniversary. The Partnership has enabled both parties to share resources and intelligence, co-operate on investigations and site surveys, and conduct training on a range of relevant topics of concern.

Indeed, regular liaison, information and intelligence sharing, and training/workshops on new or relevant areas of mutual concern are vital to NIEA's relationship with a number of bodies, MOST notably HMRC. NIEA officials work closely with it to deprive those convicted of illegally depositing waste of their criminally obtained assets and to disrupt and deter waste crime in all its forms.

Similar working arrangements, agreed via information sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding, have developed well with the National Crime Agency, the DVTA and Loughs Agency. Agreements are also currently being established with the Food Standards Agency and the Health and Safety Executive.

Within the new DAERA, NIEA have been actively cooperating with agriculturally-focused colleagues to maximise resources, share intelligence, benefit from the latter's invaluable rural knowledge and optimise opportunities for efficiency and effectiveness.

Useful discussion and shared intelligence is already stemming from the relatively new "Four Nations" meeting, a quarterly gathering of senior representatives from each of the four UK Environment Agencies, the most recent meeting of which was hosted by NIEA in mid-September.

Additionally, NIEA officials enjoy an excellent relationship with the agencies in the Republic of Ireland. Most recently this has been apparent following the discovery of significant bodies of waste originating in the Republic of Ireland in the East Tyrone area.

Finally, NIEA is a participant in the Organised Crime Task Force. Officials are members of its Criminal Finance and Fuel Fraud sub-groups.

My officials recognise and are working hard to ensure that the partnership approach to tackling waste crime remains central to our efforts.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 1609/16-21, for an update on the timeframe for the processing of 2015-16 appeals for the Basic Payment Scheme.

(AQW 3662/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: An unprecedented number of Review of Decision requests have been received for the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme year. Each case is individual in nature and must be carefully and thoroughly considered. Therefore, it is not possible to predict when all reviews will be completed. However, my Department has reassigned additional staff to process the high volume of applications and the Review process has been streamlined to process the cases as quickly as possible. These measures have already delivered an increase in output and the position is monitored on an ongoing basis.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline why she was unable to meet the Committee on Climate Change representative, Lord Krebs Kt FRS, on his recent visit; and (ii) whether she has made alternative plans to meet with him to discuss climate change.

(AQW 3694/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Due to an alternative diary commitment I was unable to meet with Lords Krebs as I was attending the Ploughing Championships in Tullamore where I met yourself at a reception for Northern Ireland exhibitors & industry. However, I was aware of Lord Krebs visit and the launch of the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report. The Permanent Secretary of my Department participated in the launch event on my behalf and Lord Krebs and colleagues from the Adaptation sub-committee met with the head of the Environment Agency and other senior environmental officials during his visit.

My Department will continue to work with the Climate Change Committee whether through official channels or via Ministerial meeting as the need or opportunity arises.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether her meeting with the Minister of Justice to discuss animal cruelty sentencing has been organised, and (ii) if so, to detail the arrangements.

(AQW 3695/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Minister Sugden and I have already had conversations on this issue.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how much has been spent on hospitality by her Department since May 2016; and to provide a breakdown.

(AQW 3698/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has provided hospitality for a number of events during the 2016/17 financial year.

The total cost incurred between 1 May 2016 and 31 August 2016 was £24,494.35.

A breakdown of the spend is as follows:

Category	£
Refreshments & Room Hire	15,503.37
Awards	6,161.79
Open Days	1,203.44
Other Events	1,625.85
Total	24,494.45

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what action her Department is taking to enhance farm safety.

(AQW 3705/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Health and Safety is the remit of the Health and Safety Executive NI, however, I continue to show my commitment to the safety of our farmers, families and employees through significant input to the work, in association with our partners, on the Farm Safety Partnership (FSP).

My Department continues to provide funding for the ongoing, 'Stop and Think SAFE' campaign. This high profile and often hard hitting campaign was developed by the FSP to help tackle the high rates of serious accidents and deaths on Northern Ireland's farms. It raises the issues of the four main causes of fatalities on our farms - Slurry, Animals, Falls (from height) and Equipment.

There are a number of online farm safety tools that I strongly recommend all farmers, farm family members and farm workers access. There must be willingness from everyone who lives and works on our farms to think about their safety and the safety of others.

As part of the Rural Development Programme, the Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) - Business Development Groups (BDG) and Farm Family Key Skills (FFKS) has been launched and groups have now been formed. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise has responsibility for the development and delivery of this knowledge transfer element of the FBIS. Farm Safety is a mandatory element of the discussion programme and also a key area of training as part of FFKS.

I launched the Preparation Stage for the capital element of the FBIS on 20 September. This is intended to provide information about the scheme to farmers before the Scheme opens formally later this month. Farm safety will be a cross cutting feature of the scheme in line with proposals within the current FSP action plan.

My Department will continue to work collaboratively with its partners on the FSP to help drive home the importance of farm safety and develop a safety-first culture on our local farms. It is however, the farmers and those living and working on our farms that must put into practice those actions that are required to minimise or eliminate the risks of serious injury or death on our farms.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of how, post exit from the European Union, the Basel Convention will influence the transport of poultry litter to the Executive-sponsored processing plant in Donegal or the return of bio-gas for use in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3736/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The poultry litter that will be used at the Glenmore plant in Donegal is classed as an animal by-product which has energy and nutrient value. Poultry litter is one of several organic feedstocks which will be sustainably processed at the plant to produce biogas and organic fertiliser.

The Basel Convention is an international agreement to restrict and control the international transport of hazardous wastes. As such, the poultry litter and the biogas which will be processed at the Glenmore plant fall outside the scope of the Basel Convention.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment on whether the catch and release scheme, in relation to salmon fishing, is producing its outcome objectives.

(AQW 3771/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The salmon conservation measures, including the prohibition of commercial netting and mandatory catch and release for recreational anglers until management targets are met, were introduced in legislation on 1st March 2014 and

are therefore still relatively recent in terms of monitoring population level trends. Salmon have a life cycle of 4-5 years so it may take a period of time before the full effects of these measures are realised.

Initial reports for the 2016 season would indicate improved runs of salmon on both the Lower Bann and River Bush, with the Lower Bann having the highest recorded return for the last 20 years. It is still too early to assess the returns back on some of other rivers this year, especially those where adults return much later in the year.

My Department is confident that mandatory catch and release, in conjunction with other conservation measures such as habitat enhancement, will prove effective and help to protect local salmon stocks into the future.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what assessment has been conducted on the survival rates of salmon subjected to the catch and release scheme.

(AQW 3772/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has examined the survival rates of salmon following the introduction of mandatory catch and release in several ways.

Just over 100 rod caught salmon were examined by AFBI fish scientists before release on the River Bush and at the Carnroe fishery on the River Bann. The angling method, hooking location and condition of the fish were assessed before release. Some 88% were assessed as released in good condition and only three salmon, all of which were deeply hooked, died after being unhooked.

AFBI scientists have also monitored the survival of a sample of 17 rod caught salmon for 48 hours post release. A total of 16 fish (94%) survived the monitoring period.

AFBI scientists are also involved in an ongoing project to examine the longer term behaviour of rod caught fish using acoustic telemetry. The results to date are encouraging, with salmon caught, tagged and released at Carnroe on the Lower Bann successfully tracked into a number of different spawning rivers including the Agivey and tributaries of Lough Neagh such the Moyola and Sixmilewater.

Careful handling of the fish by the angler is vitally important for subsequent survival. My Department is committed to raising awareness of best practice and has published guidelines on effective catch and release for salmon and sea trout angling.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether consideration has been given to exempting non wild fin-clipped salmon from the catch and release scheme.

(AQW 3773/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In the recent past some wild Atlantic salmon have also been fin clipped as they have micro tags. To avoid confusion amongst the angling public and in part to aid the enforcement of fisheries legislation, my Department included all salmon, regardless of origin, under the salmon conservation legislation which came into force in 2014. Fin clipped ranched salmon are prevented from travelling upstream of the Bush Salmon Station and therefore only anglers fishing the lower special stretches would potentially benefit from these fish and not those anglers fishing upstream.

The legislation is still relatively recent in terms of monitoring population level trends, but my Department will consider a range of options depending on the results of any future scientific reviews of salmon stocks and the impact the new regulations on overall salmon numbers.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the level of wild salmon stocks returning to local rivers.

(AQW 3774/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department monitors salmon returns to a number of index rivers in Northern Ireland by using automated fish counters. The status of each salmon stock is then assessed against a Conservation Limit established for that river. The Conservation Limit defines the number of adult salmon required to fully seed the river based on salmon habitat assessment surveys. Table 1. indicates percentage compliance with the Conservation Limit for a number of monitored salmon rivers in Northern Ireland from 2009 to 2015.

	Bush	Clady	Main	Blackwater	Glendun
2009	62	n/a	68	n/a	33
2010	56	n/a	61	n/a	64
2011	46	163	77	64	76
2012	79	120	129	83	88
2013	137	159	53	45	178
2014	83	108	102	40	55
2015	82	104	106	65	88

Where a primary salmon river does not have a fish counter present my Department monitors salmon stocks by using juvenile salmon recruitment derived from electric fishing surveys carried out during the summer period.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when she will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.
(AQW 3786/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The changes in the composition of the Executive, has led to a different approach to in-year monitoring. The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis. This has replaced the previous 'bidding' process and will allow for an objective assessment of genuine pressures across departments.

It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services and my officials will liaise with the AERA Committee when the outcome of the October exercise has been confirmed.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will provide a single point of contact for environmental advice to councils, developers and the public following the transfer of planning functions to the local councils.
(AQW 3898/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A single point of contact for providing environmental advice associated with planning consultations was established by the former Department of the Environment in April 2015, following the transfer of functions to the local councils.

These arrangements have been consolidated following the formation of DAERA. The DAERA Planning Response Team provides a single point of contact for councils, developers and the public seeking environmental advice on environment, marine and fisheries issues associated with planning applications.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the coastal management forum.
(AQW 4304/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I established the Coastal Forum when I was formerly the Minister for Regional Development. I saw there was a need to deal strategically with the issues around coastal change, specifically that of coastal erosion.

My responsibilities have, of course, since changed now that I am the DAERA Minister. Nevertheless, I still retain a strong interest.

I am satisfied that the Coastal Forum has identified the key issues that need to be addressed, such as the completion of a scientific evidence base on coastal processes in Northern Ireland and allocation of the coastal erosion risk management function.

I've met with Chris Hazzard MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, with whom I will co-Chair meetings of the Coastal Forum. We are agreed that now is an opportune time to consider the Coastal Forum's future role and terms of reference. This will, in turn, inform its membership.

We hope to be in a position to announce the outcome of those discussions shortly, at which time we will arrange a date for the Coastal Forum's next meeting.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department will build on the legacy of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink 2016.
(AQO 372/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I am sure you are all aware of the buzz around Northern Ireland as we enter the 10th month of our Year of Food and Drink, which has the theme of 'Harvest'.

Northern Ireland produces high quality food that has world leading traceability and safety controls from farms with a strong track record in quality assurance and health and welfare standards. The Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink 2016 is providing our agri-food industry with a high profile platform to tell that good news story and this positive image of our industry will remain for a long time to come.

It is also having a positive impact on our tourism industry, by putting Northern Ireland on the map as a quality food destination – both locally and internationally.

The Year of Food and Drink is a cross-departmental initiative led by the Department for the Economy. The work that has taken place to develop and deliver the initiative has built new working relationships and strengthened existing ones. I have every confidence that this collaboration between Government departments and with industry will pay dividends and will continue to ensure that the agri-food industry will reap the full benefits that the Year of Food and Drink has brought.

Working with Tourism NI and my Department, Food NI has been to the forefront of this initiative. Their determination and drive to enhance the reputation of food and drink from Northern Ireland, is to be commended as they co-ordinate and deliver many of the events and activities happening each month.

I was very pleased that in our Year of Food and Drink, local food producers excelled in the highly influential UK Great Taste Awards. While over 200 products from a wide range of businesses won coveted stars, it was very appropriate that a Northern Ireland producer should also win the Supreme Championship. I am also delighted that every county in Northern Ireland produced a winning product, and I expect this success will encourage more producers to enter their products in future.

It is not just the well established food businesses that have been successful in gaining awards this year. Our local Artisan Food sector have punched well above their weight and it is my hope that they will build upon their successes and go on to develop into highly significant business within our economy.

I continue to support the promotion and delivery of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink 2016 initiative. I have attended a number of events in the past few months, most recently the Northern Ireland Potato Festival on the 1st October. My Department will continue to work strategically with the Department for the Economy and with Food NI to ensure the momentum that has built up during this past year will continue into the future.

The Year of Food and Drink 2016 has already delivered some high profile, successful events and activities and has helped to further increase the profile and success of our agri-food industry. I have every confidence that this success will not be short-lived and we have a lasting positive legacy from this initiative.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the proposed LEADER Co-operation event agreed at the North South Ministerial Council Agriculture Sectoral meeting in January 2016.
(AQO 373/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A LEADER co-operation event will be held in Newry on the 8th and 9th of November. This has been organised by my department and the Northern Ireland Rural Network Support Unit, in conjunction with the Irish Network Support Unit and the relevant Irish government departments.

Approximately 150 delegates are expected to attend the conference. These will mainly be representatives from Northern Ireland and Irish Local Action Groups.

LEADER co-operation activities are a requirement under European legislation. Co-operation projects may be either transnational, which is co-operation with LAGs from other Member States, or inter-territorial, which is co-operation with LAGs within Northern Ireland or other regions of the UK. Local Action Groups in Northern Ireland are expected to participate in a minimum of two co-operation projects during the lifetime of the programme.

A conference at this point in the current Rural Development programme will help to inform LAGs about co-operation procedures, promote the benefits to be derived from participation and also launch a dialogue with Irish LAGs with a view to exploiting possible transnational co-operation initiatives.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department is addressing bovine tuberculosis.
(AQO 374/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has in place a TB Eradication Plan which is based on a programme of testing to detect infected cattle; removing infected animals; controlling movement to reduce the risks of disease spread within and between herds; and implementing other appropriate biosecurity measures.

Every bovine TB breakdown results in a thorough epidemiological assessment by a DAERA Veterinary Officer, who provides specific public and animal health advice to affected farmers, including biosecurity advice and advisory leaflets. During the course of a confirmed bovine TB breakdown, farmers receive regular communications from my Department, including results from post-mortem examinations and laboratory test results and strain type information.

As well as the personal advice provided by DAERA staff during bovine TB breakdown visits, a plethora of useful advice for herdkeepers has been published on the DAERA website. This guidance has been informed by an abundance of published research on the main risk factors for bovine TB and advises farmers how they can better protect their herd.

My Department shares my objective to sustainably and progressively reduce the levels of bovine TB here, with the ultimate aim of eradication from Northern Ireland's cattle herds.

That is why an independent TB Strategic Partnership Group was established in 2014, to develop a comprehensive and practical long-term TB Eradication Strategy and Implementation Action Plan. The TBSPG is currently reviewing evidence in preparation for publication of its report later this year. I look forward to receiving its report in the near future.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has in place to respond to a notification of giant hogweed on its own land.
(AQO 375/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department is very alert to the requirement to control or limit the spread of invasive 'alien' species introduced from other countries, including giant hogweed, which is a particularly unpleasant plant, the phototoxic sap of which causes severe and often long-lasting skin irritation and blistering, and Japanese knotweed, the subject of the recent Assembly debate.

Should routine patrols or annual checks of lands owned or managed by my Department or notifications from the public reveal that giant hogweed is growing on Department lands managed by Forest Service, CAFRE, NIEA or Inland Fisheries, plans are in place for the relevant officials to arrange for it to be treated promptly with an appropriate herbicide, prioritising its control on a risk basis with the focus on high recreation areas.

My Department has no authority to control giant hogweed on private land. Abandoned land passing to the Crown 'bona vacantia' is the responsibility of the Crown Solicitor's Office of the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the European Funding spent on Ardglass, Portavogie and Kilkeel harbours since 2001.

(AQO 376/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: £14million has been invested in the fishing ports of Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie since 2001, through the 2000-06 Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme and the more recent 2007-13 European Fisheries Fund.

During this period £1.3m has been investment in Ardglass, £9.6m at Kilkeel and £3.1m in Portavogie harbour.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has any plans to review the Carrier Bag Levy.

(AQO 377/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: By April 2017 my Department is committed to delivery of a Statutory Review on the charging provisions of the Carrier Bag Levy with a report to be laid before the Assembly by this date. The Review, which has recently commenced, will be conducted independently, on behalf of the Department by Business Consultancy Service a division of the Department of Finance.

The review will examine the effectiveness of the charging regime to date also if any amendments to the charging provision are either desirable or necessary.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department can assist both Down Royal and Downpatrick race courses to secure the future of the horse racing sector.

(AQO 378/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department is responsible for managing the Northern Ireland Horse Racing Fund, which provides assistance to the local race courses at Down Royal and Downpatrick. The Fund is provided for by an annual fee paid by bookmakers in Northern Ireland, and my Department is currently undertaking a review of the level of that fee.

As part of the review process, I had meetings during the summer with both the Northern Ireland Horse Racing Group (NIHRG), which represents the two race courses, and the Northern Ireland Turf Guardians Association (NITGA), which represents bookmakers.

I appreciate the value that both race courses bring to the local economy, and I will seek to ensure that appropriate rates are set under the Horse Racing Fund, subject to Department of Finance approval and the affirmative resolution process in the Assembly, which will assist with the future financing of both Down Royal and Downpatrick on an ongoing basis.

My Department also supports horse racing in Northern Ireland through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). 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.

In addition to the above, CAFRE are running a series of workshops for equine businesses in Northern Ireland. The three workshops in the series are suitable for all equine related businesses. They will take place at the Greenmount Campus on 11 October 2016, 1 November 2016 and 10 January 2017.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the effectiveness of the current River Basin Management Plans.

(AQO 379/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Second Cycle River Basin Management Plans were published in December 2015 as required by the EC Water Framework Directive (WFD). The plans set out the current state of our water environment and the measures required to achieve further improvements to the water environment in the next six years (2015 – 2021).

Currently 37% of rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal and groundwaters meet good status. The Second Cycle plans set out 120 new measures that are needed to improve the situation. These aim to bring up to 70% of our water bodies to good status by 2021.

Although the targets are ambitious, they are well founded on comprehensive monitoring and the progress already achieved in 2009-2015. Implementation of the plans is now underway, but it is too early in the six year period to determine how effective they will be. However I am confident that significant progress can be made by 2021.

Department for Communities

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) how many Steps to Success participants were sanctioned; (ii) a breakdown of how many quality jobs were secured for Steps to Success participants; and (iii) how many of these participants are on zero hours contracts.

(AQW 2752/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):

- (i) The information is not available in the format requested. As an individual may be sanctioned more than once, figures on the number of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who have had a sanction imposed cannot be provided; data can however be provided on the total number of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions imposed.

While it has not been possible to differentiate between sanctions applied to claimants who were on the Steps to Work programme and those who were participating in the Steps 2 Success programme during the crossover period when both programmes were operational, I can advise that 5,333 sanctions applied in the period 1 October 2014 until 31 August 2016. The figure provided from 1st June 2015 is taken from a new recording system (Decision Making and Appeals Case Recorder).

- (ii) The Department publishes a regular Steps 2 Success Statistical Bulletin - <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/steps-2-success-statistical-bulletin-october-2014-june-2016>. The latest figures in the Statistical bulletin published on 25 August 2016 show that 5,083 of the 21,288 people that started the Steps 2 Success programme from the start of the programme in October 2014 to the end of June 2016 have entered employment.
- (iii) The Department does not record the number of zero hours contract jobs that are entered by Steps 2 Success participants. The organisations that deliver the Steps 2 Success programme only receive output related funding for job entry and job sustainment for jobs that are over 16 hours per week.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the need for one and two bedroom properties.

(AQW 2918/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive assesses housing need at a geographical Housing Need Assessment area level, to determine the number of new build properties required within an area rather than for specific property types.

When a new build proposal is submitted for support in an area of need, the Housing Executive will consider those on the waiting list (and other factors) to determine the most suitable housing mix for the scheme i.e. the number of one, two or three bed properties required.

The current waiting list for applicants and applicants in housing stress in Northern Ireland is shown below and includes a breakdown of household type, most of whom would be eligible (with the exception of large families) to be considered for 1 or 2 bed accommodation.

Waiting List at June 2016	Singles	Small Adult	Small Family	Large Adult	Large Family	Older Persons	Total
Total Applicants	16,766	1,925	9,838	683	2,449	5,686	37,347
Applicants in Housing Stress	10,452	938	6,201	363	1,437	3,595	22,986

Definition of Household Types

- Single person 1 person 16-59 years old
- Older person 1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over, at least 1 over 60
- Small adult 2 persons 16-59 years old
- Small family 1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over, with 1 or 2 children
- Large family 1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over, and 3 or more persons 0-15, or 3 or more persons 16 or over and 2 or more persons aged 0-15
- Large adult 3 or more persons aged 16 or over with or without 1 person aged 0-15

In addition, the Housing Executive has an internal target to deliver 200 one bedroom units in the 2016/17 Social Housing Development Programme to take account of proposals being introduced under Welfare Reform.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities for a breakdown of the NI Museums Council budget per individual museum, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3036/16-21)

Mr Givan: NI Museums Council (NIMC) has operated various grant programmes in recent years.

In each year the Accredited Museum Grant Programme and the Acquisition Fund were offered. A Collections Research grant scheme operated in 2011-12. The Museum Engagement Programme operated during 2014-15 and 2015-16.

The table attached provides details of grants provided under these programmes.

Annex**2011-12****Accredited Museums Grant Programme**

Ballycastle Museum	Model Yacht Conservation	£468
Ballymoney Museum	Conservation of Clock Case	£520
Coleraine Museum	Conservation Storage Materials – Sam Henry Collection	£658
Coleraine Museum	Heritage Juke Box	£1,092
Coleraine Museum	Hugh Thompson – Circle of Friends	£1,456
Coleraine Museum	Conservation of Glass and Ceramics	£1,160
Craigavon Museum Service	Purchase of Display Boards	£347
Derry Heritage and Museum Service	On-line Resources – Armada Exhibition	£4,660
Down County Museum	Exhibition Research	£283
Down County Museum	Publication of Art Collection Catalogue	£1,000
Down County Museum	Reframing of Paintings and Drawings	£3,120
F. E. McWilliam Gallery	Cataloguing and Documentation	£2,340
F. E. McWilliam Gallery	Conservation of Works on Paper	£3,000
Fermanagh County Museum	Continuity and Change	£975
Fermanagh County Museum	Our Fermanagh Stories	£2,194
Green Lane Museum	Documentation Software	£439
Inniskillings Museum	Collections Database Upgrade	£1,950
Inniskillings Museum	Digitisation of Archives	£975
Larne Museum	Hanging System for Gallery	£1,300
Larne Museum	Letter from America	£808
Mid-Antrim Museum	Conservation of Epergne	£3,415
Mid-Antrim Museum	On-line Picture Library	£290
National Trust – Springhill House	Schaefer Bequest Conservation	£1,268
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Archival Items	£887
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Kilkeel Archival Items	£2,165
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Textile Items	£1,300
North Down Museum	Purchase of Display Cases	£900
Railway Preservation Society of Ireland	Conservation of Railway Tender	£5,000
Somme Heritage Centre	Voices from the Great War	£1,787
	Total	£45,757

Acquisition Fund

Police Museum	1858 Irish Constabulary carbine	£1,314
Derry Heritage and Museum Service	Drawing by F. E. McWilliam	£900
Down County Museum	Painting by Edward Southwell	£500
	Total	£2,714

Collections Research

Coleraine Museum	The Sam Henry Archive	£2,000
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Down County Museum	The Cecil Newman Photograph Collection	£2,500
F. E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio	The F. E. McWilliam Archive	£2,000
	Total	£6,500

2012-13**Accredited Museums Grant Programme**

Ballycastle Museum	Glass and Ceramics Conservation Project – Phase I	£1,869
Carrickfergus Museum	Conservation of Archival Material	£1,170
Coleraine Museum	Hugh Thompson Book Conservation Project	£2,210
Craigavon Museum Service	Conservation of Paper Items	£350
Down County Museum	Conservation of Artworks on Paper	£1,170
Down County Museum	Reframing of Art Collection	£1,794
Downpatrick and Co Down Railway	Restoration of Ulster Railway Carriage	£510
Larne Museum	Smiley Bible Conservation Project	£553
Limavady Museum	Newtown Estate Maps	£800
Lisburn Museum	Exhibition Display Cases	£3,101
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Deputy Lieutenant's Uniform	£618
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Photographs and Documents	£1,670
North Down Museum	Care of Collections Project	£2,925
	Total	£18,740

Acquisition Fund

Mid-Antrim Museum	Carved stones from Ballymena Castle	£1,000
Fermanagh County Museum	William Scott Print	£1,000
	Total	£2,000

2013-14**Accredited Museums Grant Programme**

Armagh Public Library	William Conor Costume Designs conservation	£525
Armagh Public Library	Opening up the Library's print collection	£3,122
Craigavon Museum	Conservation and display of cart	£390
Down County Museum	Conservation of 64 engravings	£2,641
Downpatrick and Co Down Railway	Restoration of seats for BCDR Railmotor	£2,340
Downpatrick and Co Down Railway	Environmental Control and Collections Care Project	£299
Downpatrick and Co Down Railway	Development of website	£2,100
FLAME: Gasworks Museum	Documentation and Outreach IT project	£700
FLAME: Gasworks Museum	Gas Related Papers Conservation Project	£1,500
Fermanagh County Museum	Our Fermanagh Stories Advocacy & Consultation Exercise	£1,910
Inniskillings Museum	History of the Inniskillings in 50 objects	£2,000
Mid-Antrim Museum	Conservation of Rechabite Banner	£5,793
Mid-Antrim Museum	Mid-Antrim Museums Service Conservation Programme	£6,649
National Trust - Springhill	'An Old Ulster House' - Collections Access Project	£2,280
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of archival material	£2,155
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of textile material	£585

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland	Accession Accessibility to All	£1,625
Railway Preservation Society of Ireland	'A Fresh Head of Steam!' – Conservation project	£2,500
Somme Heritage Centre	'It's the way ahead' - IT Access Project	£2,603
Tower Museum	Mobile Museum – Interpretation and Access Project	£3,575
	Total	£45,292

Acquisition Fund

Derry Heritage and Museum Service	Drawing by Eamonn Doherty	£1,000
National Trust - Mount Stewart	Mount Stewart Library Collection	£1,000
Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum	O'Grady Medal	£500
	Total	£2,500

2014-15**Accredited Museums Grant Programme**

Armagh Public Library	Catalogue Management System	£1,955
Armagh Public Library	Conservation Equipment and Materials	£2,291
Carrickfergus Museum	Store Upgrade	£3,223
Craigavon Museum Service	Conservation of Giant Irish Deer Skull	£488
Down County Museum	Conservation of Documents for Exhibition	£910
Down County Museum	Display Cases	£8,106
Downpatrick and Co Down Railway	CCTV and Security Upgrade	£2,295
Fermanagh County Museum	Portable Collections System	£746
Mid-Antrim Museum	Ways of Seeing – Phase I	£4,927
Mid-Antrim Museum	Gallipoli Commemoration Programme	£6,750
Milford House Museum	Conservation and Exhibition of Items	£1,820
Milford House Museum	Branding and Information Boards	£6,500
National Trust - Springhill	Prints and Paper Conservation Storage	£1,255
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Archival Items	£3,112
North Down Museum	Modes Software	£1,154
Police Museum	Conservation Assessment	£495
Sentry Hill	Digital Camera	£245
	Total	£46,272

Acquisition Fund

Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	Irish Linen Damask Tablecloth	£500
Milford House Museum	Chandelier	£750
F.E. McWilliam Gallery & Studio	Study for Princess Macha III	£1,201
	Total	£2,451

Museum Engagement Programme

Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	Allocation towards project that engaged communities and groups from areas of high deprivation.	£4,000
Derry Heritage and Museum Service		£4,000
Newry and Mourne Museum		£4,000
	Total	£12,000

2015-16**Accredited Museums Grant Programme**

Armagh County Museum	Store Shelving	£5,615
Ballymoney Museum	WWII Documents Conservation	£335
Carrickfergus Museum	Conservation of Carrickfergus Civic Collection	£4,770
Carrickfergus Museum	Digital Engagement	£2,291
Coleraine Museum	Gibbon Scrapbooks	£1,200
Craigavon Museum Service	Loan Box Renewal Project	£898
Downpatrick and Co Down Railway	Remedial work to CCTV system	£3,114
Down County Museum	Conservation of two portraits	£1,300
Down County Museum	Interpretation panels for Gaol Gallery	£1,105
Fermanagh County Museum	Map Storage Chest	£3,018
Flame Gasworks Museum	Planning for Storage	£1,464
Inniskillings Museum	Battle of Waterloo Booklet	£630
Limavady Museum	Ipads for Interpretation	£1,217
Mid-Antrim Museum	Purchase of Display Cases	£5,330
Mid-Antrim Museum	Ways of Seeing – Phase II	£1,519
National Trust – Castle Ward	Conservation of Watercolours	£1,502
National Trust – Florence Court	Inventory Photography	£1,040
National Trust – Mount Stewart	Conservation of Congress of Vienna Chair	£1,640
Newry and Mourne Museum	Conservation of Archival items	£1,326
Tower Museum	MODES Complete	£1,870
	Total	£41,184

Acquisition Fund

Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	'Housing Estate at Lisburn' by Basil Blackshaw	£1,000
	Total	£1,000

Museum Engagement Programme

Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	Allocation towards project that engaged communities and groups from areas of high deprivation.	£4,000
Derry Heritage and Museum Service		£4,000
Newry and Mourne Museum		£4,000
	Total	£12,000

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline the departmental funding available to community groups in the Strabane district.

(AQW 3061/16-21)

Mr Givan: Community groups in the Strabane district are able to apply for a number of Housing Executive schemes, as listed below, which are available across Northern Ireland:

- **The Community Grant Scheme** which provides short-term funding aimed at encouraging volunteering, Social Enterprise and engagement with statutory bodies;
- **Community Safety Grants** to address anti social behaviour on Housing Executive estates;
- **Community Cohesion funding** which aims to contribute to improved community cohesion;
- **Social Enterprise Awards** to assist with various social enterprises.

Sources of funding, which are currently open for application, can be identified through:

- i) The NICVA Grant Tracker, which can be found at: <https://www.grant-tracker.org/>
- ii) The Government Funding Database, which can be found at: <https://govfunding.nics.gov.uk/>

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what his Department is doing to ensure householders living in larger properties than they require are supported to downsize.

(AQW 3177/16-21)

Mr Givan: Northern Ireland Housing Executive Officers discuss such matters with tenants when appropriate, for example, where the circumstances of the household have changed following an assignment or succession.

Information about the benefits of downsizing (eg in terms of heating and maintaining a home) and the schemes available to help tenants move home are featured on the Housing Executive's website and in Information leaflets which are made available to tenants and in the Tenants magazine 'Streets Ahead' which is delivered annually to almost 90,000 homes.

Tenants can apply for a transfer and may be eligible for up to 30 Under Occupation Points under the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme where the size of their current accommodation is in excess of their needs.

The Housing Executive also operates a service which allows tenants to exchange their home with another Housing Executive or Housing Association tenant. This can include where their home is larger than they need. It has procured an online mutual exchange service, currently operated by 'HomeSwapper'. This is an internet based exchange service which allows all social housing tenants in Northern Ireland to register interest and obtain information on potential 'swaps' or exchanges of properties with other tenants across Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Finally, discussions are ongoing regarding potential changes to the Housing Selection Scheme to further assist householders who wish to downsize.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline the capital grant allocation that has been provided to housing associations for new builds in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3203/16-21)

Mr Givan: The number of new build starts achieved and the capital investment made each year in new builds through Housing Association Grant (HAG) is provided in the table below.

2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16	
Units	HAG £	Units	HAG £	Units	HAG £	Units	HAG £	Units	HAG £
1,410	88,787,114	1,379	73,486,177	1,299	64,924,619	2,013	111,185,973	1,568	102,110,276

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline how much of his Department's budget has been allocated to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the last five years, broken down into (i) Resource Departmental Expenditure and (ii) Financial Transactions Capital.

(AQW 3205/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The budget allocated to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) for each of the past five years for Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) is set out in the table below.

	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000	2013-14 £'000	2014-15 £'000	2015-16 £'000
Resource DEL	195,601	176,575	135,147	155,478	157,566
Resource DEL Rates Relief - Tenants	-	-	77,139	78,774	81,024

- (ii) No Financial Transaction Capital funding was allocated to NIHE in any of the last five years.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the funding provision for cavity wall insulation to be carried out in NIHE properties homes in North Down.

(AQW 3228/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it currently has one cavity wall scheme at Strand Avenue, Holywood, which is at tender stage. Outside of the funding for this scheme, there is currently no further specific provision made for cavity wall insulation works in properties in North Down. Other dwellings identified with severely or critically inadequate cavity wall insulation will be addressed on a case-by-case basis through either NIHE's response maintenance service or its planned maintenance programme.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline the reasons why the NI Housing Executive does not hold a list of vacant housing association properties; and (ii) whether he intends to create a central database of all vacant properties.
(AQW 3229/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) Housing Associations are independent organisations. It is the responsibility of each Housing association to manage its own housing stock and to ensure that vacant properties are made available for re-let as quickly as possible.
- (ii) The Housing Executive does not have a role regarding the management of housing association stock and there are no plans for NIHE to maintain a listing of such vacant properties. Each year, as part of the Annual Regulatory Return, my Department obtains the numbers of void stock for each housing association as at the 31st March.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how many NIHE properties require insulation improvements.
(AQW 3273/16-21)

Mr Givan:

Loft Insulation

The Housing Executive has advised that the Stock Condition Survey of its properties undertaken by the DSD / NIHE Joint Asset Commission found no failures in its stock against the Decent Homes Standard on account of inadequate loft insulation. Upgrades to loft insulation continue to be carried out through the Housing Executive's heating programme.

Wall Insulation

The Housing Executive has a significant number of properties of solid wall or non-traditional construction. The thermal insulation qualities of these dwellings are poor, many have no wall insulation at all and very few have benefitted from any additional wall insulation schemes.

The Housing Executive carried out a major programme to install cavity wall insulation in its properties from the mid-1980s through to the early 1990s. The Housing Executive estimates that around 62,000 of its houses have full cavity wall insulation and a further 9,000 have partial cavity wall insulation. No comprehensive survey of the condition of cavity wall insulation in Housing Executive homes has been undertaken.

The Housing Executive has advised that the position on cavity wall insulation throughout its stock is being established via the External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Representative samples of cavity inspections will be undertaken to determine if the cavity has been filled and, if it has been filled, what condition it is in. Where specific problems are identified these are being addressed on a case-by-case basis either through the Housing Executive's response maintenance service or planned maintenance programme.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how many NIHE properties currently require major improvement.
(AQW 3274/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Stock Condition Survey conducted as part of the Joint DSD / NIHE Asset Commission identified that the Housing Executive stock will require investment of £6.7 billion over the next 30 years to achieve and maintain modern housing standards.

This equates to an average figure of around £76,000 of investment per property over 30 years. However some properties will require significantly more than this and others less. While the Housing Executive is aware of the investment requirements for its stock and is currently developing its first 10 year investment programme on the basis of this information, it is difficult to define a specific number of properties that could be considered as currently in need of 'major' improvement as this will depend on the definition of 'major'.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the target number of low income households assisted by the Affordable Warmth Scheme for the 2015-16 year in Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and (ii) how many homes were actually assisted.
(AQW 3283/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Affordable Warmth Scheme uses a targeted and area based approach to identify low income owner occupiers and those who rent from a private sector landlord who are most at risk of fuel poverty.

In 2015/2016 each council was invited to refer 1,000 households to the Housing Executive for an assessment of their eligibility for the Affordable Warmth Scheme. This was based on the performance of the previous Warm Homes Scheme which aimed to assist 9,000 homes each year. Under the former Warm Homes Scheme the average grant per household was £1,440 and by November 2015 the average grant per household under the Affordable Warmth Scheme had risen to £3,800 as the scheme provides an enhanced range of measures to the households assisted. This means that with the same budget fewer homes can be assisted but will receive an enhanced range of energy efficiency improvement measures including cavity and loft insulation, new heating systems, replacement windows and solid wall insulation where appropriate.

The Housing Executive does not analyse Affordable Warmth Scheme performance by parliamentary constituency. Fermanagh South Tyrone comprises parts of the council areas of Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster, both of these

council areas are covered by a single Grants Office. In 2015/16, the Housing Executive issued 1,058 Approvals to householders in those two council areas (Fermanagh and Omagh 467 and Mid Ulster 591). Once an approval is issued, householders are asked to have the work completed within 3 months.

In 2015/2016, 634 homes received 1,054 energy efficiency improvement measures in those two council areas (263 homes (430 measures) in Fermanagh and Omagh and 371 homes (624 measures) in Mid Ulster.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQW 3205/16-21, to detail how much of his Department's budget has been allocated to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for each of the past five years, broken down into (i) capital departmental expenditure limits; and (ii) annual managed expenditure.

(AQW 3292/16-21)

Mr Givan: The budgets allocated to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) for each of the past five years are set out in the tables below.

Table 1: NIHE Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) Budgets

	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000	2013-14 £'000	2014-15 £'000	2015-16 £'000
Capital DEL	201,725	126,131	111,662	194,922	127,190

Table 2: NIHE Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) Budgets

	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000	2013-14 £'000	2014-15 £'000	2015-16 £'000
Resource AME – Housing Benefit *	595,213	630,476	569,782	582,692	595,049
Resource AME – other **&***				27,935	16,785
Capital AME ***	199,725	130,131	111,662	-	-
Capital AME ***	-	-	-	23,356	5,090

* In 2011-12 and 2012-13, Housing Benefit for rates relief was accounted for in AME. Subsequently, it moved to DEL.

** Other Resource AME includes accounting adjustments and corporation tax.

*** Following a review by the Office for National Statistics, NIHE's regional function was reclassified as a Non Departmental Public Body and the landlord function as a Quasi Public Corporation with effect from 2014/15. The reclassification resulted in a change to the budgeting and reporting framework. As a result the Capital and Resource AME budgets are not directly comparable across the period.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities , regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices, to outline what detailed rural-proofing has been carried out in relation to the delivery of services.

(AQW 3310/16-21)

Mr Givan: On 20th September 2016, my Department commenced a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres.

As part of this consultation exercise my officials have engaged with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for advice on the rural proofing of the proposals. An initial rural-proofing exercise has been completed which indicates that appropriate measures can be put in place to mitigate any potential adverse impacts that the proposals might have.

However, my Department acknowledges that office closures will impact on existing users and will therefore keep the need for a rural impact assessment under review during the consultation process.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities , regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices, to outline what due regard has been given to the Rural Needs Act in relation to the delivery of services.

(AQW 3312/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 does not come into effect for Northern Ireland Departments until 1st June 2017. However, Departmental officials have engaged with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and having due regard to rural needs, an initial rural-proofing exercise has been completed in respect of the proposed closure of a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many women and their children used a refuge centre in the period (i) 2014-15; and (ii) 2015-16.

(AQW 3322/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, through the Supporting People Programme, funds 14 women's refuges to provide 138 housing support units.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has informed me that they do not hold information on how many women and children use the refuges.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many women were not able to enter a refuge centre due to over-subscription in the period (i) 2014-15; and (ii) 2015-16.

(AQW 3323/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) through the Supporting People Programme funds 14 women's refuges throughout Northern Ireland providing 138 units of supported accommodation. I have been advised that that the specific information requested is not held by the Housing Executive.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many young people entered refuge centres in the period (i) 2014-15; and (ii) 2015-16.

(AQW 3325/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) through the Supporting People Programme funds 14 women's refuges throughout Northern Ireland providing 138 units of supported accommodation. The specific information requested is not maintained by the Housing Executive.

However the Housing Executive has advised that information from the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland indicates that 689 children (as defined by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child) affected by domestic violence stayed in refuges in the 2014-15 period.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Communities which projects his Department is reviewing, or plans to review, as a result of changes in funding from European sources.

(AQW 3335/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities is not reviewing any projects and does not have any plans to review any projects at this time.

Until the point that the UK leaves the EU it will continue to have all the rights and obligations that membership brings, including receiving European Funding.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to outline how his Department can assist families of adults who are on the autistic disorder spectrum and who may exhibit challenging behaviour to secure funding for a physical, independent living space or room at home.

(AQW 3342/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive can offer Disabled Facilities Grants to private sector householders where a family member has a disability and needs adaptations carried out to make the home more suitable for the needs of that person.

The works that can be grant aided typically include:

- Making access easier to the bathroom, living room or bedroom;
- Providing bathroom facilities, replacing a bath with a level access shower;
- Making the preparation and cooking of food easier, e.g. by enlarging the kitchen;
- Extending the dwelling to incorporate a downstairs bedroom and bathroom.

Grant aided works must be both necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the occupant who has the disability and be reasonable and practicable given the age and condition of the home. The works must be recommended by an Occupational Therapist from the local Health Trust. The Housing Executive has also provided funding for safe play areas for children with challenging behaviours.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline a breakdown of where neighbourhood renewal money was spent in the Strabane district.

(AQW 3345/16-21)

Mr Givan: In the last five years my Department has spent almost £4 million in the Strabane district through Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. The breakdown of where this was spent is listed in the table below.

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding in Strabane District

- Environmental Improvements within the Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal Area
- Creation of Multi Use Play/Recreation Area (Patrician Villas)
- Strabane Sigerson's GAA Construction of 4 Female Changing Rooms

- Strabane Sigerson's GAA Construction of Activity Wall & Ancillary Works
- Upgrade of Footpaths, Cycle paths, Streets and lighting in the Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal Area
- Fountain Street Community Development Association
- Foyle Women's Aid
- Derry City and Strabane District Council (Generalist Advice Services)
- Holy Cross College
- Have Your Tomorrows (HURT)
- Lisnafin/Ardnalee Trust Cross Community Development Association
- Melmount & East Bank Estates Community Association Forum
- North West Play Resource Centre
- South West College
- Springhill Park Community Development Association
- Strabane & District Caring Services
- Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group
- Strabane Community Project
- Strabane Community Unemployed Group
- Strabane Ethnic Community Association
- Strabane Local Strategy Partnership
- Strabane Sigerson's GAA
- Strabane Sigerson's GAA
- The Koram Centre
- Derry City and Strabane District Council (Technical Assistance for project development)
- Education Authority Western Division (Youth intervention and education project)

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of people currently waiting for social housing, broken down by age.

(AQW 3354/16-21)

Mr Givan: The number of applicants on the Waiting List at 30 June 2016, broken down by age, are detailed in the table below which has been supplied by the Housing Executive.

Age band	No. of Applicants	No. in Housing stress
Under 18	38	28
18 to 25	6081	4147
26 to 29	4156	2711
30 to 39	8344	5056
40 to 49	6297	3680
50 to 59	5231	2906
60 to 64	1794	992
65+	5406	3466
Total	37347	22986

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities to detail all Ministerial visits he has undertaken since taking up office, including the (i) date; (ii) purpose; and (iii) constituency.

(AQW 3425/16-21)

Mr Givan: The details requested are shown in the attached document.

Visit	Date	Constituency	Purpose of Visit	Type
Lisburn JBO	15/06/2016	Lagan Valley	Visit and photo at Lisburn JBO	Visit
Development House	15/06/2016	Upper Bann	Meeting with RDO staff	Visit
Ballybeen Women's Centre	29/06/2016	Strangford	Visit to and meeting with BWC to discuss work and concerns	Visit

Visit	Date	Constituency	Purpose of Visit	Type
Shankill Women's Centre	26/07/2016	West Belfast	Visit to see work undertaken by centre	Visit
Visit to Ulster Museum	03/08/2016	South Belfast	Visit to meet with NMNI community partners	Visit
Visit to Coleraine University	09/08/2016	East Londonderry	No info held regarding visit	Visit
Visit to Mr & Mrs Phillips	12/08/2016	Lagan Valley	Visit to discuss adaption of property 57 Killaney Avenue	Visit
Visit to Belfast South Community Resources	16/08/2016	South Belfast	Visit to meet young people involved in Digital Skills Week	Visit
Visit to Dungannon United Youth	01/09/2016	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Visit to Football Club and to meet with Hebron School of Martial Arts	Visit
DePaul Visit	06/09/2016	North Belfast	Visit to see example of work being undertaken in Stella Maris	Visit
Visit to Daisy Lodge	07/09/2016	South Down	Visit to see work in Daisy Lodge	Visit
Visit to All Saints Boxing Club	08/09/2016	North Antrim	Visit and meeting with several MLAs and club reps	Visit
Visit to Harryville Partnership	08/09/2016	North Antrim	Meeting to discuss funding and location issues	Visit
Visit to Causeway Coast and Glens Area	08/09/2016	North Antrim	Visit to several locations in the area to make funding announcements	Visit
Visit to Ballybeen Women's Centre	14/09/2016	Strangford	Visit and update on centre's future plans	Visit
Tour of Radar Centre	15/09/2016	East Belfast	Tour of centre	Visit
Visit to UU, Belfast Campus	15/09/2016	North Belfast	Visit for update on University development plans	Visit
Visit to Upper Bann	15/09/2016	Upper Bann	Visit to 4 cricket/bowling clubs in the area to discuss funding issues	Visit
Visit to the SCRAM Centre	21/09/2016	Lagan Valley	Visit to see facilities and hear about work done there	Visit
Visit to Dales and Moynes Flats	21/09/2016	Lagan Valley	Visit to see towerblocks and discuss their condition	Visit
Visit to Larne Football Club	22/09/2016	East Antrim	Meeting to discuss sub regional stadia programme	Visit
Visit to Blanchflower Stadium	23/09/2016	East Belfast	Visit to hear progress report and redevelopment plans	Visit
Visit to Cedar Foundation, Lisburn	23/09/2016	Lagan Valley	Visit to supported housing scheme	Visit
Vauxhall International Challenge Match	27/05/2016	East Belfast	Attendance at football match	Event
HMS Caroline Opening	31/05/2016	East Belfast	Opening of museum	Event
Responsible Business Awards Gala	02/06/2016	East Belfast	Awards evening	Event
BBC Music Day	03/06/2016	East Belfast	Reception and concert	Event
NIHE Annual Conference	08/06/2016	East Belfast	Address conference and present awards	Event
SoS Garden Party, Hillsborough	14/06/2016	Lagan Valley	Reception	Event
Opening of Tullaghoge Fort	15/06/2016	Mid Ulster	Opening	Event

Visit	Date	Constituency	Purpose of Visit	Type
Super Schools Festival	15/06/2016	North Belfast	Speech and presentation of awards	Event
Euro 2016 Match	16/06/2016	N/A	Attendance at football match	Event
World Premiere of The Belfast Opera	18/06/2016	North Belfast	Audience member	Event
Euro 2016 Match	21/06/2016	N/A	Attendance at football match	Event
American Independence Day Reception	24/06/2016	South Belfast	Reception	Event
NI Football Team Homecoming	27/06/2016	East Belfast	Reception and address	Event
Launch of Digitised WW1 Letters	29/06/2016	North Belfast	Launch	Event
Unveiling of 1st July Project	01/07/2016	West Belfast	Launch	Event
Opening Night at The Lyric Theatre	05/07/2016	South Belfast	Audience member	Event
Launch of Carer's Allowance Digital Service	06/07/2016	North Belfast	Launch of service	Event
Roughan Opening Event	11/07/2016	South Tyrone	Opening and photocall	Event
Opening of Irish Street, Rose Court and Clooney Community Centre	15/07/2016	Foyle	Opening	Event
Launch of Next Steps Together Report	27/07/2016	Foyle	Launch of report	Event
Dankse Bank Premiership Launch	03/08/2016	South Belfast	Reception	Event
My Journey, My Voice	04/08/2016	Lagan Valley	Speech and exhibition viewing	Event
UEFA Women's Under 19 Tournament Launch	11/08/2016	East Belfast	Launch of Tournament	Event
Carl Frampton Event	12/08/2016	East Belfast	Reception to mark boxing success	Event
Launch of Hard at Work	16/08/2016	East Belfast	Launch	Event
Edinburgh Cultural Summit	24/08/2016	N/A	Opening ceremony and Ministerial Breakfast	Event
BBC Proms	29/08/2016	N/A	Audience member	Event
Joint Good Relations Event	31/08/2016	South Belfast	Opening address	Event
Launch of Banbridge Masterplan	01/09/2016	Upper Bann	Launch of plan	Event
Airwaves	03/09/2016	East Londonderry	Audience member	Event
Public Trust in Charities Report Launch	06/09/2016	East Belfast	Launch of report	Event
Improving Benefit Uptake Launch	07/09/2016	Lagan Valley	Launch of service	Event
Launch of Challenge Fund	21/09/2016	Lagan Valley	Launch of service	Event
Fermanagh Heritage Gateway Launch	22/09/2016	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Launch and interview	Event
Launch of Community House in Drumtara	22/09/2016	North Antrim	Launch of new facilities	Event
Family Fun Day	22/09/2016	North Antrim	Community Relations and Cultural Awareness Week event	Event

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline the assessment that has been carried out on the options for renewable heating in NIHE tower blocks.

(AQW 3435/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive is currently completing an option appraisal process as part of its Tower Block Strategy to determine the long term future of all its tower blocks. In the course of making decisions on the future of its tower blocks, the Housing Executive intends on assessing potential heating options which will include renewable heating alternatives.

The Housing Executive has advised that in 2015 it conducted an initial scan of the market to identify what new or innovative heating or energy efficiency technologies were currently on the market. As a result of this, two companies have responded with products that they state are particularly suitable for flats – both medium and high rise.

Furthermore the Housing Executive is also investigating the introduction of new electricity tariffs suitable for renewable technologies including energy storage systems and it is pursuing this with the Utility Regulator.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to detail the costs of maintaining the current publicly-owned housing stock at Decent Homes Standard, in each of the next five years.

(AQW 3436/16-21)

Mr Givan: In July 2014, the Department and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) procured a survey of the NIHE stock condition as part of a wider asset commission. This survey was based on assessments of one quarter of all of the NIHE's 88,000 social homes. These were conducted in late 2014 / early 2015 and the findings published in March 2016.

Based on the findings of the survey it is estimated that the annual requirement for 17/18 to 21/22 would be approximately £327m. The standard against which this requirement was assessed is higher than the Decent Homes Standard to which you have referred, but reflects common practice, including in the NIHE.

The survey also defined the NIHE's investment requirements against a standard broadly comparable to Decent Homes and it is estimated that the annual requirement to meet this lower standard from 17/18 to 21/22 would be approximately £260m.

The outputs of the Joint Asset Commission, including the Summary Report on the survey and other outputs are available on the DfC (www.communities-ni.gov.uk) and NIHE (www.nihe.gov.uk) websites.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline how he will support future town centre heritage initiatives; and (ii) whether he plans to set aside funding to help schemes achieve greater success.

(AQW 3490/16-21)

Mr Givan: I launched the Historic Environment Fund on 14 September 2016. The fund has four streams of funding to support actions and initiatives that will conserve and realise the potential of our historic environment. The funding streams are:- Heritage Research, Heritage Regeneration, Heritage Repair and Heritage Revival.

Applications will be considered from across Northern Ireland in this financial year for Heritage Regeneration, Heritage Repair and Heritage Revival funds.

The Historic Environment Fund will have a four year life span to align with the Executive's proposed budget period. Funds for future years will be subject to budget availability.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities or an update on the proposed transfer of housing stock at Rossville Street, Derry to a housing association.

(AQW 3502/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive has undertaken to transfer 2,000 homes to housing associations in order to deliver £100 million of investment to the stock. Any such transfers as part of this process of small scale stock transfer require tenant agreement.

Regarding Rossville Street the Housing Executive is currently completing an Outline Business Case to confirm if the proposed transfer is viable.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Communities whether medical notes are sent by recorded delivery when they are being returned from the Appeals Service.

(AQW 3505/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Appeals Service returns all medical notes using the Royal Mail 'signed for' delivery service.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities what his Department is doing to support foodbanks.

(AQW 3507/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department recognises that food banks provide a service to individuals in times of real crisis in their lives. In that context, my staff on the ground have been pro active in working with the food bank network to ensure that those

accessing food support are also assisted in drawing down the social security benefits and wider supports that they are entitled to.

My officials have put in place a partnership model whereby Food Banks can ensure that every individual and family that finds itself in crisis and presenting in need of food support is referred directly into the Department's Improving Benefit Uptake Service for a full and confidential benefit entitlement check. This assesses entitlement, not only to Social Security Benefits, but also to a wide range of additional government benefits, services and support.

In addition, Food Banks have been offered a second layer of support - a named Community Outreach Officer, who will work closely with their staff and volunteers to ensure that anyone who needs further benefit advice or help with making a claim is given the support they need. If necessary, this support can be provided within their own homes. Community Outreach Officers' contact details are shared to ease access to advice.

A wide range of food banks in Northern Ireland have been provided with "Make the Call" promotional material and are actively encouraged to distribute these with every food box or parcel. It is hoped that by doing so, those presenting at food banks will be encouraged to have an entitlement check by telephoning the dedicated "Make the Call" freephone Benefits Advice Line (0800 232 1271).

My department published research in 2015 into the causes of food bank use and the lessons learned from this has informed our ongoing service improvement and partnership working. The Report, 'An Insight into Food Banks in Northern Ireland', is available on the Department's website.

More recently, as part of "A Fresh Start", additional Executive funds were agreed to help mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform, with £1.65million allocated to research and pilot actions aimed at reducing food poverty by improving access to food through a network of community food shops and social stores/supermarkets over the next four years.

Given the high level of interest and ongoing activity by a wide range of stakeholders in this area, I have commissioned a scoping study to identify the opportunities for that money to add value by bringing forward proposals for testing interventions that can be sustained and will make a difference in reducing food poverty.

On an ongoing basis, my officials continue to engage with a wide range of food bank representatives to better understand people's need and to join up services and support in a way that helps reduce the need for food banks in our society.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of foodbanks, broken down by local council area. (AQW 3508/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department continues to work in partnership with food banks across Northern Ireland to ensure that those who are at that most vulnerable point are in receipt of all benefits, services and supports that they and their families are entitled to.

Whilst this engagement continues at a local level, my Department has no role in monitoring or recording the number of food banks operating in Northern Ireland. The information is not held.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department has considered supporting the reinstatement of the Fermanagh Feis. (AQW 3510/16-21)

Mr Givan: The reinstatement of the Fermanagh Feis does not fall within the remit of my Department.

However, my Department allocates a total of around £400,000 per year to the Community Festivals Fund which is administered by Local Councils. Fermanagh and Omagh Council were awarded £24,900 in 2016/17. The Council have confirmed that they have not received an application for funding from Fermanagh Feis in the last five years.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding. (AQW 3571/16-21)

Mr Givan: In relation to parts (i) and (ii), I can confirm that no bids have been made or are currently being prepared.

In relation to part (iii), The Disability Employment Service provides public match funding to 17 employability and employment projects, aimed at supporting people with a range of disabilities to progress towards and obtain paid employment. These projects receive core funding through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Department for the Economy (DfE).

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline the current status of the Together: Building a United Community Sports Programme; and (ii) whether he plans to roll it out to projects in West Tyrone. (AQW 3625/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Together Building a United Community (TBUC) cross community youth sports programme headline action aims to improve good relations through the power of sport and creative activity and produce the next generation of community leaders. The programme has been delivered successfully in the Lower Falls and Greater Village areas of Belfast and young people from these communities are now designing and delivering their own good relations programmes. A rural programme is

underway in the Erne East area of Co Fermanagh and my officials have developed a strategic partnership with The Executive Office's Urban Village initiative to deliver the sports programme in the Urban Village areas. Initial stakeholder engagement and community co-design has commenced in the Colin and Eastside Urban Village areas and this will continue throughout 2016/2017 with a view to delivering a dedicated programme for both areas in 2017/18.

Further roll out of the cross community youth sports programme is subject to the availability of funding. No additional areas have been selected for programme roll out at this time; however priority will again be given to urban and rural areas with particular interface challenges and good relations issues, in line with the TBUC Strategy.

The sports programme will continue to include a significant rural dimension and take account of the fact that interfaces are not only to be construed as physical barriers, but can also be the less visible social, economic and community barriers that can exist in rural areas. Chief Executive of NIHE

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) who was the Chief Executive of the NIHE; and (ii) who was the Chairman of the NIHE when the land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade was sold to a private developer.

(AQW 3633/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that when the land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade was sold:

- (i) The Chief Executive was Mr Paddy McIntyre; and
- (ii) The Chairman was Mr Brian Rowntree.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many houses were demolished on the land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade prior to the sale of that land to a private developer.

(AQW 3634/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that 108 dwellings were demolished on the land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade prior to its release to a private developer.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Communities to detail the date on which the sale of land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade to a private developer was approved by the board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 3635/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the sale of land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade to Quayside Construction was approved by the Board of the Housing Executive in June 2005.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) when was a large area of land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade vested by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and (ii) how much land was vested.

(AQW 3636/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the area is known as Glenbryn Redevelopment Area 138 and was vested in November 2002. The entire redevelopment area was 2.758 hectares.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) when did the Northern Ireland Housing Executive sell a large area of land at Glenbryn Park, Glenbryn Drive and Glenbryn Parade to a private developer; and (ii) how much land was sold.

(AQW 3637/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the site at Glenbryn was transferred to Quayside Construction under licence in June 2007 with the sale completed in January 2008. The site area was 1.86 hectares.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail how many complaints the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has received in relation to the work and standards of their service in the last three years; and (ii) whether these complaints will be considered as part of the Review of CCNI.

(AQW 3640/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland received (i) seven complaints in 2013/14, seven complaints in 2014/15 and seven complaints in 2016/17 in relation to the work and standards of service, and (ii) the Review of CCNI will consider if there any identifiable trends from the complaints received by the Charity Commission and assess the action taken to address these. Individual complaints will not be considered by the review.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail how much the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has spent on legal opinion and/or legal advice obtained from any source outside Northern Ireland in each of the last 3 years and this year to date; and (ii) to outline why it was necessary to seek legal opinion and/or legal advice outside this jurisdiction.

(AQW 3643/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland spent £20,060.05 in 2013-14, £37,762.65 in 2014-15, £28,703.80 in 2015-16 and £6,090.00 in 2016-17 (to date) on legal opinion and/or legal advice obtained from any source outside Northern Ireland.
- (ii) Legal opinion and/or legal advice was sought from outside this jurisdiction as these were very specialised and complex areas of legal work which are new to Northern Ireland and required substantial knowledge of specific areas of charity law, or relevant experience within NI was exhausted, or counsel had already represented the Commission in ongoing appeals therefore continuity of legal advice and representation was essential.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the legal costs in relation to the proceedings Attorney General NI -v- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland notifying party W. Allen in the High Court and the subsequent court of appeal; and (ii) to outline whether costs were awarded against these proceedings, and if so, did they include the Attorney General's costs.

(AQW 3644/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has spent £8,640 on legal costs in relation to the proceedings Attorney General NI -v- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland notifying party W. Allen in the High Court and the subsequent Court of Appeal.
- (ii) A decision on the High Court Proceedings has been issued and the Attorney General was awarded costs. The Court of Appeal hearing took place on 7 September 2016, and a written decision has not yet been issued. No costs have been submitted to the Commission by the Attorney General to date.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many new builds are planned over the next five years for South Antrim; broken down by property size.

(AQW 3664/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) is formulated on a three year basis, so information on new social housing schemes is only currently available for the period 2016/17-2018/19.

There are currently 62 social housing units which are classified as "under construction" in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency. The detail of these schemes is included in Table 1 below.

There are also 301 social housing units programmed to start on-site in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency as part of the SHDP 2016/17 to 2018/19. The detail of these schemes is included in Table 2 below.

Housing Associations' proposed mixes for new social housing schemes are supported by the Housing Executive based on housing need identified through the Common Waiting List. Housing mixes are subject to change and some will only be indicative at this stage, therefore it is not possible to collate the planned numbers of units by property size for the time period requested. For indicative purposes only, the typical balance for new social housing delivery is around 15% one-beds, 50% two-beds, 30% three-beds and 5% four+ beds.

Please note that programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons for example relating to delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure Planning Permission. Additional schemes can also be added to the SHDP in-year through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory / Off-the-shelf properties.

Table 1: Social housing schemes recorded as starts but not completed (under construction) in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency (at 22nd September 2016)

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Clanmil	5 Roguery Road	Toome	Rural	7	2014/15	2016/17
Connswater	22 Fairview Road	Newtownabbey	Urban	1	2015/16	2016/17
Connswater	58 Mayfield High Street	Newtownabbey	Urban	1	2015/16	2016/17
Fold	Chaine Court (Transfer)	Antrim	Urban	14	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	The Square	Ballyclare	Urban	39	2016/17	2018/19

Table 2: Social housing schemes programmed to start in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency as part of the Social Housing Development Programme 2016/17-2018/19 (at 22nd September 2016)

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	Donegore Drive (Transfer)	Antrim	Urban	15	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Fennel Road (Transfer)	Antrim	Urban	15	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	5 Massareene Gardens	Antrim	Urban	1	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	52-58 Main Street	Glenavy	Rural	16	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	Devenish Drive (Transfer)	Monkstown	Urban	2	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	Devenish Drive (Transfer)	Monkstown	Urban	4	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	Devenish Drive (Transfer)	Monkstown	Urban	14	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	19-21a Riverside, Antrim	Antrim	Urban	3	2016/17	2016/17
Choice	Neillsbrook Park (17-19 Portglenone Road)	Randalstown	Urban	9	2016/17	2017/18
Choice	Neillsbrook Park (17-19 Portglenone Road)	Randalstown	Urban	4	2016/17	2017/18
Connswater	Manse Road, Ballyclare Road, New Mossley (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	Urban	48	2016/17	2018/19
Helm Housing	Vicarage Gardens (site to rear of 33 Oriel Road)	Antrim	Urban	2	2016/17	2016/17
Helm Housing	1-11 Ballyfore Park	Ballyduff	Urban	6	2016/17	2016/17
Rural	Crumlin ESPs	Crumlin	Urban	7	2016/17	2016/17
Rural	10 Maple Park	Crumlin	Urban	1	2016/17	2016/17
Triangle	Crumlin ESPs	Crumlin	Urban	5	2016/17	2016/17
Apex Housing	Ballyduff Road, Carnmoney	Newtownabbey	Urban	6	2017/18	2018/19
Choice	Lands to the rear of Riverside, Antrim	Antrim	Urban	6	2017/18	2018/19
Clanmil	The Old Mill, Mill Road	Crumlin	Urban	32	2017/18	2019/20
Clanmil	53 Mill Road	Crumlin	Urban	11	2017/18	2018/19
Connswater	Ballycraig Way, New Mossley	Newtownabbey	Urban	4	2017/18	2018/19
Connswater	Campbell Road, New Mossley	Newtownabbey	Urban	20	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Crumlin ESPs	Crumlin	Urban	5	2017/18	2018/19
Apex Housing	15 Glenavy Road	Crumlin	Urban	55	2018/19	2021/22
Helm Housing	Lands to the rear of 47 Main Street	Crumlin	Urban	5	2018/19	2019/20

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Triangle	Crumlin ESPs	Crumlin	Urban	5	2018/19	2019/20

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the funding provision for cavity wall insulation to be carried out in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in South Antrim.

(AQW 3667/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it currently has two schemes in South Antrim involving improvements to thermal insulation, although not specifically cavity wall insulation. One is a pilot scheme at Springfarm, Antrim which is on site and consists of external wall insulation to 7 “No Fines” dwellings and extracting and refilling the cavity of one other dwelling.

The second scheme is South Antrim Aluminium Bungalows which is currently scheduled to start in April 2017. This scheme is designed to improve the thermal insulation of the external walls of 54 dwellings, by replacing the aluminium sheeting with Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) insulation board.

Outside the funding for these two schemes, there is currently no specific funding provision being made for cavity wall insulation works in Housing Executive properties in South Antrim. Dwellings identified with severely or critically inadequate cavity wall insulation will be addressed on a case-by-case basis through either NIHE’s response maintenance service or its planned maintenance programme.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities, in the event of the closure of Ballynahinch Jobs and Benefits Office, to outline what proposals he has to mitigate the financial impact for clients that will be forced to travel to alternative locations.

(AQW 3669/16-21)

Mr Givan: Currently any Jobseekers attending Client Adviser interviews are entitled to have their travelling expenses reimbursed.

In launching the public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres, including the Ballynahinch office, the Department recognises that the closure of offices may have an impact for claimants accessing our services.

As part of the consultation exercise the Department will give full consideration as to what options are available to mitigate any impacts on service users, including any potential financial impact.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities how many people that were registered as homeless died in hospital in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 3670/16-21)

Mr Givan: Information on how many people were registered as homeless and died in hospital in each of the last twelve months is not held by the Housing Executive.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities whether responsibility for any new housing developments by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive would come under its landlord function or its regional services function.

(AQW 3673/16-21)

Mr Givan: All new build social housing in Northern Ireland is developed and managed by Housing Associations. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has not built or taken management responsibility for any new social housing developments since the 1980s.

New social housing in Northern Ireland is grant funded by the Department through the Social Housing Development Programme. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Development Programme Group, which is part of the regional services function, is responsible for managing the Social Housing Development Programme.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities to outline what engagement there has been between his Department and the eleven local councils to ensure greater cohesion in implementing arts policy.

(AQW 3697/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department’s funding for the Arts is disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) and ACNI has recently launched the Arts Council Challenge Fund for Local Government. The Arts Council Challenge Fund aims to embed arts policy and programming in the development of Local Government Community Plans and their emerging themes, including economic growth, urban and rural regeneration, community relations, social cohesion, tourism, health & wellbeing.

The Arts Council is challenging local authorities to increase their investment in the arts with the offer to double local government investment with matched funding from the National Lottery through ACNI. A total of £1.5m has been made available by ACNI this year.

In addition, local Councils were consulted throughout the process of developing the Communities Festival Funds' Policy and Guidance Framework which came into effect in 2016/17.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Women in Community Development Programme.
(AQW 3703/16-21)

Mr Givan: My officials are taking forward activity to increase the participation of women in community development in order to address paramilitarism, as outlined in Section A Paragraph 3.9 of the Fresh Start Agreement through two related strands of activity.

Strand one relates to a detailed co-design process involving key stakeholders from the statutory and voluntary and community sectors to develop a framework proposal for public consultation and delivery from April 2017.

Strand two identifies the need for early intervention in identifying and engaging potential participants for the strand one programme and is planned to take place between October 2016 and March 2017.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of people on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive housing waiting list in Upper Bann; and (ii) their profile, such as single parent, over 65.

(AQW 3714/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below, provided by the Housing Executive, details the number of applicants on the Waiting List in Upper Bann Parliamentary constituency and the household type, at 30 June 2016.

Total Applicants in Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency by Household Type

Single Male > 16 and < 18	<10
Single Male 18 - 25	124
Single Male 26 - 59	429
Single Female > 16 and < 18	<10
Single Female 18 - 25	95
Single Female 26 - 59	221
Husband & Wife 18 - 25	19
Husband & Wife 26 - 59	75
Male 60+	72
Female 60+	164
Husband and Wife 60+ (either)	66
2 Adults 60+(either)	36
2 Adults 18 - 59	79
2 Adults & 1 child	80
2 Adults & 2 children	87
1 Parent & 1 child	190
1 Parent & 2 children	99
2 Adults & 3 children	39
2 Adults & 4+ children	23
1 Parent & 3 children	33
1 Parent & 4+ children	30
3+ Adults & 2+ children	29
3+ Adults & 0 or 1 child	79

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the implementation of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015.

(AQW 3717/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 was made on 9 December 2015 by Westminster and to date there have been 5 commencement orders to introduce various provisions within the Order. There have also been a series

of regulations passed to implement future welfare changes in this Order. These have been made at Westminster with commencement dates in the future to align with IT and operational requirements.

The welfare changes which have been made during 2016 have included the Benefit Cap which was introduced on 31 May and Personal Independence Payment which commenced on 20 June 2016. There have also been changes to how claimants can appeal social security decisions with the introduction of a mandatory reconsideration process and new fraud and error powers have also been introduced.

Moving forward the new Discretionary Support service will replace discretionary aspects of Social Fund from the end of October and the time-limiting of contributory Employment and Support Allowance will begin on 28th November 2016.

The next phase of Personal Independence Payment, which starts the managed migration of existing DLA claimants to the new benefit, commences in December and it is currently planned that housing benefit changes relating to under occupancy in the social rented sector will commence on 23rd January 2017. My Department has also recently agreed with the Department for Welfare and Pensions (DWP) that the roll out of Universal Credit will commence in September 2017.

In addition, there have also been four sets of Welfare Supplementary Payments Regulations made through the Assembly. These provide the level of mitigation outlined in the Evason Report for the welfare changes which have already been implemented.

All Regulations are available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>.

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Communities to outline why access to Hillsborough Fort has been restricted to 4pm during the summer months.

(AQW 3726/16-21)

Mr Givan: The opening arrangements for Hillsborough Fort transferred to my Department in May 2016.

There has been no new restriction or reduction on opening times this year; the closing time remains consistent with the arrangements in 2015. My officials keep opening times of state care monuments under review, taking account of factors such as visitor numbers and the costs of opening each state care monument.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 2548/16-21, to detail the timescales set by his Department for application, approval and delivery of the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

(AQW 3728/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Affordable Warmth Scheme uses a targeted area based approach to find households considered to be most at risk of fuel poverty. Local council officials make an initial visit to the householder to assess eligibility before passing the case to a Housing Executive Grants Office for a technical inspection to determine what energy efficiency improvement measures are needed for the property.

The Housing Executive has reviewed the Affordable Warmth process to ensure cases are dealt with quickly. However, it is important to note that some aspects of the process are outside the control of the Department and the Housing Executive; for example:

- householders have to provide information confirming eligibility to the councils and to the Housing Executive;
- where the property is in the private rented sector, the landlord has to be identified and contacted;
- contractors have to be contacted and appointed;
- Building Control Officers have to certify completed works.

Where all eligibility documents have been received and are satisfactory, it takes the Housing Executive 4 to 5 weeks to issue a formal approval. This process involves:

- checking that the documents are correct;
- assessing eligibility;
- making an appointment and conducting a technical inspection of the property;
- producing a costed schedule of works identifying the approved measures.

When works have been completed, and all payment documents have been received, it takes the Housing Executive 2 to 3 weeks to check the payment documents and process the payment.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline the procedure for dealing with dilapidated and rat-infested private houses which have been abandoned by their landlords but are attached to Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) properties and that are affecting the overall look and hygiene of the NIHE property.

(AQW 3733/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has a responsibility for deciding the most satisfactory course of action in relation to an unfit property. This responsibility extends to private dwelling houses.

Where the property is not subject to a Preliminary Grant Enquiry/Application, it would be referred for an unfitness inspection to the appropriate Council Environmental Health Department. Where this inspection confirms the property is unfit, the case

will be considered by the Housing Executive's Local Office Manager to decide the most satisfactory course of action which can include serving a repairs notice or making a demolition order.

Where an owner does not comply with the repairs notice, the Housing Executive can take action. This includes the Housing Executive carrying out the works in default and recovering the relevant costs as a civil debt from the owner of the property.

Should an owner not comply with a Demolition Order, the Housing Executive has legal authority to demolish and remove the property and sell the materials.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many people were registered homeless in the Strabane district in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3735/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised on the number of households accepted as homeless in the Strabane district in each of the last five years.

Year	Accepted
2011/12	85
2012/13	96
2013/14	131
2014/15	157
2015/16	130

Under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, those accepted as homeless by the Housing Executive are those households that meet the four statutory tests of:

- Homelessness
- Eligibility
- Priority need
- Unintentionally homeless

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when he will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.

(AQW 3785/16-21)

Mr Givan: The changes in the composition of the Executive, has led to a different approach to in-year monitoring. The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis. This has replaced the previous 'bidding' process and will allow for an objective assessment of genuine pressures across departments. It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services and officials will liaise with Committees on this at each monitoring round.

My Department informed the Communities Committee on the outcome of June Monitoring during July. My Department will notify the Committee on the outcome of October monitoring in due course.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many families have been adversely affected by benefit sanctions, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3790/16-21)

Mr Givan: This information is not available from the Department. Data is available for the number of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions imposed but cannot identify household breakdown nor how many sanctions an individual may have had imposed.

Data is available for the number of Employment Support Allowance sanctions imposed but cannot be broken down into the number of claimants with families sanctioned.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many children have been affected by benefit sanctions, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3791/16-21)

Mr Givan: This information is not available from the Department. Data is available for the number of sanctions imposed for Jobseeker's Allowance claimants but cannot be broken down to identify children in the household.

Employment and Support Allowance does not hold information on dependent children as there is no dependants increase payable for a child under Employment and Support Allowance.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many benefit claimants have been sanctioned in each of the last three years, broken down by benefit.

(AQW 3792/16-21)

Mr Givan: The information is not available in the format requested. As an individual may be sanctioned more than once, figures on the number of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who have had a sanction imposed cannot be provided; data can however be provided on the total number of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions imposed.

All sanctions imposed are as a result of an adverse decision on benefit entitlement. The figure provided from 1st June 2015 is taken from a new recording system (Decision Making and Appeals Case Recorder).

Period	Number of sanctions imposed
April 2013 – March 2014	8215
April 2014 – March 2015	5400
April 2015 – May 2015	1403
June 2015 – March 2016	8558

The figures below show the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have had sanctions imposed for failing to attend or failing to participate in a Work Focused Interview without good cause from April 2013 to March 2016.

Period	Number of Work Focused Interview Sanctions Imposed
April 2013	Data not available
May 2013	Data not available
June 2013	0
July 2013	30
August 2013	40
September 2013	22
October 2013	46
November 2013	26
December 2013	24
January 2014	21
February 2014	62
March 2014	67
April 2014	28
May 2014	72
June 2014	61
July 2014	39
August 2014	48
September 2014	82
October 2014	64
November 2014	60
December 2014	58
January 2015	43
February 2015	51
March 2015	57
April 2015	33
May 2015	45
June 2015	76
July 2015	69

Period	Number of Work Focused Interview Sanctions Imposed
August 2015	54
September 2015	66
October 2015	38
November 2015	54
December 2015	15
January 2016	9
February 2016	11
March 2016	10

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) how Capita intends to deliver on Personal Independence Payment assessments given that individuals will require a General Practitioners Factual Report paid at the rate of £33.50 per report when presently a written Factual Report by a GP normally costs £133; and (ii) as this is not part of the General Medical Services GP contract, for his assessment of whether GPs have any incentive to conduct such a report.

(AQW 3794/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) Assessment process Capita will only request a General Practitioner's Report in certain appropriate circumstances including where the Health Professional reviewing the case feels that further evidence will allow them to offer robust advice to the Department without the need for a face-to-face consultation.

Given that there is no contractual obligation on General Practitioners to complete these reports for PIP, a fee of £33.50 is paid which is the same fee that applies across the rest of the United Kingdom. The same fee is currently paid when a report is requested for Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance. At the beginning of June 2016 my Department wrote to all GPs advising them of the introduction of PIP in Northern Ireland, stressing the important role they play in the PIP process when asked by Capita to supplement the information already gathered.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities whether the Northern Ireland Housing Executive consulted legal professionals on whether it enters a legal contract with builders providing home insulation through the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

(AQW 3802/16-21)

Mr Givan: While the Housing Executive consulted with its legal colleagues over a number of issues related to the Affordable Warmth Scheme, it did not specifically refer this matter as it has already been established through the administration of other grant schemes that no contractual agreement exists between the Housing Executive and the contractor.

Contractors participating in the Affordable Warmth Scheme are not appointed by the Housing Executive but by the grant applicant. Therefore the Housing Executive is not a party to that contract.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to detail the total amount of grants, loans, funding or subsidies drawn down for energy efficiency and or/renewable energy programmes, broken down by each local council for each year from 2007 to 2014.

(AQW 3804/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it is unable to provide details of the expenditure for energy efficiency and or/renewable energy programmes at local council level. Appendix A shows the information available.

Appendix A

AQ 3804/16-21: Total amount of grants, loans, funding or subsidies drawn down for energy efficiency and/or renewable energy programme, broken down by each local council for each year from 2007 - 2014

Year:	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Grand Total
Private Sector									
Warm Homes (See notes 1 & 2)	22,292,934	21,778,697	8,611,738	12,207,537	13,388,088	17,862,291	13,403,330	12,385,031	121,929,647
Affordable Warmth (See note 3)						268,514	627,692	1,857,670	2,753,876
Boiler Replacement Expenditure (See note 4)			250,000		2,501,643	2,652,999	7,114,488	5,934,600	18,453,730

Year:	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Grand Total
Total Private Sector Expenditure	22,292,934	21,778,697	8,861,738	12,207,537	15,889,731	20,783,805	21,145,510	20,177,301	143,137,254
Public Sector									
Solar Panels									
Belfast Area	669,719								669,719
South East Area	782,942								782,942
South Area	775,362	693							776,055
North East Area	645,475	7,972							653,447
West Area	1,081,762	2,632							1,084,395
Total Solar Panels	3,955,260	11,298	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,966,557
Solar Panel Servicing									
Belfast Area	1,963	3,639	11,434	11,187	1,560				29,783
South East Area	1,840	1,697	13,923	5,849	12,849				36,159
South Area			824	1,268	14,455				16,547
North East Area	1,558	10,634	10,568	11,174	3,346				37,280
West Area	1,558	12,816	22,273	15,302	7,604				59,553
Total Solar Panel Servicing	6,919	28,786	59,022	44,780	39,814	0	0	0	179,321
Energy Marketing	282,727	260,834	272,588	155,964	106,846	128,981	91,658	82,776	1,382,373
Total Energy Marketing	282,727	260,834	272,588	155,964	106,846	128,981	91,658	82,776	1,382,373
Heating Installations	13,840,389	10,677,899	17,139,572	19,701,533	31,671,849	18,715,709	24,366,234	31,146,427	167,259,612
Total Heating Installations	13,840,389	10,677,899	17,139,572	19,701,533	31,671,849	18,715,709	24,366,234	31,146,427	167,259,612
Total Public Sector	18,085,295	10,978,817	17,471,181	19,902,277	31,818,510	18,844,690	24,457,892	31,229,202	172,787,864

Notes

- 1 All figures are taken from the NIHE finance system. At this time these costs cannot be split further without additional analysis.
- 2 It should be noted that these costs exclude any NIHE salary or administration costs.
- 3 The Affordable Warmth costs include the council set up costs.
- 4 The total Boiler Replacement expenditure was £18,453,730. ERDF funding was received in 2013/14 of £3,039,800 and in 2014/15 of £2,967,700.
- 5 It should be noted that £45k was received from DETI in relation to wood pellet boiler schemes for NIHE properties in the financial year 2011/12.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of individuals in the last year that, having had work carried out through the Affordable Warmth Scheme, have contacted the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to express concern about sub-standard work.

(AQW 3805/16-21)

Mr Givan: In the financial year 2015/2016, a total of 5,074 energy efficiency measures were installed in 3,057 homes under the Affordable Warmth Scheme. In total four individuals have contacted the Housing Executive to express concern about sub-standard work carried out through the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) any schemes the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is undertaking to replace windows, doors, kitchens in the Strabane district; (ii) the areas that will benefit; and (ii) the timeframe for the work. **(AQW 3809/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it has a number of schemes currently planned for the remainder of 2016/17 and 2017/18 in the Strabane area. The details of the schemes planned are provided in the table below.

Year	Work Type	Scheme Name	No of Dwellings	Estates Included
2016/17	Double Glazing	Castledearg / Strabane Retrofit	415	Castlefinn/Churchtown/Crockett Pk/Derg Vw/Hillview Pk/Hospital Rd/Millbrook Gdns/ Young Cres. Castledearg and Fountain Area Strabane
2016/17	Double Glazing	Ballycolman Etc Retrofit	378	Ballycolman/Carlton Drive estates, Strabane
2016/17	Kitchens	Drumrallagh/ Innisgree Gardens Kitchens	144	Streets in Fountain Area Strabane
2016/17	Multi-element Improvement	330A-F Lisnafin Park Flats Refurbishment	6	Lisnafin Park
2016/17	*Privatisation (windows included)	Lisnafin Flats	18	Lisnafin
2017/18	Double Glazing	Lisnafin/ Newt'kenedy/ Clady Rfit	389	Lisnafin/Newtownkenedy/Clady Strabane
2017/18	Double Glazing	Sion Mills/ Erganagh/ Spamount	322	Allen Pk/Blackstone Pk/Breen Pk/Sion Mills /Erganagh/ Spamount
2017/18	ECM (includes door replacement based on condition)	Drumrallagh/ Blackstone	262	Streets in Fountain Strabane / Castle Vow Newtownstewart/Blackstone Pk/Leckpatrick Gdns/Owenreagh /Koram Square
2017/18	ECM (includes door replacement based on condition)	Drumnabey Pk/ Parkside Gdns	156	Bridge St/Waterside St/Dublin Rd Strabane/Parts of Spamount and Sion Mills
2017/18	Kitchens	Old Ballycolman/ Fountain Area	115	Streets in Old Ballycolman/Fountain Area
2017/18	Kitchens	Sion Mills Kitchens	118	Streets in Sion Mills area

* The objective of this scheme is to create separate entrances for ground floor flats and to provide new door entry systems for the communal access for first floor flats in three blocks of flats. As the windows in the blocks were due to be replaced it was decided to include such work in this scheme.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail when the next meeting of the Inter-Departmental Charter Implementation Group will take place; and (ii) whether minutes from further meetings will be made available on the Department's website. **(AQW 3829/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The next meeting of the Inter-Departmental Charter Implementation Group is planned for November 2016. The minutes of this meeting, and further meetings, will be made available on the Department's website.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of whether an exit from the European Union will not be detrimental on the full application of The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. **(AQW 3830/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities are agreements under the Council of Europe, an organisation separate from the European Union. As such, they are not affected by the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department will work with Derry City and Strabane District Council and other government Departments to facilitate the extension of the Waterside Greenway.

(AQW 3834/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department has previously provided £543,000 towards costs associated with the delivery of earlier phases of the Waterside Greenway and will continue to work with Derry City and Strabane District Council and other government Departments to facilitate its extension.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities, in relation to the proposal to close Cookstown Social Security Office and Cookstown Job Centre, to detail for each office over the last five years (i) how many men and women have accessed services in both offices; (ii) how many people with a disability have accessed services in both offices; (iii) how many people with dependants have accessed services in both offices; (iv) how many people from different racial groups have accessed services in both offices; and (v) for a breakdown of the ages of people that have used the services in both offices.

(AQW 3837/16-21)

Mr Givan: This Department does not routinely collect data for Section 75 groupings in relation to claimants accessing its services and therefore the information requested is not available.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of people on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive urgent need housing lists in Upper Bann, broken down by ward.

(AQW 3859/16-21)

Mr Givan: Please see table below detailing the Upper Bann Waiting List by Housing Need Assessment Area. Please note that ward is not a geography at which waiting list is reported.

Waiting list and allocations data totalling 10 or less are anonymised and are reported as <10 however the overall totals are fully reported.

Parliamentary Constituency	Housing Need Assessment Area	Total Waiting List	Housing Stress (30+ Points)	Allocations
Upper Bann	Aghagallon	22	<10	<10
	Banbridge Rural Cottages	<10	<10	<10
	Banbridge Town	339	170	78
	Bleary	<10	<10	<10
	Carn	<10	<10	<10
	Central Craigavon	210	59	58
	Central Lurgan	97	35	24
	Derrytrasna/Derrymacash/Kinnego	20	12	<10
	Dollingstown	19	<10	<10
	Donacloney	11	<10	<10
	Gilford	26	13	22
	Laurencetown	<10	<10	<10
	Lenaderg	<10	<10	0
	Loughbrickland	16	<10	0
	Magheralin	17	<10	0
	North Lurgan	441	184	97
	Portadown 1	182	57	29
	Portadown 2	462	145	101
	Portadown Rural	13	<10	<10
	Scarva	<10	<10	<10
	Seapatrick	<10	0	<10
	South Lurgan	160	45	32
	Tullylish	<10	<10	<10

Parliamentary Constituency	Housing Need Assessment Area	Total Waiting List	Housing Stress (30+ Points)	Allocations
	Waringstown	20	12	<10
Upper Bann Total		2075	775	482

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive calculate service charges for tenants that live in (a) apartments; and (b) detached and semi detached properties; and (ii) for his assessment of the number of tenants paying for services which are not applicable to their property.

(AQW 3880/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it does not levy service charges in respect of the properties occupied by its tenants. Service charges are levied in respect of flats or maisonettes previously owned by the Housing Executive which were sold to the sitting tenant (known as leaseholders) under the House Sales Scheme. Service charges are also levied in respect of Housing Executive hostels used to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people.

Rent collected from Housing Executive tenants is used to collectively fund its landlord services. Therefore an element of all tenants' rent payments may be used to fund services not applicable to their own property.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive address airlocks in central heating systems installed in tenants houses.

(AQW 3881/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it addresses airlocks in central heating systems installed in tenants' homes through investigation by its heating contractors. As an airlock may be caused by a number of factors within the heating system, investigations over a period of time may be necessary.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities to outline what investigations the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has undertaken into the deterioration of cavity wall insulation that it previously installed in tenant properties.

(AQW 3882/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive advises that there is a UK-wide problem with cavity wall insulation installed in the 1980s. The degrading or failure of this insulation affects all housing tenures, not just social housing. A research report for the Housing Executive's housing stock by South Eastern Regional College in 2014 pointed to problems with cavity wall insulation that are now arising due to the age of properties and the quality of the cavity wall insulation.

It is important to note that this research was based on a small sample of properties and its findings are therefore generic in nature and could not be used for the purposes of developing a work programme.

Consequently, the Housing Executive will carry out a representative sample of cavity inspections in the future as part of its Cyclical Maintenance scheme surveys to determine if the cavity has been filled and, if it has, what condition the insulation is in.

The Housing Executive has advised that regarding wall insulation its priority is the significant number of non-traditional properties which, to date, have not benefitted from any insulation work.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the cost of investigations into internal complaints and grievances lodged by staff members in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3892/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities was created on 9th May 2016. The majority of staff transferred from the Department for Social Development. In DSD, 534 internal complaints and grievances were investigated over the last three financial years. Each case is unique, with different input required in terms of time to undertake the investigation and or grade of investigating officer involved. We do not keep records of the costs attached to processing each case. Such investigations are regarded as part of the overall and ongoing staff management function within the Department.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities what grants have been paid by his Department to CLM Management Services for property maintenance over the last three years,

(AQW 3909/16-21)

Mr Givan: There have been no grants paid by my Department in the last 3 years to CLM Management Services.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities when he expects to announce his decision on the allocation of the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme.

(AQW 3916/16-21)

Mr Givan: The consultation on the proposals for the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer took place from 30 November 2015 to 22 February 2016 with 1,279 responses received by the Department.

My officials are currently finalising their consideration and analysis of the responses to the consultation together with all other relevant information to inform recommendations to me on the programme going forward.

I hope to be in a position to make a decision on the programme shortly and I anticipate that the programme will be launched and open for applications in the coming months.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) social regeneration projects that are being delivered by his Department in Omagh or that are planned for Omagh; (ii) and both the timelines and budgets set aside for the completion of these projects.

(AQW 3922/16-21)

Mr Givan: Through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, the Department for Communities supports five projects aimed at the social regeneration of the Omagh area. Funding is committed to these projects until end March 2017. Details of these projects are as follows:

Promoter	Project Title	16/17 funding (£)
Western Health & Social Care Trust	Omagh Health & Wellbeing Programme	51,000
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council	Neighbourhood Renewal Coordination & Technical Assistance	44,909
Sacred Heart College	Learning Mentor	51,000
Strathroy Community Association	Afterschool & Homework Club	36,743
Supporting Communities (NI)	Campsie Community Hub	12,367
South West College	Going Places	29,545
	Total	225,564

Details of Sport NI investment which has the potential to contribute to social regeneration through the delivery of programmes are:-

Financial Year	Programme	Amount
2016	TBUC Good Relations 14 Sports Bags provided to clubs in Omagh & Fermanagh Area	£1,066 each bag
2015/16	Active Awards for Sport Altnamuskin Cycling Club in Sixmilecross	£9,648
2015/16	Active Awards for Sport Strule Dolphins Swimming Club	£8,183

In addition Sport NI has provided 43 Automated External Defibrillators to sports clubs and groups across the area.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities what guidelines or protocols exist in his Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.

(AQW 3939/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are no guidelines or protocols in my Department governing my holding of meetings with third parties in the absence of officials.

Records of all formal meetings are held by my Department.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities, in relation to the proposed closure of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices, to outline what assessment has been made on any changes that may affect the workforces' health and safety including (i) new or different procedures; (ii) types of work equipment; (iii) premises; and (iv) ways of working, including new shift patterns.

(AQW 3958/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities is compliant with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and all other legislation and codes of practice. The Department is also committed to ensuring so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of all its employees and of others who may be affected by its operations.

The Department has recently published an Organisation and Arrangements for Health and Safety at Work guidance which sets out the arrangements and key areas of responsibility arising from the Department's policy on health and safety at work. These arrangements provide all staff with such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure the safe performance of their work duties, including arrangements to enable staff to raise health and safety issues.

It is not expected that the proposed closure of Social Security Offices and JobCentres will make any changes that may affect the health and safety of staff. Indeed, impacted staff will have access to better facilities at the alternative offices which are more modern buildings.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline the criteria developed in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments to ensure (i) private rental tenants are not impacted by the opening up of the payments to social sector tenants; and (ii) that social tenants impacted by the removal of the family premium or the benefit cap can access payments.
(AQW 3977/16-21)

Mr Givan: Discretionary Housing Payments are administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Housing Benefit claimants living in the private rented sector, who require further assistance with housing costs above and beyond their Housing Benefit payment may apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

The Department for Communities allocates a budget to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on an annual basis, which the Housing Executive manages in such a way as to ensure that Discretionary Housing Payments are available to tenants in greatest need throughout the year. Housing Executive decision makers determine each application on its own merits.

From 5 September 2016, Discretionary Housing Payments are also available to tenants in the social sector impacted by the removal of the family premium. This will ensure that those in receipt of a partial award of Housing Benefit, for example, those claimants who work part-time and are therefore not entitled to full Housing Benefit, are not adversely impacted by this change. This ensures that social sector tenants are not unduly affected by this reform to Housing Benefit.

For the majority of claimants whose Housing Benefit has or will be restricted by the application of the Benefit Cap, Supplementary Welfare Payments will be available as agreed in the Fresh Start Agreement. From 7 November 2016, Discretionary Housing Payments will be available to anyone in the social sector impacted by the Benefit Cap and who is not entitled to a Welfare Supplementary Payment.

Discretionary Housing Payments are designed as a short-term measure to provide financial assistance to those Housing Benefit claimants who require further financial assistance to meet housing costs.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities whether he has given any consideration to waiving the £1,000 fee for transferring land to Translink when this transfer is as the result of the implementation of a new bus shelter.
(AQW 3984/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department and its arms length bodies are obliged by legislation to secure the best price reasonably obtainable when disposing of land and property. When land is being considered for disposal, the value of the land is independently assessed by Land and Property Services on a case by case basis to determine the best consideration or fair value that the subject lands could reasonably expect to achieve.

Where it is proposed that an area of land should be transferred to a third party at less than best consideration, the proposal must be subjected to the appropriate level of appraisal and a business case prepared. Where it is proposed that an arms length body should transfer land to a third party at less than best consideration, they are required to seek prior approval from the Department.

At this time, I am not aware of that requests have been made to my Department to consider transferring land below the assessed value in order to facilitate the creation of bus shelters.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the amount spent on employment schemes for Job Seekers Allowance claimants, broken down by constituency, since 2013.
(AQW 4000/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department offers a wide range of support initiatives and return to work programmes to help clients overcome barriers to work and to move towards and into employment. The Department also offers a customised recruitment service tailored to the needs of employers to help them fill vacancies.

In the main, funding for these initiatives and activities is available on a Northern Ireland wide basis. Return to work programmes are delivered throughout Northern Ireland over numerous contract areas and spend is monitored on that basis. It is not possible therefore to report on spend by constituency.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of welfare claimants that received a sanction in the last 12 months, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 4001/16-21)

Mr Givan: The information is not available in the format requested As an individual may be sanctioned more than once, figures on the number of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who have had a sanction imposed cannot be provided; data

can however be provided on the total number of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions imposed. Data cannot be provided by constituency.

All sanctions imposed are as a result of an adverse decision on benefit entitlement. There were 9961 Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions imposed from 1.4.15 to 31.3.16.

There were 480 Employment and Support Allowance claimants who had sanctions imposed for failing to attend or failing to participate in a Work Focused Interview without good cause from 1.4.15 to 31.3.16.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities what support is available to establish recording facilities for musicians. (AQW 4224/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department and Invest NI jointly fund Generator NI whose remit is to deliver a music business support programme which aims to help the music industry in NI realise its full economic potential.

The Music Business Support Programme (MBSP) which is delivered by Generator NI provides a range of support activities contributing towards the development of a creative and vibrant music industry. The MBSP builds effective partnerships and collaborations across the private and public sectors to extend the reach of available support, particularly around events, marketing, and business support and skills development. Generator NI's current mentoring service would also be available to prospective new businesses to discuss the viability and best practice of recording facilities.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) also supports community access to recording facilities via The Nerve Centre in Londonderry, to which they provide annual funding. ACNI also helps individual artists to access studio facilities by contributing to production costs of a maximum of one album via the Support for the Individual Artist Programme.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Communities whether decisions taken following the consultation entitled Exemption Under Article 85(8) Of The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 For Listed Places Of Worship From The Requirement To Obtain Listed Building Consent will be applicable to planning applications already submitted. (AQW 4240/16-21)

Mr Givan: The decision I made following this consultation was not to amend the Planning Act (NI) 2011. There are therefore no changes to planning legislation which would impact past or future planning applications.

As indicated in my written statement, however, my Department will work with church representatives and district councils to 'review developing best practice in this and other jurisdictions, and agree appropriate changes to Departmental, planning authority and governing body guidance'. Any amendments to guidance, when finalised, will be referenced by church governing bodies and Planning Authorities when they consider such applications.

Department of Education

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for an update on a new build for Bangor Central Primary School. (AQW 2579/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The new build project for Bangor Central Primary School is in the very early stages of planning. The Department and the Education Authority are working collaboratively to progress all the projects that will benefit from funding under the Fresh Start Agreement, as announced on 23 March 2016, as expediently as possible.

Correspondence will issue in the coming weeks with a view to setting up the first Project Board meeting during November.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the number of newcomer pupils who attend primary and post-primary schools in West Tyrone; and (ii) to outline any specific programmes which are aimed at improving their levels of educational attainment (AQW 3341/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2015/16, there were 499 Newcomer pupils attending primary or post-primary schools in West Tyrone.

In relation to the educational attainment of Newcomer pupils, the Department is aware that some primary schools are very successfully using the Common European Framework of Reference for Schools to help assimilate newcomer children to the curriculum and in so doing improve their levels of educational attainment.

To enable Newcomer children and young people to more effectively access the curriculum, my Department provides funding for the Education Authority's Inclusion and Diversity Service. This Service provides vital assistance to schools, Newcomer pupils and their families including the provision of supports such as interpreting and translation services. Schools also receive an additional funding of approximately £1,000 per year, via the Common Funding Formula for each designated Newcomer for an initial period of three years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for an update on a potential new build for Priory College, Holywood. (AQW 3347/16-21)

Mr Weir: I visited Priory Integrated College on 15 September and discussed the position on the new build that will be funded under the Fresh Start Agreement with the school Principal, the Vice Principal and the Chair of the Board of Governors.

The project is in the very early stages of planning. The Department and the Education Authority are working collaboratively to reach a decision on school enrolment numbers. Once that process is complete correspondence will issue in respect of setting up the first Project Board meeting.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to outline what monitoring his Department has put in place to ensure all schools are adhering to their legal obligations under Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

(AQW 3350/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 30 November 2015. After completing its Committee scrutiny and Assembly passage, it received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016, becoming the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

This legislation will:

- Provide a common definition of bullying;
- Require all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome; and
- Require the Board of Governors collectively to take responsibility to the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures

Before these new provisions can be brought into force, several pieces of additional work must be undertaken. There are:

- The preparation of supporting guidance for schools, Boards of Governors, parents, and pupils. This guidance will clarify how the new duties are to be applied by schools and Governors, how parents or pupils should inform the school about bullying incidents and what steps they can reasonably expect the school to take in response to an incident or complaint.
- Training for school staff and Governors in how they discharge their duties and record each incident; and
- The creation of a new standardised recording system to be made available to all schools via the Classroom 2000 SIMS system.

In the passage of the Bill, responding to concerns from both stakeholders and MLAs, Ministerial commitments were given that the Department would consult widely on these matters to ensure the guidance, training and new IT system were robust, easy to understand and use; and that they minimised any additional administrative burden for schools and Governors.

My officials are working to meet these commitments and we currently expect the new provisions to be in force in time for the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year. All Departmental website links will be updated at that time.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to outline what guidance or other information his Department has published or issued to parents, guardians and pupils to make them aware of their rights and entitlements under the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

(AQW 3351/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 30 November 2015. After completing its Committee scrutiny and Assembly passage, it received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016, becoming the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

This legislation will:

- Provide a common definition of bullying;
- Require all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome; and
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- Training for school staff and Governors in how they discharge their duties and record each incident; and
- The creation of a new standardised recording system to be made available to all schools via the Classroom 2000 SIMS system.

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My officials are working to meet these commitments and we currently expect the new provisions to be in force in time for the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year. All Departmental website links will be updated at that time.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to outline what guidance or other materials his Department has issued to schools and managing authorities to ensure that Boards of Governors and senior management teams in schools are acting in full compliance with the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

(AQW 3352/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 30 November 2015. After completing its Committee scrutiny and Assembly passage, it received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016, becoming the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

This legislation will:

- Provide a common definition of bullying;
- Require all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome; and
- Require the Board of Governors collectively to take responsibility to the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures

Before these new provisions can be brought into force, several pieces of additional work must be undertaken. There are:

- The preparation of supporting guidance for schools, Boards of Governors, parents, and pupils. This guidance will clarify how the new duties are to be applied by schools and Governors, how parents or pupils should inform the school about bullying incidents and what steps they can reasonably expect the school to take in response to an incident or complaint.
- Training for school staff and Governors in how they discharge their duties and record each incident; and
- The creation of a new standardised recording system to be made available to all schools via the Classroom 2000 SIMS system.

In the passage of the Bill, responding to concerns from both stakeholders and MLAs, Ministerial commitments were given that the Department would consult widely on these matters to ensure the guidance, training and new IT system were robust, easy to understand and use; and that they minimised any additional administrative burden for schools and Governors.

My officials are working to meet these commitments and we currently expect the new provisions to be in force in time for the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year. All Departmental website links will be updated at that time.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to outline why his Department's website and associated links continue to refer to Board of Governors' legal responsibilities as set out in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 Article 17, 18 and 19 but makes no reference to Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

(AQW 3353/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 30 November 2015. After completing its Committee scrutiny and Assembly passage, it received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016, becoming the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

This legislation will:

- Provide a common definition of bullying;
- Require all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome; and
- Require the Board of Governors collectively to take responsibility to the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures

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- The preparation of supporting guidance for schools, Boards of Governors, parents, and pupils. This guidance will clarify how the new duties are to be applied by schools and Governors, how parents or pupils should inform the school about bullying incidents and what steps they can reasonably expect the school to take in response to an incident or complaint.
- Training for school staff and Governors in how they discharge their duties and record each incident; and
- The creation of a new standardised recording system to be made available to all schools via the Classroom 2000 SIMS system.

In the passage of the Bill, responding to concerns from both stakeholders and MLAs, Ministerial commitments were given that the Department would consult widely on these matters to ensure the guidance, training and new IT system were robust, easy to understand and use; and that they minimised any additional administrative burden for schools and Governors.

My officials are working to meet these commitments and we currently expect the new provisions to be in force in time for the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year. All Departmental website links will be updated at that time.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline why in the School Omnibus Survey 2014 only 6 per cent of Year 1; 6 per cent of Year 2; 2 per cent of Year 3; 3 per cent of Year 4; 6 per cent of Year 5; 7 per cent of Year 6; and 7 per cent of Year 7 pupils spent the minimum recommended time of two hours Physical Education per week.

(AQW 3356/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Northern Ireland curriculum recognises the importance of providing teachers with the flexibility to plan their teaching to meet the needs of their pupils. It is therefore a matter for each school to determine how much time is devoted to Physical Education (PE) in the curriculum.

At present I have no plans to introduce legislation to prescribe the amount of time that schools allocate to PE.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail what percentage of teachers that graduated in each of the last five years have secured full time permanent employment.

(AQW 3360/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department does not hold the information requested in the format required. The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) collects information on teacher employment on an annual basis. The table below sets out the number of teachers, who qualified in Northern Ireland and registered with the GTCNI, whose employment is of a permanent or significant temporary nature (i.e. one term or more).

Year of Graduation	Number of Northern Ireland Graduates registered with the GTCNI	Northern Ireland Graduates employed ¹ on a permanent or significant temporary basis ²
2011/12	478	335 (70%)
2012/13	464	297 (64%)
2013/14	469	273 (58%)
2014/15	467	222 (48%)
2015/16	445	141 (32%)

Notes:

- 1 Figures as at 17 February 2016.
- 2 Includes full-time and part-time posts.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of special schools that were not in receipt of their 2016-17 budget for the beginning of this school year.

(AQW 3430/16-21)

Mr Weir: Special schools do not receive budget allocations directly from the Department; their budgets are determined and allocated by the Education Authority. The Education Authority has confirmed that special schools were allocated their budget for 2016-17 on the 23 September 2016, with the exception of Lakewood Special School, the Education Authority have advised that they will receive their allocation by 7 October 2016.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education whether his Department provides training for departmental staff on autism and learning disability awareness.

(AQW 3449/16-21)

Mr Weir: Departmental staff have access to three e-learning courses provided on-line by the NICS Centre of Applied Learning (CAL), as follows:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Awareness;
- Disability Awareness for Frontline Staff;
- Diversity Now.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education how many private contractors used for home to school transport provision have been removed from the Department's database.

(AQW 3450/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education does not hold a database of private contractors used for Home to School Transport. All contracts for this purpose are held by the Education Authority.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to outline the provisions in place when emergency transport has to be used to minimise the distress to pupils with learning disabilities.

(AQW 3451/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has confirmed that it operates a pool of spare vehicles that can be used in the event of a breakdown and alternative drivers are available should a regular driver be unavailable.

An assurance is also required from private contractors, as part of the tendering process, to confirm that suitable contingency arrangements are in place to deal with breakdowns etc. The nature of these contingency arrangements can vary but typically most private operators will also have spare vehicles and drivers to call on at short notice.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2549/16-21, to detail the number of special school nursery units currently unused.
(AQW 3491/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has confirmed that in the 16/17 academic year Fleming Fulton Nursery will not be accepting pupils with physical disabilities, all of whom will continue to attend Mitchell House Nursery; all nursery units in other special schools are in use. There continues to be no intention to formally close the nursery at Fleming Fulton and the position is subject to review.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2547/16-21, to detail (i) the minimum number of hours of education a young person will receive in Woodlands Juvenile Centre; and (ii) how this compares to the number of hours the same young person would receive in mainstream education.
(AQW 3493/16-21)

Mr Weir: Under the Secondary Schools (Grant Conditions) Regulations (NI) 1973, pupils in a mainstream secondary school, should receive 22.5 hours of teaching per week. Latest information available shows that in 2014 young people in Woodlands received an average of 20 hours per week and in 2015, 15 hours. The 2015 figures reflect short term difficulties in maintaining levels of teaching cover. These have now been addressed.

Woodlands must often address a complex mix of behavioural, medical, addiction, mental health and care needs for those young people held in detention; as well as considering their educational requirements. Any educational provision must accommodate very short periods of detention, for those held on remand, and the need for the young people to be available for court proceedings and consultation with their legal representatives. Educational programmes are therefore tailored to meet the academic and personal development needs of each individual, any therapeutic interventions required while flexibly accommodating broken patterns of attendance.

This is a similar approach to that followed by the Education Authority (EA) within its Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) centres. In EOTAS, academic and vocational learning combine with other interventions to support both the educational attainment and personal development needs of the young person. In EOTAS all of these additional activities can count towards the weekly teaching requirement of 22.5 hours.

In pursuing the transfer of the education service within Woodlands JJC to EA control, an EOTAS model has therefore been adopted to help maintain and enhance the current holistic, needs-based approach.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2326/16-21, to detail the dates that consultation took place with NIPSA branch 521 at local level through staff consultative committees.
(AQW 3494/16-21)

Mr Weir: Pursuant to AQW 2326/16-21, there has been no local level consultation with NIPSA Branch 521 via a staff consultative committee specific to the re-alignment of payrolls within the EA Armagh Office. However commensurate with Finance schedules, and in line with agreed roll out of the re-alignment at JNC on 27 May 2016, all relevant recognised trade unions, including NIPSA 521, will be invited to consult with Finance/Payroll (Armagh) facilitated by Human Resources in early October 2016.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the total number of youth clubs in Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and (ii) the amount of funding each youth group receives from his Department, broken down over the last three years.
(AQW 3513/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what consideration has been given to issuing guidance to children's authorities on the exercise of the functions of the Children's Services Co-operation Act, as allowed for under Section 7(1) of the Act.
(AQW 3518/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Member will be aware from my response to his previous question (AQW 2458/16-21), which asked whether I intend to publish explanatory notes and/or guidance in relation to the Children's Services Co-operation Act, that the Act links directly to the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to provide greater financial autonomy for controlled schools.
(AQW 3541/16-21)

Mr Weir: It is my intention as Education Minister, to give greater freedom and autonomy to schools over how they spend their budget. Over the coming months, I will be looking at ways and means of achieving this.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education whether coding is included in teacher training courses for primary and post-primary education.

(AQW 3543/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have been advised by the Higher Education Institutions that coding is included in teacher training courses as follows:

Initial Teacher Education

Institution	Primary Education	Post primary Education
Queen's University Belfast	Not applicable	All PGCE students have compulsory classes addressing elements of using ICT. Students are required to create an ICT portfolio demonstrating their ability to embed ICT in their teaching. 10-12 PGCE ICT computing teachers are trained annually.
St Mary's University College	All Primary B.Ed. 3 maths students undertake a project to create an application in Scratch to teach a mathematical concept.	Students who take computing & ICT as a subsidiary subject take the equivalent of a single module in basic computer programming (Scratch) in year 1 of their 2 year course.
Stranmillis University College	All B.Ed. students study coding in each of the 4 years of their degree. This includes Scratch, Raspberry Pi, Computational Thinking and Minecraft Edu. All students undertake "Using ICT" (UCIT) training threaded throughout the 4 year degree programme.	All B. Ed students study coding in each of 4 years of their degree. This includes Scratch, Raspberry Pi, Computational Thinking and Minecraft Edu. All students undertake UCIT training threaded throughout the 4 year degree programme.
University of Ulster	A one year post graduate course for teachers of primary is offered. Students are trained in a variety of ICT and computing applications including hands on training in Scratch.	A one year postgraduate course for post primary for university graduates holding relevant degrees is offered.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to eliminate racist bullying in schools.

(AQW 3553/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department's publication "Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour" offers detailed guidance, practical initiatives and case studies to support schools to tackle bullying. The guidance specifically states that racist, homophobic, sectarian or other offensive name-calling is a form of bullying and should be recognised as such.

My Department funds the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) to raise awareness of bullying and provide a range of practical support, resources and guidance to schools, parents and pupils. The Forum's website (www.endbullying.org.uk) has a page dedicated solely to racist bullying and a leaflet has been produced entitled "What is bullying due to Race, Faith and Culture", which provides advice and signposting for parents.

The NIABF also runs an annual Anti-Bullying Week (ABW) programme. The focus for this year's ABW, which takes place from 14-18 November, is "Together We Are Stronger". This will particularly focus on bullying that is motivated by difference or prejudice, including racist bullying.

The 'Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016' was granted Royal Assent on 12 May 2016. This will require schools to record details of all bullying incidents which occur, including their motivation. These records will allow schools to quickly identify and take action if an issue such as racist bullying is becoming a particular problem. While the provisions of this Act are not yet in force, I intend that they will be in place for the start of 2017-18 school year.

The Department also places a significant emphasis on early, preventative education. Our curriculum at both primary and post-primary level contributes to promoting 'good relations' and is closely aligned with my Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy. The CRED policy aims to contribute to improving relations between communities by ensuring learners, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination. The policy seeks to provide children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to develop mutual understanding, recognition of and respect for difference.

In terms of the curriculum itself, at primary level the "Personal Development and Mutual Understanding" area of learning explores topics such as responsibilities for self and others; human rights and social responsibility; causes of conflict and appropriate responses; valuing and celebrating cultural difference and diversity; similarities and differences between people;

respect for others; and living as members of the community. At post-primary level, the "Learning for Life and Work" area of learning covers topics such as discrimination in greater depth under the subject "Local and Global Citizenship".

My Department's Shared Education policy also provides opportunities for pupils to learn about each other from each other. The policy seeks to deliver educational and social benefits to learners; promote equality of opportunity; good relations; equality of identity; respect for diversity; and community cohesion.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding. **(AQW 3568/16-21)**

Mr Weir:

- i) My Department has made no bids to the EU Investment bank;
- ii) no bids are currently being prepared; and
- iii) there are no ongoing departmental projects that are reliant on EU funding.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number and percentage of pupils achieving each grade from A* to U in GCSE English and Maths, broken down annually since 2010. **(AQW 3610/16-21)**

Mr Weir: The answer is contained in the tables below:

Year 12 GCSE English examination outcomes, 2009/10 to 2014/15

Year 12 pupils with 1+ entry		No.	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
			22019	21812	21272	21997	21428	21309
Achieving Grade	A*	No.	975	913	919	1004	1004	989
		%	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.6
	A	No.	3331	3515	3396	3440	3808	3884
		%	15.1	16.1	16.0	15.6	17.8	18.2
	B	No.	5421	5665	5362	5517	5879	5981
		%	24.6	26.0	25.2	25.1	27.4	28.1
	C	No.	6031	5607	5124	5757	5721	5830
		%	27.4	25.7	24.1	26.2	26.7	27.4
	D	No.	3498	3570	3554	3689	2927	2716
		%	15.9	16.4	16.7	16.8	13.7	12.7
	E	No.	1654	1462	1741	1607	1283	1173
		%	7.5	6.7	8.2	7.3	6.0	5.5
	F	No.	640	613	788	663	553	487
		%	2.9	2.8	3.7	3.0	2.6	2.3
	G	No.	232	240	288	215	183	166
		%	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.0	0.9	0.8
	Q	No.	0	*	0	0	0	0
		%	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	U	No.	199	204	91	91	61	72
		%	0.9	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3
X	No.	38	#	9	14	9	11	
	%	0.2	#	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	

Source: RM Education

* denotes fewer than 5 pupils

figure not disclosed under rules of statistical suppression

Year 12 GCSE mathematics examination outcomes, 2009/10 to 2014/15

Year 12 pupils with 1+ entry			2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
		No.	22438	22180	21548	22281	21823	21639
Achieving Grade	A*	No.	1858	1879	2161	2224	2508	2439
		%	8.3	8.5	10.0	10.0	11.5	11.3
	A	No.	3281	3293	3238	3354	3426	3448
		%	14.6	14.8	15.0	15.1	15.7	15.9
	B	No.	4538	4457	4005	4246	4100	4166
		%	20.2	20.1	18.6	19.1	18.8	19.3
	C	No.	5243	5246	5300	5817	5875	6014
		%	23.4	23.7	24.6	26.1	26.9	27.8
	D	No.	3211	3055	3054	2962	2337	2186
		%	14.3	13.8	14.2	13.3	10.7	10.1
	E	No.	1962	1929	1741	1655	1463	1398
		%	8.7	8.7	8.1	7.4	6.7	6.5
	F	No.	1328	1246	1177	1098	1104	960
		%	5.9	5.6	5.5	4.9	5.1	4.4
	G	No.	638	695	576	590	592	568
		%	2.8	3.1	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.6
	Q	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0
		%	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	U	No.	331	323	242	240	332	368
		%	1.5	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.5	1.7
X	No.	48	57	54	95	86	92	
	%	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	

Source: RM Education

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2889/16-21, to outline the definitions of rural and urban used in this answer.

(AQW 3619/16-21)

Mr Weir: The NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) definition of settlements with a population of less than 4,500 was used to define a rural location. A settlement with a population of 4,500 or more was therefore defined as urban.

The following tables provide details of the organisations in the Pathway Fund in 2016/17 broken down by urban and rural locations and the sum received by each.

Pathway funded organisations – Urban locations (using NISRA definition)

Organisation	Town	Funding
An Droichead	Ardstraw	£38,719
Ashton Community Trust	Belfast	£37,365
Ballee Community Childcare	Ballymena	£18,225
Ballybeen Women's Centre Ltd	Belfast	£17,199
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast	£21,397
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast	£48,771
Blackie River Community Groups	Belfast	£59,329
Bloomfield Community Association	Belfast	£21,462

Organisation	Town	Funding
Cairde Gaelscoil na Móna	Belfast	£30,000
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon	£38,683
Cornabracken Child Care Ltd	Omagh	£62,380
Dara Pre-School	Armagh	£14,211
Derry Well Women	Londonderry	£8,331
East Belfast Mission-Bright Sparks Daycare	Belfast	£103,366
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast	£57,584
First Housing Aid & Support Services	Londonderry	£57,425
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Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	Waterside	£98,222
Giggles and Wiggles	Strabane	£16,250
Glen Community Parent Youth Group	Belfast	£29,782
Grove Community Playgroup	Lisburn	£21,414
Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre Ltd	Coleraine	£47,435
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast	£6,509
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Ionad na Fúiseoige	Belfast	£30,000
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast	£80,619
Jack and Jill Pre-School	Cookstown	£6,894
Kids Together Belfast	Belfast	£29,883
Kilcooley Women's Centre	Bangor	£60,334
Larne Community Care Centre	Larne	£26,830
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast	£14,040
Limavady Community Development Initiative Ltd	Limavady	£51,847
Little Orchids Ltd	Londonderry	£22,272
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast	£28,181
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Monbrief Pre-School Playgroup	Craigavon	£11,317
Nai-ionad Ard Eoin	Belfast	£25,335
Naionra an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Belfast	£45,634
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	Downpatrick	£7,122
Newhill First Steps Daycare Centre Ltd	Belfast	£36,431
Newry Early Years Children and Family Centre	Newry	£54,931
Oasis Caring in Action	Belfast	£31,176
Parish of Nativity Playgroup	Belfast	£12,971
Play-A-Way Childcare Centre	Newtownards	£19,711
Quaker Service	Belfast	£40,000
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	Londonderry	£30,000
Richmount Playgroup	Portadown	£3,031
Roden Street Community Development Group	Belfast	£14,140
Royal Mencap Society – MENCAP	Newtownbreda	£6,509

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Star Neighbourhood Centre	Belfast	£17,438
The Firs Playgroup	Armagh	£27,867
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	Belfast	£25,167
West Bann Development	Coleraine	£51,812
Whiterock Crèche Association Ltd	Belfast	£36,400
Windsor Women's Centre	Belfast	£43,548
Women's Centre Derry	Londonderry	£25,561

Pathway funded organisations – Rural locations (using NISRA definition)

Organisation	Town	Funding
Acorn Women's Group	Augher	£28,610
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	Omagh	£19,588
Bo Peeps Playgroup	Enniskillen	£7,709
Care Bears Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart	£4,653
Clogher Valley Playgroup	Clogher	£6,509
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Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson	£19,349
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	Fivemiletown	£6,509
Kidzone	Newry	£33,984
Little Amps Early Years	Maghera	£11,180
McClintock's Children's Centre	Omagh	£24,897
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	Newtownbutler	£43,665
Nippers Alley Playgroup	Omagh	£14,875
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Pomeroy	£19,982
The Dry Arch Children's Centre	Dungiven	£29,400

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education whether he would consider working with the War Memorial Trust Educational Officer to commence a programme for young people to look at the historic significance of their local war memorials and consider their future upkeep.

(AQW 3639/16-21)

Mr Weir: Whilst I fully appreciate the historic and educational value of our war memorials and the need to maintain these for future generations, I have no plans to introduce such a programme for schools. The statutory curriculum provides schools/ teachers with the flexibility to decide which resources or programmes they wish to use to deliver the curriculum.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the number of schools in Belfast that currently allow their pitches for community use outside of school opening hours; and (ii) what measures he intends to take to ensure that more schools facilitate community use of their facilities outside of opening hours.

(AQW 3658/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) This information is not currently held by the Department of Education or the Education Authority.
- (ii) Responsibility for decisions relating to the use of individual school premises rests with the Board of Governors of those schools.

The Department of Education continues to encourage schools to make their premises available for use by local communities when not otherwise required for education purposes by means of existing legislation and a range of policies such as Extended Schools, Full Service programmes and commitments made through Every School a Good School. The Department's guide for school governors also highlights the responsibility which governors have in promoting the use of the school as a community facility where possible.

In January 2014, the Department issued a set of operational guidelines entitled Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools which is designed to encourage and assist schools, especially those who may not already do so, to facilitate community access to school premises. The majority of schools (81% - School Omnibus Survey 2014) currently report that they do make their facilities available for wider community use.

In line with the duties placed upon it by the Education Act (NI) 2014, the Education Authority (EA) has appointed a standing committee to help exercise its statutory functions with regard to the community use of schools.

The EA has advised that the standing committee will give consideration to the use of the Guidance Toolkit in schools. My officials will continue to work closely with EA colleagues to promote the use of the school as a community facility.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many groups are funded through the Education Authority in South Antrim; and (ii) where these groups are located.

(AQW 3666/16-21)

Mr Weir: A total of 116 groups in South Antrim have been funded through the Education Authority since its formation in April 2015. The table below provides a list of these groups and their locations.

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
ABC Day Nursery	Building 643 Off Crumlin Road, Aldergrove	BT29 4BN
Crumlin Integrated Pre School	Room 7, 27 Mill Road, Crumlin	BT29 4XL
Greendale Day Nursery	633 Antrim Road, Newtownabbey	BT36 6RF
Hilcroft Special School (pre-school)	3 Manse Way, Newtownabbey	BT36 5UW
Kilbride Playgroup	1 Moyra Road, Burnside, Doagh	BT39 0SD
Little Hands PreSchool	Parkhall Complex Unit 5, Parkhall	BT41 1AJ
Maine Integrated Playgroup	93 Portglenone Road, Randalstown	BT41 3EH
Mallusk Community Playgroup	Academy Sports Club, Mallusk Road	BT36 4QE
Muckamore PreSchool Playgroup	Muckamore Community Centre, Ballycraigy Road, Antrim	BT41 1PH
Naiscoil Ghleann Darach	15F Glenavy Road, Crumlin	BT29 4LA
Naiscoil Na Tamhnaí Moire	30 Chapelstown Road, Antrim	BT41 2LD
Primrose Hill Day Nursery	3A Lisglass Road, Ballyclare	BT39 9NP
Randalstown Community Playgroup	Neillbrook Community Centre, Neillsbrook Park, Randalstown	BT41 3AE
Round Tower Community Playgroup	Durnish Road, Springfarm, Antrim	BT41 2TH
St Comgall's Playgroup, Antrim	C/o Parish Centre, 3 Oriel Road, Antrim	BT41 4HP
St MacNissis Preschool Playgroup	Christine Road, Newtownabbey	BT36 6UE
Tiny Tots PreSchool Centre, Toomebridge	Pastoral Centre, Main Street, Toomebridge	BT41 3NJ
Tir na nÓg Playgroup	60 Doagh Road, Ballyclare	BT39 9BG
16th Antrim Scouts	5 The Diamond Road, Aldergrove, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4DB
1st Killead BB	Killead Pres Church, 52 Killead Rd, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4EJ
223rd Killead Presbyterian Girls Brigade	52 Killead Road, Aldergrove, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4EJ

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Crumlin Integrated YC	10 Glenavy Road, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4LA
Youth Zone	C/o St Josephs Primary School, 15 Glenavy Road, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4LA
210th Co. Crumlin Girls Brigade	Crumlin Presbyterian Church Hall, Cidercourt Road, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4UU
1st Crumlin BB	Crumlin Pres Church Hall, Cidercourt Road, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4XQ
Loanends Youth Club	50 Loanends Road, Nutts Corner, Crumlin, Antrim	BT29 4YW
9th Newtownabbey BB	Hydepark Presbyterian Church, Mallusk Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 4PY
66th Hydepark Presbyterian Girls Brigade	Hydepark Presbyterian Church, Mallusk Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 4QA
1st Ballycraigy BB	Ballycraigy Congregational Church, Ballycraigy Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 4TB
90th Belfast Girl Guides	Ballyhenry Presbyterian Church , Ballyhenry Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5AX
14th Newtownabbey BB	Church of the Holy Spirit, Manse Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5BU
Supergang	34a Ballynure Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5SW
324th Mossley Methodist Church Girls Brigade	Manse Drive, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5US
Refuge	Mossley Methodist Church, 1 Manse Drive, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5US
New Mossley Youth Centre	Manse Way, New Mossley, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5UW
New Mossley Presbyterian GB	1a Ballycraigy Way, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5XJ
New Mossley Presbyterian Youth Club	1a Ballycraigy Way, New Mossley, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5XJ
53rd Ballycraigy Congregational Girls Brigade Co.	Ballycraigy Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5ZZ
Ballycraigy Youth Club	Ballycraigy Congregational Church, Ballycraigy Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5ZZ
Trekkers	Glenabbey Church, Cedar Hill, Ballycraigy Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 5ZZ
175th Carnmoney Presbyterian Girls Brigade	258 Carnmoney Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 6JZ
4th Newtownabbey BB	258 Carnmoney Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 6JZ
Carmmoney Presbyterian Youth Club	258 Carnmoney Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 6JZ
Cumann Oige Croi Eanna	St.Enda's Complex, Hightown Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT36 7AU
1st Ballyeaston Girls Brigade	1st Ballyeaston Presbyterian Church Hall, Ballyeaston, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9SH
149th Templepatrick Girls Brigade	Templepatrick Presbyterian Church, 750 Antrim Road, Templepatrick, Antrim	BT39 0AP
1st Templepatrick BB	1st Templepatrick Church Hall, 750 Antrim Road, Templepatrick, Ballyclare, Co Antrim	BT39 0AP
1st Templepatrick Scout Group	St Patricks Parish Hall, Old Church Road , Templepatrick, Antrim	BT39 0BA

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Ballyclare Riding for Disabled Group	Laurelview Equestrian Centre, 18 Knowehead Road, Templepatrick, Antrim	BT39 0BX
East Antrim Riding for Disabled Group	Laurelview Equestrian Centre, 18 Knowehead Road, Templepatrick, Antrim	BT39 0BX
Riding for the Disabled (Antrim Group)	Laurel View Equestrian Centre, 18 Knowehead Road, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT39 0BX
1st Donegore BB	Donegore Pres Church Hall, 30 Main Street, Ballyclare, Co Antrim	BT39 0DG
Parkgate "Jump" Youth Club	1st Donegore Presbyterian Church, 32 Main Street, Parkgate, Antrim	BT39 0DG
1st Lylehill BB	Lylehill Pres Church Hall, 90 Lylehill Road, Templepatrick, Antrim	BT39 0HL
238th Lylehill Girls Brigade	Browne Memorial Hall, Lylehill Road, Templepatrick, Antrim	BT39 0HL
1st Kilbride Guide Association	Kilbride Parish Hall, Kilbride Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 0QA
1st Kilbride Scouts	Kilbride Parish Hall, Kilbride Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 0QA
1st Donegore Girls Brigade	First Donegore Presbyterian Church, Main Street, Parkgate, Antrim	BT39 0RU
1st Kilbride BB	Kilbride Presbyterian Church Hall, 12 Moyra Road , Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 0SD
72nd Kilbride Presbyterian Girls Brigade	Kilbride Presbyterian Church Hall, Moyra Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 0SD
Breakers Youth Club	Kilbride Presbyterian Church, Moyra Road, Doagh, Antrim	BT39 0SD
2nd Ballyclare BB	Ballyclare Methodist Church, Main Street, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9AB
1st Ballyclare Brownies & Guides	St.John's Church of Ireland Hall, Doagh Rd, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9BG
3rd Ballyclare BB	St.John's Church Hall, Doagh Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9BG
1st Ballyclare BB	Ballyclare Presbyterian Church, 2 Foundry Lane, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9BQ
367th NI Ballyclare Presbyterian GB	2 Foundry Lane, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9BQ
Ballyclare Presbyterian Church Senior Youth Club	2 Foundry Lane, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9BQ
Grange Youth & Community Youth Club	16 Clareville Avenue, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9DN
16th Newtownabbey BB	Belfast City Mission, Innis Avenue, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT39 9EZ
1st Ballyclare Scout Group	31 Rashee Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9HJ
Straid Young Farmers Club	Straid Orange Hall, Main Street, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9NE
The Open Door Youth Club	Straid Congregational Church, Main Street, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9NE
1st Ballylinney BB	Ballylinney Presbyterian Church, Ballylinney Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9PB
275th NI Ballylinney GB	Ballylinney Presbyterian Church, Ballylinney Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9PB

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Ballylinney Youth Club	21 Ballylinney Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9PB
117th Ballyclare Methodist Girls Brigade	Main Street, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9QA
Ballynure Methodist Junior Youth Club	Ballynure Methodist Church, Main Street, Ballynure, Antrim	BT39 9QA
1st Ballyeaston BB	2nd Ballyeaston Presbyterian Church, Trench Road, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9SJ
2nd Ballyeaston Youth Club	Trenchill Road, Ballyeaston , Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9SJ
162nd Ballynure Presbyterian GB	Main Street, Ballyclare, Newtownabbey, Antrim	BT39 9TU
1st Ballynure BB	Main Street, Ballynure, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9TU
Greater Ballyclare Youth for Christ	1 Granges Street, Ballyclare, Antrim	BT39 9ZJ
Parkhall Youth Club	Steeple Road, Antrim	BT41 1AF
5th Antrim Rainbows, Brownies & Guides	St. Patricks Church of Ireland, 50 Parkhall Road, Antrim	BT41 1BU
2nd Antrim Guides	High Street Presbyterian Church, Steeple Road, Antrim	BT41 1DN
High Street Presbyterian Youth Club	High Street Church, Steeple Road, Antrim	BT41 1DN
Parkhall Scout Group	High Street Presbyterian Church Hall, Steeple Road, Antrim	BT41 1DN
Greystone Road Girls Brigade	Greystone Road Presbyterian Church, Greystone Road , Antrim	BT41 1JW
Ballycraig Youth Club	Ballycraig Primary School, Bracken Avenue, Antrim	BT41 1PU
Antrim Baptist Campaigners (IMPACT)	3 Greystone Link, Antrim	BT41 1QW
Saint Macnissi Youth Group	St Macnissi Parish Centre , Station Road, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 2AE
Rathenraw Youth Scheme	C/o 13 Norfolk Square, Rathenraw , Antrim	BT41 2SE
1st Randalstown Girl Guides	The Scout Hall, Neillsbrook Road, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3AE
1st Randalstown Scout Group	Scout Hall, Neillsbrook Lane, Neillsbrook Lane, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3AE
1st Randalstown Rainbow, Brownie & Senior Section	Drummaul Parish Church Hall, Church Road, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3AJ
Randalstown OC Girls Brigade	Randalstown OC Presbyterian Church, Portglenone Road, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3BE
2nd Randalstown Presbyterian Church Youth Club	Portglenone Road, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3EG
Mid Antrim Branch of Pony Club	125 Ahoghill Road, Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3EP
Randalstown OC Church Youth Club	OC Randalstown Church Halls, 4 Portglenone Road , Randalstown, Antrim	BT41 3ET
Living Waters Christian Centre Youth Club	The Bridge Development, 10C Main Street, Toomebridge, Antrim	BT41 3SA
Young Doves Youth Club Moneyglass	Moneyglass Community Centre, 10 Loughbeg Road, Toomebridge, Antrim	BT41 3TN
5th Antrim (All Saints) Scout Group	All Saints Parish Centre, Railway Street, Antrim	BT41 4AE
All Saints YC	All Saints Parish Centre, Railway Street, Antrim	BT41 4AE
1st Antrim Presbyterian Girls Brigade	1st Antrim Presbyterian Church, 82 Church Street, Antrim	BT41 4BA

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
1st Antrim Youth Club	82 Church Street, Antrim.	BT41 4BA
3rd Antrim Brownies & Rainbows	All Saints Church of Ireland, Railway Street, Antrim	BT41 4BA
4th Antrim Scout Group	Methodist Church Hall, Greystone Road , Antrim	BT41 4DQ
2nd Antrim BB	First Antrim Pres Church Hall, 82 Church Street, Antrim	BT41 4HB
St Comgalls Youth Club	C/o 3 Oriel Road, Antrim	BT41 4HP
1st Muckamore BB	Muckamore Pres Church Hall, 76 Dunadry Road, Antrim	BT41 4QJ
Muckamore Presbyterian Girls Brigade	Muckamore Presbyterian Church, 76 Dunadry Road, Antrim	BT41 4QT
Ballyclare SS Youth Club	C/O Ballyclare Secondary School, Doagh Road, Ballyclare, Co Antrim	BT39 9BG
Ballymacward Pre-School Playgroup	22A Rock Road, Stoneyford, Lisburn	BT28 3SU
Dundrod Presbyterian Youth Council	Leathemstown Road, Dundrod	BT29 4JN
Glenavy Youth Project	2 Belfast Road, Glenavy	BT29 4LL
Stoneyford Community & Youth Association	49 Stoneyford Road, Stoneyford	BT28 3SR

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education , pursuant to AQW 2889/16-21, to detail the sum received by each organisation. (AQW 3668/16-21)

Mr Weir: The NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) definition of settlements with a population of less than 4,500 was used to define a rural location. A settlement with a population of 4,500 or more was therefore defined as urban.

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Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson	£19,349
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	Fivemiletown	£6,509
Kidzone	Newry	£33,984
Little Amps Early Years	Maghera	£11,180
McClintock's Children's Centre	Omagh	£24,897
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	Newtownbutler	£43,665
Nippers Alley Playgroup	Omagh	£14,875
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Pomeroy	£19,982
The Dry Arch Children's Centre	Dungiven	£29,400

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline what steps he is taking to improve the outcomes of children and young people in areas of deprivation and/or at risk of educational under-attainment.

(AQW 3704/16-21)

Mr Weir: I will focus on those policies and strategies that are driving improvement and which aim to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning which some pupils face. This includes Every School a Good School – the school improvement policy; Count, Read: Succeed – the literacy and numeracy strategy; the curriculum; the Learning to Learn Framework; and the Teachers Professional Learning Strategy.

I intend to work closely with schools, early years and childcare providers, the youth service and other education stakeholders to ensure that we identify and disseminate the most effective strategies so that, together, we can meet the needs and nurture the aspirations of our children and young people.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to detail which schools currently teach Chinese .

(AQW 3706/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2016/17 the Department of Education has made available up to £85,000 to the Confucius Institute at Ulster University to continue delivery of its Chinese cultural and language tuition programme for primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. This programme, which works through a network of eight Confucius Classroom Hubs, aims to have 12,000 pupils involved in the programme in 2016/17, with 2,500 pupils attaining the Chinese Proficiency Test or Youth Chinese Test. The Confucius Institute has provided a list of the schools involved in the programme in 2016/17 included in the table below.

HUB 1 - Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast

- St Joseph's College, Belfast
- Wellington College, Belfast
- Assumption Grammar, Ballynahinch
- Campbell College, Belfast
- St Michael's Primary School, Belfast
- St Bernard's Primary School, Belfast
- Botanic Primary School, Belfast
- Drumlins Integrated Primary School, Ballynahinch
- Holy Family Primary School, Teccaonaught, Downpatrick
- Holy Rosary Primary School, Belfast
- St Bride's Primary School, Belfast

HUB 2 - Grosvenor Grammar School, Belfast

- Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Belfast
- Lagan College, Belfast
- Orangefield Primary School, Belfast
- Gilnahirk Primary School, Belfast

- Andrews Memorial Primary School, Newtownards
- Braniel Primary School, Belfast
- Dundonald Primary School, Belfast
- Strandtown Primary School, Belfast

HUB 3 - Lumen Christi College, Londonderry

- St Mary's College, Londonderry
- Thornhill College, Londonderry
- Nazareth House Primary School, Londonderry

- Good Shepherd Primary School, Londonderry
- Longtower Primary School, Londonderry
- St Patrick's Primary School, Pennyburn, Londonderry

HUB 4 - St Columb's College, Londonderry

- Thornhill Grammar School, Londonderry
- Culmore Primary School, Londonderry
- Model Primary School, Londonderry

- Pennyburn Primary School, Londonderry
- Steelstown Primary School, Londonderry

HUB 5 - Bangor Academy

- South Eastern Regional College
- Sullivan Upper School, Holywood
- Ballyholme Primary School, Bangor

- Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor
- Bangor Central Primary School, Bangor

HUB 6 - Downshire School, Carrickfergus Belfast High School, Newtownabbey

- Carrickfergus College
- Acorn Integrated Primary School, Carrickfergus
- Silverstream Primary School, Carrickfergus
- Sunnylands Primary School, Carrickfergus

- St Nicholas' Primary School, Carrickfergus
- Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus
- Whitehead Primary School, Whitehead

HUB 7 - Millburn Primary School, Coleraine

- Coleraine College
- Coleraine Grammar
- Dominican College, Portstewart
- Loreto College, Coleraine
- North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine
- St Joseph's College, Coleraine
- Ballysally Primary School, Coleraine
- DH Christie Memorial Primary School, Coleraine

- Killowen Primary School, Coleraine
- Portstewart Primary School
- St Colum's Primary School, Coleraine
- St John's Primary School, Coleraine
- St Malachy's Primary School, Coleraine
- Ballysally Nursery School, Coleraine
- Kylemore Nursery School, Coleraine

HUB 8 - South West College

- St Mary's Primary School, Mullymesker, Enniskillen
- St Ninnidh's Primary School, Enniskillen
- St Ronan's Primary School, Lisnaskea, Enniskillen
- Jones Memorial Primary School, Enniskillen
- St. Marys Primary School, Newtownbutler, Enniskillen
- Newtownbutler Controlled Primary School, Enniskillen
- St Mary's Primary School, Teemore, Enniskillen
- St Naile's Primary School, Enniskillen
- St. Patrick's Primary School, Enniskillen
- Tattygar Primary School, Enniskillen
- Enniskillen Royal School
- Mount Lourdes Grammar, Enniskillen
- St Michael's College, Enniskillen
- St Aidan's High School, Enniskillen
- St. Comhgall's High School, Lisnaskea
- St Mary's College, Irvinestown
- College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), Enniskillen

- Drumlish Primary School, Omagh
- McClintock Primary School, Omagh
- Omagh County Primary School
- Omagh Integrated Primary School
- Roscavey Primary School, Omagh
- St Catherine's Primary School, Strabane
- St Eugene's Primary School, Omagh
- St. Patrick's Primary School, Eskra , Omagh
- All Saints Primary School, Omagh
- Cooley Primary School, Omagh
- Drumduff Primary School, Omagh
- Magheralough Primary School, Omagh
- St Colmcille's Primary School, Omagh
- St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Omagh
- St. Patrick's Primary School, Omagh
- St. Peter's Primary School, Omagh
- St Teresa's Primary School , Omagh
- Dean Maguirc College, Omagh
- Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh

- Christian Brothers Grammar School, Omagh
- Loreto Grammar School, Omagh
- Omagh Academy, Omagh
- Sacred Heart College, Omagh
- St. John's (Business and Enterprise College) Dromore, Omagh
- Gaelscoil Uí Neill, Coalisland
- St Joseph's Primary School, Dungannon
- Windmill Integrated Primary School, Dungannon
- Edendork Primary School, Dungannon
- Laghey Primary School, Dungannon
- St Mary's Primary School, Lisbuoy, Dungannon
- St Mary's Primary School, Mullaghbawn
- St Mary's Primary School, Pomeroy
- St Patrick's Primary School, Donaghmore
- St Patrick's Primary School, Crossmaglen
- St. Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen
- St. Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown
- Cookstown High School

In addition, the Entitlement Framework Audit, which measures how schools are faring against the statutory requirements for the post 14 curriculum, identified three post-primary schools offering GCSE and/or A Level courses in Chinese in 2015/16:

- Campbell College, Belfast
- Royal School, Armagh
- Laurelhill Community College, Lisburn

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education, further to the announcement on 21 September 2016 from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children regarding specialist teacher training on how to keep children safe from abuse, whether his Department will give proper consideration to developing a structured Relationships and Sexuality Education course for primary schools.

(AQW 3727/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department has no plans to introduce a prescriptive Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) course for primary schools. The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007 specifies the minimum content for each area of learning of the curriculum. Teachers have considerable flexibility to select from within those areas the aspects they consider appropriate to the ability and interests of their pupils. At primary level, RSE is covered within the 'Personal Development and Mutual Understanding' area of learning.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment published revised RSE guidance for primary schools in August 2015 which contains advice on helping children to recognise inappropriate behaviour and touch and provides links to relevant resources. However, the guidance does not stray into the actual content of teaching and learning as this is a matter for each school.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 3056/16-21, to detail the amount each group received.

(AQW 3744/16-21)

Mr Weir: The table below lists the groups in receipt of funding from the Pathway Fund that applied for more than £30,000 and the amount allocated to each.

Name of Organisation	Amount Allocated
An Droichead	£38,719
Ashton Community Trust	£37,365
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	£48,771
Blackie River Community Groups	£59,329
Chrysalis Women's Centre	£38,683
Cornabracken Child Care Ltd	£62,380
East Belfast Mission-Bright Sparks Daycare	£103,366
Falls Women's Centre	£57,584
First Housing Aid & Support Services	£57,425
First Steps Daycare Ltd	£91,840
First Steps Playgroup and Parent & Toddler Group	£32,390
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	£98,222
Giggles and Wiggles	£16,250
Giggles Early Years Ltd	£51,404

Name of Organisation	Amount Allocated
Grove Community Playgroup	£21,414
Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre Ltd	£47,435
Hobby Horse Playgroup	£6,509
Ionad Uibh Eachach	£80,619
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	£6,509
Kidzone	£33,984
Kilcooley Women's Centre	£60,334
Limavady Community Development Initiative Ltd	£51,847
Lower Oldpark Community Association	£28,181
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	£41,013
Naionra an tSléibhe Dhuibh	£45,634
Newhill First Steps Daycare Centre Ltd	£36,431
Newry Early Years Children and Family Centre	£54,931
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	£43,665
Oasis Caring in Action	£31,176
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	£19,982
Quaker Service	£40,000
Royal Mencap Society - MENCAP	£6,509
The Firs Playgroup	£27,867
West Bann Development	£51,812
Whiterock Creche Association Ltd	£36,400
Windsor Women's Centre	£43,548

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the current budget allocated to the School Aged Mothers Programme; (ii) a breakdown of how much is to be spent on each aspect of the programme; and (iii) how much of the budget has been spent to date.

(AQW 3775/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that they have allocated a budget of £680k for the School Age Mothers Programme in 2016/17. They are anticipating that this will be broken down as follows:

- Childcare costs £400k,
- Local co-ordinator costs £200k,
- Educational programmes £80k.

The Education Authority's expenditure in this regard as at 31 August 2016 was £193k.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail how many applications were made for childcare fee support from the School Age Mothers Programme, since April 2011.

(AQW 3776/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since April 2011 there have been 324 applications for childcare fees support to School Age Mothers. None of these applications were rejected and 39 School Age Mothers are currently receiving support with childcare fees.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the findings of his Department's stock take of policies and programmes in respect of its statutory duty to promote Irish-medium education.

(AQW 3779/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2014 all Directorates and Teams within my Department were asked to undertake a review of their key policies and programmes in relation to the duty in respect of both Irish-medium and integrated education. The review detailed the Department's key policies and programmes and, where appropriate, any adjustments made to them in light of the statutory

duties. This is an ongoing process which will be kept under review to ensure it continues to reflect the development of new policies and programmes.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the information is contained in a Key Stage 2 pupil's profile which is shared by a primary school with the receiving post-primary school.

(AQW 3780/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education (Pupil Records and Reporting)(Transitional) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 and The Education (Pupil Reporting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 specify the information which should be provided in relation to a Key Stage 2 pupil's educational and other achievements. These specify the following:

Information on the assessment of the pupil's progress in relation to Communication and Using Mathematics.

Brief particulars of the pupil's achievement in any other area of learning or activity which forms part of his curriculum including:

- Using ICT
- Other skills: Problem Solving, Self Management, Working with others
- Learning for Life and Work
- Physical Education
- Religious Education (optional)
- Interests and Strengths
- Focus on Development
- Any further optional Content.

In addition the information shall include any qualification, award, certificate or credit towards a qualification for which the pupil has been prepared by the school, brief particulars of any school societies, clubs or activities and particulars of any positions of responsibility held by the pupil in the school or in any of the societies, clubs or activities mentioned.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education how Ministerial time used for party business is accounted for on Assembly-funded trips.

(AQW 3781/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have not been on any Assembly-funded business trips.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education , pursuant to AQO 193/16-21, to detail what is contained in the 13 per cent of the overall 2016-17 budget attributable to services to schools.

(AQW 3782/16-21)

Mr Weir: The 13% of the 2016-17 Education Budget which is attributed to schools for services provided by the Education Authority includes: Transport, C2K (managed ICT service), School Meals, Headquarters, Pupil Support, Schools Development Service, Music Service and School Library Service.

The 12% of the 2016-17 Education Budget which is allocated to schools from centre budgets, held by the Education Authority, includes: the Special Schools budget, Special Education in Mainstream, Rates and Substitution costs.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education , pursuant to AQO 193/16-21, to detail what is contained within the 12 per cent of the overall 2016-17 budget allocated to schools from centre budgets held by the Education Authority.

(AQW 3783/16-21)

Mr Weir: The 13% of the 2016-17 Education Budget which is attributed to schools for services provided by the Education Authority includes: Transport, C2K (managed ICT service), School Meals, Headquarters, Pupil Support, Schools Development Service, Music Service and School Library Service.

The 12% of the 2016-17 Education Budget which is allocated to schools from centre budgets, held by the Education Authority, includes: the Special Schools budget, Special Education in Mainstream, Rates and Substitution costs.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage and number of children that achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grade A* to C in each year since 1996 to 2016, broken down by (i) gender; (ii) community background; and (iii) socio-economic background.

(AQW 3784/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information on the attainment of school leavers in 2015/16 will be available in May 2017. Figures for 1995/96 and 2002/03 are not available.

Tables 1 to 3 below detail the number and percentage of school leavers who achieved at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C from 1996/97 to 2014/15.

Table 1: Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) by gender, 1996/97 – 2014/15⁽¹⁾

Year	School leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2014/15	8762	76.9	9371	85.4	18133	81.1
2013/14	8621	74.1	9172	83.4	17793	78.6
2012/13	8750	74.5	9314	82.8	18064	78.5
2011/12	8103	71.0	9160	82.1	17263	76.5
2010/11	8026	67.7	8923	78.9	16949	73.2
2009/10	7444	65.4	8970	78.4	16414	71.9
2008/09	7470	64.4	8859	75.9	16329	70.2
2007/08	7283	60.0	8836	73.9	16119	66.9
2006/07	7323	58.2	8726	71.5	16049	64.7
2005/06	7495	57.5	8899	71.2	16394	64.2
2004/05	7157	55.4	8779	70.9	15936	63.0
2003/04	7044	53.9	8522	67.8	15566	60.7
2002/03⁽²⁾						
2001/02	6473	50.5	8208	67.3	14681	58.7
2000/01	6470	50.5	8121	65.8	14591	58.0
1999/00	6341	49.2	7919	65.0	14260	56.9
1998/99	6337	48.8	8172	65.7	14509	57.1
1997/98	6310	49.1	8186	64.0	14496	56.6
1996/97	6307	48.1	7662	60.8	13969	54.3

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 2 Due to considerable difficulties with new software installed in schools, the School Leavers survey was cancelled in 2002/03.

Table 2: Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) by religion, 1996/97 – 2014/15⁽¹⁾

Year	School leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)							
	Protestant		Catholic		Other ⁽²⁾		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
2014/15	6942	78.9	9426	82.7	1765	81.6	18133	81.1
2013/14	6794	77.4	9198	80.3	1801	74.9	17793	78.6
2012/13	7066	77.4	9232	80.4	1766	73.6	18064	78.5
2011/12	6703	73.8	8982	78.8	1578	75.3	17263	76.5
2010/11	6547	70.4	8883	76.1	1519	69.5	16949	73.2
2009/10	6530	70.6	8377	73.4	1507	69.7	16414	71.9
2008/09	6614	68.5	8276	71.6	1439	70.0	16329	70.2

Year	School leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)							
	Protestant		Catholic		Other ⁽²⁾		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
2007/08	6492	65.0	8195	68.6	1432	66.2	16119	66.9
2006/07	6558	62.8	8316	66.6	1175	63.0	16049	64.7
2005/06	6692	62.1	8418	65.4	1284	68.1	16394	64.2
2004/05	6540	60.7	8139	64.1	1257	69.0	15936	63.0
2003/04	6521	60.3	7976	60.4	1069	65.5	15566	60.7
2002/03⁽³⁾								
2001/02	6376	58.0	7353	58.4	952	66.9	14681	58.7
2000/01	6185	57.3	7465	57.4	941	69.2	14591	58.0
1999/00	5927	56.6	7231	55.8	1097	66.6	14255	56.9
1998/99	5928	55.8	7451	56.8	1130	67.0	14509	57.1
1997/98	6030	56.6	7363	55.7	1103	63.1	14496	56.6
1996/97	5768	54.2	6963	53.6	1238	59.5	13969	54.3

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 2 Other includes Other Christian, No religion and Non-Christian.
- 3 Due to considerable difficulties with new software installed in schools, the School Leavers survey was cancelled in 2002/03.

Table 3: Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) by Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME), 1996/97 – 2014/15⁽¹⁾

Year	School leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	Non-FSME		FSME		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2014/15 ⁽²⁾	14701	86.2	3432	64.6	18133	81.1
2013/14	15499	83.4	2294	56.6	17793	78.6
2012/13	15564	83.1	2500	58.5	18064	78.5
2011/12	15149	81.4	2114	53.4	17263	76.5
2010/11	15071	78.0	1878	48.8	16949	73.2
2009/10	14709	76.6	1705	47.1	16414	71.9
2008/09	14802	75.1	1527	42.9	16329	70.2
2007/08	14634	71.9	1485	39.8	16119	66.9
2006/07	14391	70.4	1658	37.9	16049	64.7
2005/06	14622	70.2	1772	37.6	16394	64.2
2004/05	14055	70.3	1881	35.6	15936	63.0
2003/04	13791	68.0	1775	33.0	15566	60.7
2002/03⁽³⁾						
2001/02	13217	64.8	1464	31.7	14681	58.7
2000/01	13030	64.5	1561	31.5	14591	58.0
1999/00	12723	63.1	1537	31.3	14260	56.9

Year	School leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	Non-FSME		FSME		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1998/99	12908	64.1	1601	30.3	14509	57.1
1997/98	12735	63.8	1761	31.0	14496	56.6
1996/97	12259	61.8	1710	29.0	13969	54.3

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 2 The increase in the number of FSME pupils in 2014/15 coincides with an extension of the eligibility for free school meals under the Working Tax Credit free school meal criterion which was extended to post-primary pupils from September 2014.
- 3 Due to considerable difficulties with new software installed in schools, the School Leavers survey was cancelled in 2002/03.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Education, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when he will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.

(AQW 3787/16-21)

Mr Weir: The changes in the composition of the Executive, has led to a different approach to in-year monitoring. The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis. This has replaced the previous 'bidding' process and will allow for an objective assessment of genuine pressures across departments. It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services and officials will liaise with Committees on this at each monitoring round.

Under this new regime, my officials briefed the Committee on the outcome of June monitoring on 29 June 2016. Once the Executive has made its decisions on October monitoring, I will consider the best approach to be taken to brief the Committee on the outcomes.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the changes made to the criteria for the Pathway Fund as compared to the previous Early Years Fund.

(AQW 4147/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Early Years Fund (EYF) closed on 31 March 2016. The criteria were:

- i Provide direct early years care and education to children;
- ii. Provide a service in areas of low provision, disadvantaged areas or where the service is considered critical for children;
- iii. Ensure inclusion and diversity; and
- iv. Ensure a standard of excellence in relation to quality.

The Pathway Fund replaced the EYF from 1 April 2016. The following criteria applied:

- i Providing quality services in areas of social disadvantage¹;
- ii. Ensuring children with additional needs receive appropriate Early Years support;
- iii. Provision of services/ support to children at risk of harm;
- iv. Not in receipt of alternative funding to provide the service outlined in the application;
- v Improving access for children with additional needs;
- vi. Addressing access to/ improvement of infrastructure of services in rural areas and other areas where there is little or no provision;
- vii. Improving the integration and building of community relations from an early age;
- viii. Delivering services on a community-based, social economy basis.

The first four criteria were most heavily weighted.

¹ i.e. living within specific deprived areas of the North - the top 25% most disadvantaged (Super Output) areas, as defined by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail who was involved in agreeing the changes to the criteria for the Pathway Fund as compared to the previous Early Years Fund.

(AQW 4148/16-21)

Mr Weir: Departmental officials developed the Pathway Fund criteria to align with DE's strategic objectives. The former Education Minister agreed the arrangements for the new fund including the new criteria, to address issues identified in the review of the Early Years Fund.

The criteria have been applied to 2016/17 applications and have not changed since the Fund commenced on 1 April 2016.

Department of Finance

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance whether he will consider the pilot project proposed by Omagh Enterprise Company to public sector workers that commute and work outside the Omagh area to work from shared workspace in Omagh.

(AQW 2480/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): My Department provides a number of Business Zones in offices, including Omagh, where staff can use touchdown type facilities such as those being proposed by the Omagh Enterprise Company.

The Reform of Property Management Programme, currently being progressed by DoF in partnership with the Strategic Investment Board's Asset Management Unit is seeking to rationalise the government office estate through more efficient use of office space. I understand that spare capacity of 324 empty workstations already exists within the government office estate in Omagh.

During my visit on 30 June, I had a number of very useful engagements and I was impressed with the good work ongoing in the area. I am keen to encourage business and would welcome further proposals or initiatives from Mr O'Shiel of Omagh Enterprise Company and from others in the area.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW 2001/16-21, how it is determined whether the survey process deployed is value for money.

(AQW 2712/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: When commissioning research and assessing value for money public bodies use the business case, options appraisal and value for money approach set out in the Department's "Managing Public Money in Northern Ireland" and the Treasury's "The Green Book – Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government".

As with all business areas, NISRA is subject to regular internal audits of its processes. In all of these audits, the most recent of which was in 2014, Central Survey Unit has achieved a satisfactory rating and no value for money issues were identified.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance what funding is provided by the Executive to each local airport.

(AQW 2841/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: In 2016 the Executive, through Tourism Northern Ireland, has provided £34,560 to the George Best Belfast City Airport and £27,216 to the Belfast International Airport for marketing support to provide visitors with a warm welcome and sense of place on arrival to Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance whether he has investigated the validity of the claims of insider status and influence in NAMA made by Frank Cushman on the BBC Spotlight programme broadcast on 6 September 2016; and for his assessment of whether such actions could have been taken without staff complicity.

(AQW 2900/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The very serious allegations surrounding NAMA's "Project Eagle" sale are currently being investigated by the relevant authorities here, the South of Ireland, Britain and the United States.

I have also made clear to an Taoiseach that all the information held by my Department will be made available to the Commission of Enquiry he is proposing to investigate these matters.

I trust these investigations will reveal the truth of these matters, will see any evidence of wrongdoing robustly dealt with, and justice served. These investigations have my full support and that of my Department.

However, it is up to the Criminal Justice Agencies in the relevant jurisdictions, rather than the Finance Minister, to investigate these allegations of criminality.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Finance for an update on proposals to assist traders located at Ardoyne on Crumlin Road following the site meeting he attended on 9 August 2016.

(AQW 3233/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As you are aware I had a productive meeting with traders in the area in August and discussed steps they may wish to take including the Hardship Rate Relief Scheme and the process by which affected traders could make application to Land & Property Services for a valuation appeal.

I am sympathetic to their plight and am pleased that a resolution to the Twaddell dispute has now been agreed.

I am very keen to continue to work with traders in the area in order to help them work through the issues they face. In order to move this forward, staff from Land & Property Services contacted approximately 25 commercial properties between 471 to 523 Crumlin Road and 1 to 27 Ardoyne Road.

Information packs and application forms for Hardship Relief and Back in Business Rate Relief were delivered to all business premises that were open at this time. Details on how to complete the application forms and named contact points within Land & Property Services were included in the information pack. In addition, LPS offered support in completing application forms should it be required.

Following this visit an additional 10 information packs and application forms were posted out to business premises which were closed at the time of the visit.

Land & Property Services will continue to update me on the progress of any applications received and any issues which may arise as a result of this process.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to meet with the Chief Executive of Derry City and Strabane Council to discuss priorities and projects in the Strabane district.

(AQW 3376/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I met with the Chief Executive of Derry and Strabane Council, in Strabane, on Friday 30 September to discuss priorities and projects in the Strabane District.

This is one of a series of engagements that I have had with the Chief Executives of Derry and Strabane Council and Donegal County Council to discuss investment in the North West Region as a whole.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance how social impact bonds are being utilised by the Executive.

(AQW 3415/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Social impact bonds exist in other parts of the world but not yet here. As the Minister of Finance, I am certain that if we are to be ambitious about our future we will have to be open to different methods of delivery and I am keen to see the first Social Impact Bond introduced on this island.

Within my Department, Public Sector Reform Division has liaised extensively with other departments to identify areas that might be suitable for piloting alternative models of delivery, in particular, the Social Impact Bond concept. While departments have cited budgetary pressures and the need to focus on frontline services as barriers to piloting this approach, there are signs of a new readiness to consider the use of Social Impact Bonds and I am reflecting on the financial implications of introducing a Social Impact Bond. I have also authorised officials within my department to liaise with other jurisdictions with a view to understanding how this methodology could be applied here, and they are working with the Programme for Government to identify how Social Impact Bonds could be used in dealing with some of the intractable problems in our society.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance what work is being undertaken to produce guidance on the pooling of resources on the operations of the Children's Services Co-operation Act, as allowed for in Section 8(1) of the Act.

(AQW 3516/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: DoF officials are currently working with DE officials in developing guidance on the pooling of resources on the operations of the Children's Services Co-operation Act. This will be incorporated in the "In-year Monitoring of Public Expenditure Guidelines" in due course.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) the number of men and women unemployed in East Derry in each of the last three years and; (ii) to provide a breakdown by age.

(AQW 3523/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: It is not possible to provide the level of detail requested from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the lead measure of unemployment.

The following tables for East Derry Assembly Area are sourced from the administrative claimant count measure of unemployment. Table 1 shows the number of men and women claiming unemployment related benefits at August each year since 2014. Table 2 shows the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits at August each year since 2014 broken down by age.

**Table 1: Claimant count measure of unemployment by gender
East Derry Assembly Area**

Date	Male	Female	Total ¹
August 2014	1,945	840	2,785
August 2015	1,585	775	2,360
August 2016	1,360	745	2,105

**Table 2: Claimant count measure of unemployment by age group
East Derry Assembly Area**

Date	16 to 24	25 to 49	50+	Total ¹
August 2014	735	1,550	485	2,775
August 2015	695	1,225	440	2,360
August 2016	575	1,100	430	2,105

1 Totals do not sum because:

- the age group data does not include clerical claimants who make up less than 1% of the total count
- data in both tables are rounded to 5 for disclosivity purposes

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of civil servants employed in East Derry in each of the last five years, broken down by grade.

(AQW 3524/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The information requested is set out in the table overleaf.

Number of Civil Servants employed in East Derry in each of the last five years, broken down by grade

Date	Analogous Grade								Total
	G7 +	DP	SO	EOI/EOII	AO	AA	Industrial	Prison grades	
1st July 2016	25	42	66	228	272	79	115	266	1093
1st January 2016	25	40	73	236	276	81	122	276	1129
1st January 2015	32	46	95	268	364	111	132	299	1347
1st January 2014	30	34	93	250	388	143	130	296	1364
1st January 2013	32	40	97	252	395	144	130	345	1435

Notes:

Headcount figures at date listed.

Information taken from HRConnect and additional Department of Justice databases.

July 2016 figures include staff working in the 9 Northern Ireland ministerial departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution

Service for Northern Ireland. Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Team are also included.

Figures before 09 May 2016 include staff working in the 12 Northern Ireland ministerial departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Assembly Ombudsman/Commissioner for Complaints are also included.

Not all departments have work locations in the East Derry Assembly Area.

Figures exclude staff on career break or on secondment to an external organisation.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of civil servants (i) based in Mid Ulster; (ii) based in Mid Ulster in 2011–12; and (iii) projected to be based in Mid Ulster by 2019.

(AQW 3533/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The information requested at parts (i) and (ii) is set out in the table below. The information requested at part (iii) is not held by my Department.

NICS Staff with a work location in the Mid Ulster Assembly Area

Date	No.
1 July 2016	402
1 January 2012	427

Notes:

Headcount figures at date listed.

Information taken from HRConnect and additional Department of Justice databases.

July 2016 figures include staff working in the 9 Northern Ireland Ministerial departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Team are also included.

January 2012 figures include staff working in the 12 Northern Ireland Ministerial departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Assembly Ombudsman/Commissioner for Complaints are also included.

Not all departments have work locations in the Mid Ulster Assembly Area.

Figures exclude staff on career break or on secondment to an external organisation.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance why he does not use a Civil Service ministerial driver.
(AQW 3599/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am very happy with the service provided by my current driver and am content with the arrangements that are in place.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Finance what action his Department is taking to assist small business start-ups.
(AQW 3654/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Growing the size of our business base lies at the heart of our emerging Programme for Government and this is the responsibility of a number of Departments.

For my part I have a role in ensuring that public expenditure is managed well so that we are able to maximise opportunities for investment and for the provision of other measures to help create the right conditions for growing our small business sector.

The rating system is one way we can offer help and I wish to bring forward a range of better targeted rates support measures to stimulate economic development and regeneration, instead of the existing small business rate relief scheme.

I will also be looking to extend the successful Back in Business rate support scheme beyond March 2017. Almost 560 new ventures have qualified for it since 2012 and our scheme has since been copied throughout Britain. The decision to extend the scheme beyond March 2017 will be taken in the context of upcoming budget.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Finance how ministerial time for party business is accounted for on departmental funded trips.
(AQW 3840/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Ministerial Code sets out the rules and procedures for the exercise of the duties and responsibilities of Ministers. It places clear requirements on Ministers to observe the highest standards of propriety and regularity involving impartiality; ensure that their public positions are not used to promote their private interests; and declare any interests which may conflict with their responsibilities.

I am satisfied that I am fully compliant with the Code. I do not spend ministerial time on party business.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance what measures he will put in place to reduce long term sick absence in the Civil Service.
(AQW 3844/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There is a comprehensive range of policies and procedures in place to address sickness absence in the NICS. Help and support for staff at work and throughout their illness is fully available, including professional interventions, assistance with rehabilitation and reasonable adjustments. Also, the inefficiency sickness absence policy focuses on areas such as return to work interviews, warning action and a detailed process for managing long term sick absence.

More generally, prevention of illness and promotion of a healthy lifestyle is integral to the overall approach adopted in managing attendance. Strategies and approaches have been developed to support this approach. For example, a central web-based health and wellbeing hub, known as NICS WELL, is accessible to all staff, a training programme specifically

designed to equip managers to deal more effectively with sickness absence has been delivered and a new approach to rehabilitation has now been embedded in the service provided by our Welfare Support team.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance what measures he will put in place to reduce the time lost in sick absence days in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

(AQW 3846/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There is a comprehensive range of policies and procedures in place to address sickness absence in the NICS. Help and support for staff at work and throughout their illness is fully available, including professional interventions, assistance with rehabilitation and reasonable adjustments. Also, the inefficiency sickness absence policy focuses on areas such as return to work interviews, warning action and a detailed process for managing long term sick absence.

More generally, prevention of illness and promotion of a healthy lifestyle is integral to the overall approach adopted in managing attendance. Strategies and approaches have been developed to support this approach. For example, a central web-based health and wellbeing hub, known as NICS WELL, is accessible to all staff, a training programme specifically designed to equip managers to deal more effectively with sickness absence has been delivered and a new approach to rehabilitation has now been embedded in the service provided by our Welfare Support team.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance how much was raised by the (i) regional rate and (ii) district rate over each of the last 10 years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 3887/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The figures requested are only available from the 2009/10 rating year and have been summarised in the tables below. A table splitting the revenue raised by District Council has been provided and has been analysed by district and regional rate revenue raised.

Note that the figures quoted represent the gross rating assessments before deduction of rate reliefs, discharges or write-off.

2015/16

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim And Newtownabbey	59,427,239	48,049,425	107,476,664
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	69,188,004	61,045,130	130,233,135
Belfast	203,565,506	160,271,748	363,837,253
Causeway Coast and Glens	51,979,383	43,437,518	95,416,902
Derry and Strabane	53,466,771	51,360,759	104,827,530
Fermanagh and Omagh	44,964,836	31,892,300	76,857,135
Lisburn and Castlereagh	65,015,147	42,664,088	107,679,235
Mid and East Antrim	50,086,706	46,425,981	96,512,686
Mid Ulster	45,750,402	33,453,582	79,203,984
Newry, Mourne and Down	63,663,746	50,552,846	114,216,593
North Down and Ards	66,903,046	47,457,144	114,360,190
Total	774,010,785	616,610,522	1,390,621,307

* the figures in the table above are subject to change pending finalisation of the annual audit

2014/15

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim	23,718,893	20,289,789	44,008,682
Ards	27,858,898	19,269,438	47,128,336
Armagh	18,020,114	18,064,934	36,085,047
Ballymena	25,668,470	22,931,219	48,599,688
Ballymoney	8,233,430	7,059,098	15,292,529
Banbridge	14,864,031	13,397,838	28,261,868
Belfast	192,259,247	150,429,668	342,688,915
Carrickfergus	13,271,579	12,198,664	25,470,243

District	Regional	District	Total
Castlereagh	30,231,806	16,207,885	46,439,691
Coleraine	27,263,023	20,695,421	47,958,444
Cookstown	12,627,511	8,800,798	21,428,309
Craigavon	33,141,080	28,091,259	61,232,338
Down	23,507,926	19,840,066	43,347,992
Dungannon & South Tyrone	19,307,962	12,083,280	31,391,242
Fermanagh	25,403,553	14,895,283	40,298,836
Larne	12,224,012	10,705,836	22,929,848
Limavady	10,033,903	9,474,551	19,508,454
Lisburn	50,909,270	32,057,530	82,966,800
Derry	42,611,028	40,469,410	83,080,438
Magherafelt	13,164,311	8,654,256	21,818,567
Moyle	5,683,691	5,489,843	11,173,534
Newry & Mourne	36,714,663	28,386,821	65,101,484
Newtownabbey	34,450,983	28,005,808	62,456,792
North Down	38,646,581	26,650,300	65,296,881
Omagh	18,174,951	14,592,924	32,767,876
Strabane	10,563,983	9,170,250	19,734,234
Total	768,554,902	597,912,168	1,366,467,070

2013/14

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim	22,677,743	19,879,092	42,556,835
Ards	27,177,010	19,126,191	46,303,201
Armagh	17,302,561	17,478,956	34,781,517
Ballymena	24,832,423	22,442,041	47,274,464
Ballymoney	7,986,161	7,046,878	15,033,039
Banbridge	14,345,762	13,061,913	27,407,675
Belfast	186,009,562	149,482,795	335,492,357
Carrickfergus	12,886,649	11,996,895	24,883,543
Castlereagh	29,832,748	16,615,185	46,447,933
Coleraine	25,896,497	20,202,145	46,098,642
Cookstown	12,219,542	8,664,148	20,883,689
Craigavon	32,158,956	27,983,447	60,142,403
Down	22,519,416	19,528,668	42,048,084
Dungannon & South Tyrone	18,784,354	12,067,528	30,851,882
Fermanagh	24,555,236	14,789,738	39,344,973
Larne	12,028,280	10,499,947	22,528,227
Limavady	9,434,180	9,177,882	18,612,063
Lisburn	48,299,705	30,949,134	79,248,839
Derry	40,975,945	38,948,617	79,924,563

District	Regional	District	Total
Magherafelt	12,758,052	8,608,717	21,366,769
Moyle	5,464,375	5,421,675	10,886,050
Newry & Mourne	35,395,814	28,092,834	63,488,647
Newtownabbey	33,264,751	27,767,156	61,031,907
North Down	37,304,516	26,020,704	63,325,221
Omagh	17,318,028	14,528,435	31,846,464
Strabane	10,307,141	8,963,001	19,270,142
Total	741,735,408	589,343,724	1,331,079,130

2012/13

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim	22,063,242	19,840,965	41,904,207
Ards	26,164,780	18,739,375	44,904,155
Armagh	16,521,141	16,851,476	33,372,617
Ballymena	24,024,588	21,901,822	45,926,411
Ballymoney	7,360,647	6,688,233	14,048,880
Banbridge	13,830,948	12,639,978	26,470,926
Belfast	183,794,813	151,643,578	335,438,390
Carrickfergus	12,378,540	11,619,010	23,997,549
Castlereagh	28,921,109	16,021,762	44,942,871
Coleraine	25,685,697	20,151,160	45,836,857
Cookstown	11,669,315	8,329,935	19,999,251
Craigavon	30,376,848	26,770,785	57,147,633
Down	21,635,277	18,770,782	40,406,059
Dungannon & South Tyrone	17,696,471	11,677,016	29,373,487
Fermanagh	23,146,241	14,091,475	37,237,716
Larne	11,387,808	9,944,764	21,332,572
Limavady	9,090,763	8,917,122	18,007,885
Lisburn	46,008,102	29,677,858	75,685,960
Derry	40,055,543	38,315,019	78,370,563
Magherafelt	12,181,669	8,277,349	20,459,018
Moyle	5,277,525	5,281,445	10,558,970
Newry & Mourne	33,551,699	27,018,672	60,570,371
Newtownabbey	31,999,236	27,074,262	59,073,498
North Down	36,006,953	25,546,464	61,553,417
Omagh	17,589,525	14,880,540	32,470,065
Strabane	10,092,579	8,673,867	18,766,446
Total	718,511,060	579,344,715	1,297,855,775

2011/12

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim	21,336,174	19,531,130	40,867,304

District	Regional	District	Total
Ards	25,184,520	18,345,478	43,529,998
Armagh	16,095,290	16,463,769	32,559,059
Ballymena	23,212,018	21,273,003	44,485,020
Ballymoney	7,438,870	6,686,453	14,125,323
Banbridge	13,283,496	12,105,999	25,389,495
Belfast	172,274,500	142,998,916	315,273,417
Carrickfergus	11,991,479	11,320,532	23,312,011
Castlereagh	27,638,972	14,918,830	42,557,802
Coleraine	24,293,992	19,103,285	43,397,277
Cookstown	11,235,909	8,112,033	19,347,942
Craigavon	29,718,695	26,438,142	56,156,838
Down	20,955,670	18,216,195	39,171,865
Dungannon & South Tyrone	17,143,092	11,590,506	28,733,598
Fermanagh	22,270,620	13,815,315	36,085,934
Larne	11,402,127	9,753,518	21,155,645
Limavady	8,721,666	8,650,674	17,372,340
Lisburn	44,070,548	28,252,365	72,322,913
Derry	38,683,856	37,218,974	75,902,831
Magherafelt	11,507,890	7,844,781	19,352,672
Moyle	5,123,134	5,127,028	10,250,162
Newry & Mourne	31,539,896	25,562,777	57,102,673
Newtownabbey	30,530,875	25,950,028	56,480,903
North Down	34,481,338	24,320,783	58,802,121
Omagh	16,636,592	14,238,221	30,874,813
Strabane	9,560,023	8,129,890	17,689,913
Total	686,331,242	555,968,625	1,242,299,867

2010/11

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim	20,310,994	18,799,970	39,110,964
Ards	24,103,015	17,830,573	41,933,588
Armagh	15,645,526	15,976,260	31,621,786
Ballymena	22,366,205	20,450,938	42,817,143
Ballymoney	7,159,993	6,418,920	13,578,913
Banbridge	12,655,421	11,429,913	24,085,334
Belfast	167,489,043	138,425,663	305,914,706
Carrickfergus	11,636,929	11,014,196	22,651,125
Castlereagh	25,735,940	13,899,917	39,635,857
Coleraine	23,547,467	18,329,022	41,876,490
Cookstown	10,822,612	7,930,082	18,752,694
Craigavon	28,478,280	25,147,470	53,625,750

District	Regional	District	Total
Down	20,186,773	17,985,334	38,172,106
Dungannon & South Tyrone	16,578,476	11,490,170	28,068,645
Fermanagh	20,559,358	12,951,496	33,510,854
Larne	10,913,722	9,298,383	20,212,105
Limavady	8,814,079	8,982,290	17,796,370
Lisburn	42,196,415	26,942,557	69,138,972
Derry	37,812,481	36,454,245	74,266,726
Magherafelt	11,274,179	7,719,967	18,994,146
Moyle	4,909,916	5,034,959	9,944,875
Newry & Mourne	30,998,480	25,713,799	56,712,279
Newtownabbey	29,556,623	25,143,322	54,699,945
North Down	32,990,854	23,182,567	56,173,421
Omagh	15,995,795	13,847,838	29,843,632
Strabane	9,347,344	8,284,995	17,632,338
Total	662,085,920	538,684,846	1,200,770,766

2009/10

District	Regional	District	Total
Antrim	19,883,960	17,731,717	37,615,677
Ards	23,100,319	16,738,426	39,838,745
Armagh	14,870,038	14,364,365	29,234,403
Ballymena	21,541,547	18,695,455	40,237,002
Ballymoney	6,866,158	5,781,569	12,647,727
Banbridge	12,321,280	10,699,294	23,020,573
Belfast	164,181,418	128,133,914	292,315,332
Carrickfergus	11,227,333	10,190,259	21,417,592
Castlereagh	26,035,221	13,750,592	39,785,813
Coleraine	23,030,200	17,272,542	40,302,742
Cookstown	10,417,783	7,532,829	17,950,612
Craigavon	27,415,967	24,067,443	51,483,410
Down	19,388,144	16,355,572	35,743,716
Dungannon & S Tyrone	15,902,559	11,147,271	27,049,830
Fermanagh	20,061,681	12,306,475	32,368,156
Larne	10,638,392	8,822,690	19,461,081
Limavady	8,336,783	7,985,732	16,322,515
Lisburn	41,280,946	26,150,385	67,431,331
Derry	36,567,162	34,111,404	70,678,565
Magherafelt	11,076,408	7,070,759	18,147,167
Moyle	4,769,363	4,925,299	9,694,662
Newry & Mourne	29,282,457	23,017,655	52,300,112
Newtownabbey	28,957,605	23,801,821	52,759,426

District	Regional	District	Total
North Down	32,744,101	22,554,572	55,298,673
Omagh	14,798,499	12,673,085	27,471,584
Strabane	9,039,257	7,770,571	16,809,828
Total	643,734,580	503,651,694	1,147,386,273

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance whether there has been a change to the provision of Park Rangers at Stormont Estate.

(AQW 3949/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There has been no change to the provision of Park Rangers on the Stormont Estate. There are currently four Rangers which has been the position since 2010.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of farm related deaths since 2011.

(AQW 4180/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The attached table outlines the number of farm related¹ deaths that were registered here over the five year period 2011 to 2015, the latest year for which figures are available.

Number of farm related¹ deaths registered in NI, 2011-2015

Registration Year	Number of Deaths
2011	11
2012	8
2013	5
2014	4
2015	3
Total	31

¹ Since 2001 the tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD10) is used to classify cause of death. The codes used for 'farm related' deaths are V84 and W00 – Y34 where place of occurrence was 'farm' or 'at home', and the home address was a farm. Occupation was searched for mentions of 'Farmer' or other variations of this. Cause of death text was also searched for 'slurry'.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance to advise when he was first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4245/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I first became aware of the document through the Nolan Show on Radio Ulster.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance how many Freedom of Information requests his Department has received in the last two years; and how much it has cost his Department to respond to these requests.

(AQW 4286/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Between 30th September 2014 and 30th September 2016, the Department received 623 FOI requests.

The information requested is also published in a series of FOI Annual Reports, which are on the basis of calendar years. The reports can be accessed from The Executive Office website at:

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/information-management-and-central-advisory-branch-imcab>

DoF, in common with other NICS departments, does not calculate or record information on the cost of processing FOI requests.

Department of Health

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health to detail the range of regional services available to treat people diagnosed with intractable epilepsy; and whether her Department provides help to families to access the best treatment internationally, including a hospital based in Los Angeles, for life-threatening conditions.

(AQW 2666/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I am committed to ensuring that those suffering from intractable epilepsy and their families receive the specialist services they need. Patients with more complex forms of epilepsy are referred to the neurology service in the Belfast Trust. Clinicians there have specialist knowledge and experience in assessing and caring for patients with epilepsy. Treatments available in Belfast include drug treatments, use of ketogenic diets, includes psychology services, and specialist nursing.

The HSCB has in place a process to allow local consultants to transfer individual named patients outside the North to NHS providers for treatment which is not available locally. Referrals to non NHS providers can be considered where the referring consultant supplies detailed clinical grounds demonstrating why an NHS provider is not appropriate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health what training his staff receive in completing answers to Assembly Questions in line with departmental guidance.

(AQW 3239/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A range of training and guidance is available to Departmental Staff in relation to answering Assembly questions. This training and guidance takes the form of: formal Centre for Applied Learning Courses on Assembly Questions; Departmental Seminars on Private Office Procedures; access to the Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer for advice; and guidance and templates available on the Department's Intranet.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health how many people in West Tyrone are (i) registered blind; (ii) registered as partially sighted; and (iii) diagnosed with a serious eye condition.

(AQW 3247/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not held centrally and was requested from the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response can be found in Table 1 below.

Information is not available at constituency level and has been provided for the Western HSC Trust. Registration is voluntary and the totals may not include all those eligible to be registered.

Table 1. Number of adults in the Western HSC Trust that are registered:

Blind	445
Partially Sighted	285
Visually Impaired ¹	1,329
Total	2,059

¹ This includes clients with a serious eye condition however Trust systems cannot distinguish what proportion have been diagnosed with a serious eye condition.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health for her assessment the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency's role in facilitating trainee GP's undertake Keep in Touch Days; and what action she will take.

(AQW 3254/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) facilitates all requests for Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days in line with existing policy, operating within a legislative framework agreed with the Royal College of General Practitioners and the General Medical Council. This policy is available upon request or through the NIMDTA website. As a formal and satisfactory process exists to apply for, and to seek advice about, KIT days I do not consider it necessary to take any action.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health what steps the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency is taking to encourage trainee GP's returning from maternity leave to return to the workplace.

(AQW 3255/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is rare for GP trainees, including those who return after a break, not to complete their training programme. However, trainees are provided with information booklets prior to the onset of their break and these are now routinely sent to those trainees who return from maternity leave. In addition, the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) operates a Special Circumstances Policy which supports those trainees who may require a reasonable adjustment to their placement in order to ensure they can remain in work. NIMDTA also provides any trainee who requests it the opportunity of a meeting to discuss their return to the training programme.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for what reasons is the urgent cardiology consultation waiting list at the Ulster Hospital 31 weeks.

(AQW 3257/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am advised by the South Eastern HSC Trust that difficulties being experienced in filling two Consultant Cardiologist posts, alongside staff sickness and an increase in the number of cardiology referrals has led to an increase in waiting time for cardiology patients.

To help address this, the Trust has recently recruited an additional Specialty Doctor who will take up post in the coming months and is also working with other HSC Trusts to explore ways in which gaps in staffing can be bridged.

I have stated on many occasions that long waiting times for treatment are unacceptable to me, and addressing this issue is a priority for me. I am looking forward to setting out my vision for Health and Social care in the coming weeks which will include a strategy for addressing waiting times in the long term.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health to list the waiting times for urgent cardiology consultations at each cardiology unit.

(AQW 3258/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of people waiting for a first urgent consultant-led outpatient appointment within the cardiology specialty as at 31st August 2016 is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Hospital Site	Weeks waiting					
		0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15-18	>18-52
Belfast	Belfast City	49	16	7	<5	0	0
	Mater	58	12	10	<5	0	0
	Royal Victoria	119	23	11	10	<5	0
Northern	Antrim Area	60	<5	<5	0	0	0
	Causeway	27	<5	0	0	0	0
South Eastern	Ulster	295	86	88	81	81	364
Southern	Armagh Community	<5	0	<5	<5	0	0
	Craigavon Area	70	16	11	8	<5	0
	Daisy Hill	12	6	<5	<5	<5	0
	South Tyrone	<5	0	0	0	0	0
Western	Altnagelvin	21	0	0	0	0	0
	Roe Valley	<5	0	0	0	0	0
	South West Acute	16	<5	0	0	0	0
	Tyrone County	12	0	0	0	0	0

Source: HSC Trusts

*Cells with values less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health for an update on a new Health and Wellbeing Centre in Bangor.

(AQW 3266/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Plans for a new Primary and Community Care Centre in Bangor are included in the Health and Social Care Board's Strategic Implementation Plan for primary care. Future investment in new primary care facilities cannot be progressed until the pilot projects for health and care centres in Lisburn and Newry are evaluated. This evaluation is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

Delivery of the implementation plan, including plans for a new health centre in Bangor will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health how many people are on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust waiting list for autism spectrum disorder assessments, broken down by the source of referral.

(AQW 3267/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of people on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust waiting list for an autism assessment, broken down by the source of referral would require a manual trawl through hundreds of files and could therefore not be provided due to disproportionate cost.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health how many people have been on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust waiting list for autism spectrum disorder assessments for (i) up to 3 months; (ii) 3-6 months; (iii) 6-9 months; (iv) 9-12 months; (v) 12-18 months; (vi) 18-24 months; and (vii) longer than 24 months.

(AQW 3268/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Table 1, below, details the number of children waiting for an autism assessment by length of time waiting at 26th September 2016 in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Table 1

Length of time waiting (months)							Total
< 3	3 – 6	6 – 9	9 – 12	12 - 18	18 – 24	>24	
172	187	155	150	282	43	0	989

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – PARIS System

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQO 222/16-21, how many people are on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust waiting list for autism spectrum disorder assessments, broken down by age group.

(AQW 3269/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Table 1, below, details the number of children on the waiting list for an autism assessment by age group at the 26th September 2016 in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Table 1

Age Group (years)						Total
2<3	3<4	4<5	5 – 11	12 – 14	15 – 17	
7	105	180	578	70	49	989

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – PARIS System

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of ophthalmic care services.

(AQW 3285/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In respect of ophthalmology inpatient and day case treatment, 58% of patients were waiting less than 13 weeks at 30 June 2016 and 38 people were waiting longer than 52 weeks. Significant progress is needed to meet the waiting time target, with 70% of patients waiting longer than 9 weeks for a first consultant outpatient appointment.

Work already underway to reform eyecare services is focussed on the development of a primary care based service for acute non-sight threatening eye conditions and the four major ophthalmic disease entities; glaucoma, cataract, macular and diabetic retinopathy.

In the longer term, Developing Eyecare Partnerships is a five year plan to improve the commissioning and delivery of eyecare services in the North of Ireland. The 12 objectives encompass all elements of service reform including; promotion of eye health, legislative requirements, workforce development and the development of integrated care pathways supported by IT developments and professional skill mix. Developing Eyecare Partnerships aims to ensure that service planning and reconfiguration will deliver safe and effective care equitably for all patients both in the primary and secondary care setting.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of physical assaults committed against staff in each Emergency Department over the last five years.

(AQW 3286/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Table 1 below details the number of physical assaults committed against staff in each Emergency Department over the last five years ending 31 March.

Table 1

Emergency Department	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Craigavon Area Hospital	14	11	20	14	15
Daisy Hill Hospital	7	8	6	3	3
Antrim Area Hospital	20	21	15	13	16
Causeway Hospital	7	3	2	2	4
Mater Hospital	11	18	12	13	13

Emergency Department	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Royal Victoria Hospital	24	12	13	28	28
Belfast City Hospital	11	0	0	0	0
Altnagelvin Hospital	4	6	5	10	6
Erne Hospital	4	0	0	0	0
South West Acute Hospital	0	1	1	2	3
Lagan Valley Hospital	2	0	1	1	2
Ulster Hospital	18	15	13	18	14
Downe Hospital	2	0	1	1	0
Bangor Community Hospital	0	1	0	0	0
Total	124	93	89	105	104

The number of incidents of physical assaults committed against members of the Ambulance Service (NIAS) is recorded based on the Divisional Area for the station that the staff member works from. As NIAS Divisional Areas and Local Commissioning Group boundaries are broadly co-terminus, Table 2 details the number of physical assaults committed against members of the Ambulance Service over the last five years ending 31 March, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

Table 2

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Belfast HSC Trust	20	42	60	54	75
Northern HSC Trust	5	13	14	27	23
Western HSCT	29	10	12	21	14
South Eastern HSC Trust	12	15	31	28	31
Southern HSC Trust	20	7	18	16	17
Unknown	1	1	7	2	0
Total	87	88	142	148	160

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of physical assaults committed against members of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service over the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3288/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Table 1 below details the number of physical assaults committed against staff in each Emergency Department over the last five years ending 31 March.

Table 1

Emergency Department	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Craigavon Area Hospital	14	11	20	14	15
Daisy Hill Hospital	7	8	6	3	3
Antrim Area Hospital	20	21	15	13	16
Causeway Hospital	7	3	2	2	4
Mater Hospital	11	18	12	13	13
Royal Victoria Hospital	24	12	13	28	28
Belfast City Hospital	11	0	0	0	0
Altnagelvin Hospital	4	6	5	10	6
Erne Hospital	4	0	0	0	0
South West Acute Hospital	0	1	1	2	3
Lagan Valley Hospital	2	0	1	1	2
Ulster Hospital	18	15	13	18	14

Emergency Department	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Downe Hospital	2	0	1	1	0
Bangor Community Hospital	0	1	0	0	0
Total	124	93	89	105	104

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Northern HSC Trust	5	13	14	27	23
Western HSCT	29	10	12	21	14
South Eastern HSC Trust	12	15	31	28	31
Southern HSC Trust	20	7	18	16	17
Unknown	1	1	7	2	0
Total	87	88	142	148	160

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health whether all of the current clinics and services that are available at South Tyrone Hospital will be retained throughout the next five years; and whether her Department intends to increase services at the hospital over the next five years.
(AQW 3302/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust currently has no plans to change services in the South Tyrone Hospital.

I am considering the expert panel's report on Health and Social Care in the North. The reconfiguration of these services is an important and complex matter. I am therefore taking time to consider fully the implications of the recommendations made throughout the report. Alongside the panel's report I will publish the vision for transforming Health and Social Care in the coming weeks.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to outline the intended geographic area of operation of the helicopter emergency medical service.
(AQW 3316/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The initial HEMS operating model will cover the same geographic area as that covered by the current road ambulance service. There is potential to build on the initial operating model by exploring the possibility of cross-border arrangements, e.g. to provide HEMS cover in the west and north-west of Ireland, once the service has been established.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health for an update on the pharmacy pilot being operated by the Northern Health and Social Services Trust; and whether she plans to roll out this service across all Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 3317/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Community Pharmacy Emergency Supply Pilot Service being coordinated by the Health and Social Care Board in the Northern Local Commissioning Group (LCG) area is due to end in March 2017. The pilot service is being evaluated and the evaluation will inform decisions relating to the future roll-out of the service.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health (i) how many packs of take home Naloxone have been distributed in each of the last four years; (ii) what advice is provided to patients supplied with a pack; (iii) what is the cost to the Health Service associated with this treatment; (iv) to outline the rationale for the distribution of these packs; and (v) how many addicts have given up their drug addiction as a result.
(AQW 3318/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The following table shows the number of times that patients were supplied with Take Home Naloxone packs in each of the last four years:

April 2012 – March 2013	139
-------------------------	-----

April 2013 – March 2014	163
April 2014 – March 2015	187
April 2015 – March 2016	247

- (ii) When supplied with a pack, patients receive advice on how to recognise opioid overdose, when to call for an ambulance, how to administer Take Home Naloxone (THN), how to put someone in the recovery position, and information on the temporary nature of Naloxone. Patients are also advised when and how to get replacement packs in the case of expiry, loss and use of THN. Associated training also involves delivering advice to recipients on using Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.
- (iii) The average cost of a THN pack is approximately £18.50. The total THN expenditure for the four years ending March 2016 is £13,801.
- (iv) The number of deaths following heroin overdose increased year-on-year from 6 to 25 between 2008 and 2013. Through the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two (NSD), the Public Health Agency developed and piloted the Take Home Naloxone Scheme as a harm reduction measure to reduce the number of drug-related fatalities.
- THN packs provide immediate life-saving medicine to someone who has taken an opioid (heroin) overdose. The packs are supplied by HSC Trust Community Addiction Teams and the Prison Service to those at risk of overdose, or those who have come into contact with someone at risk.
- In 2014, the number of deaths attributed to heroin use fell from 25 to 11. Since the THN Scheme began in July 2012 and the end of March 2016, 58 packs have been administered to reverse the effects of an overdose, and on 54 of these instances, the patient has survived. It is therefore estimated that for every £250 spent on medicine, a life has been saved.
- (v) The aim of the THN Scheme is to save lives. However the provision of Naloxone has been shown to improve engagement with services by this vulnerable client group, which in turn may lead to improved treatment outcomes, including potentially recovery from addiction.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health on how many occasions Naloxone has been administered to patients in each of the last four years.

(AQW 3319/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of occasions on which Naloxone has been administered to patients is not available, as this information is not routinely collected. Naloxone is administered by injection, which can be given by a healthcare provider, emergency medical provider, by an individual at risk of heroin or opioid overdose or by a family member or caregiver who is trained to properly give a Naloxone injection. As such, Naloxone may be administered within a wide range of settings, including but not limited to, within hospital, in a prison setting, and prior to or during an emergency ambulance call out.

The number of times that Naloxone has been administered by ambulance staff in a pre-hospital environment is available and these figures are shown in Table 1 below, for each of the last 4 financial years.

Table 1: Naloxone Administrations by NIAS staff, 2012/13 to 2015/16

Year	Naloxone administrations by NIAS staff*
2012/13	220
2013/14	196
2014/15	262
2015/16	420

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)

*Please note that these figures are provisional and may be subject to slight amendments.

Naloxone 'take-home' kits are supplied to patients at risk of an opioid overdose in emergency situations outside a healthcare environment. Whilst HSC Trusts supply take-home Naloxone for this initiative, the Trusts do not collect data on the number of occasions that this Naloxone has been administered. These kits may be dispensed through treatment or outreach services, such as Trust/Community Addiction teams, and through the Prison Service. The number of times that patients were supplied with such 'take-home' Naloxone in each of the last four years is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of times a patient has been supplied with Naloxone, 2012/13 – 2015/16

Year	Number of times a patient has been supplied with 'take-home' Naloxone
2012/13	139
2013/14	163

Year	Number of times a patient has been supplied with 'take-home' Naloxone
2014/15	187
2015/16	247

Source: Public Health Agency

HSC Trust pharmacies also supply Naloxone to clinical areas within their Trust for use in emergency situations, but supplies relate to replacement of expired stock rather than doses administered. Most if not all clinical areas need to hold a stock of Naloxone. Trusts do not collect data on the number of occasions that Naloxone has been administered in such situations.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the differences in the Minor Ailments Scheme operated by pharmacies in Northern Ireland and the scheme in Scotland; and what plans she has to expand and improve the current system. **(AQW 3320/16-21)**

Mrs O'Neill: In the North of Ireland, all patients are eligible for the Minor Ailments Scheme if they are over the age of three months and registered with a GP Practice. Patients can avail of the scheme from any participating pharmacy without registration. A defined list of conditions may be treated under the scheme and pharmacists may supply products that are included in a Minor Ailments formulary. Further details are available from: www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/2055.htm.

Patients in Scotland can register with a community pharmacy of their choice as the first port of call for the treatment of common illnesses for the Scottish Minor Ailment Service. The service is only available to specified patient groups including those under the age of 16, under 19 and in full time education, or aged 60 or over. There are a wider range of treatments available in Scotland compared to here. These include all Pharmacy (P) and General Sales List (GSL) medicines that are not blacklisted, dressings and appliances from Part 2 of the Drug Tariff, selected items from Part 3 of the Tariff, such as bug busting kits, and any Prescription Only Medicines (POMs) agreed suitable and which are underpinned by a series of core patient Group Direction (PGDs). Full details of these are available from: www.communitypharmacy.scot.nhs.uk/core_services/mas.html

My officials are currently engaged in working with Community Pharmacy NI and the Health and Social Care Board around the future of community pharmacy services, including minor ailments.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister of Health what are the waiting times for breast cancer screening referrals being processed in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. **(AQW 3330/16-21)**

Mrs O'Neill: Patients who have attended the breast cancer screening service in Linenhall Street and who are subsequently diagnosed with a cancer are given a choice of which hospital they wish to attend for their treatment. Patients who choose to attend the Belfast Trust are given an appointment with a breast surgery Consultant within a week, sometimes as quickly as the next day; however, they will wait no more than 7 days to be seen in the Belfast City Hospital.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister of Health what are the waiting times for autism assessment referrals being processed in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. **(AQW 3331/16-21)**

Mrs O'Neill: Table 1 below details the number of children waiting for an autism assessment in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust at 26th September 2016.

Table 1

Length of time waiting (months)							Total
< 3	3 – 6	6 – 9	9 – 12	12 - 18	18 – 24	>24	
172	187	155	150	282	43	0	989

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – PARIS System

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Health how many people registered with learning difficulties in each Health and Social Care Trust have been allocated a social worker since 2011. **(AQW 3367/16-21)**

Mrs O'Neill: Information on people with learning difficulties who have been allocated a social worker is not available. However, information on adults in the learning disability client group who commenced receipt of social work or social care services is available and can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Adults in the learning disability client group who commenced receipt of social work or social care services (Year ending 31 March 2011/12 – 2015/16)

HSC Trust	Number of Adults
Belfast	798
Northern	473
South Eastern	251
Southern	277
Western	453

Source: HSC Board

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health what proportion of eligible children have received the meningitis B vaccine.
(AQW 3371/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Men B vaccination programme was introduced in September 2015 and is offered to all infants when they are two, four and twelve months of age.

As those infants who received the vaccine first have just recently received their 3rd and final dose at 12 months of age, full uptake figures for a completed course are not available yet. However, based on early indications the uptake rate for the first two doses given at 2 and 4 months of age are approximately 98% and 95% respectively.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future of the Ravara Training and Resource Centre, Bangor.
(AQW 3372/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Ravara redevelopment is part of a wider project to replace day care facilities in the South Eastern Trust. A business case is being prepared and has been discussed with the Trust. This is a project that certainly has merit given the existing facilities but is subject to budget constraints. The Department's Capital Budget is heavily committed and ultimately the timing of this project will be determined by business case approval and budget availability.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Health for an update on the review of the Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2011-2016.
(AQW 3406/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2 (NSD Phase 2) was launched in 2012. While it was anticipated to be a 5-year strategy running from 2011 to 2016, there was a slight delay in publishing the final document, and NSD Phase 2 has therefore only been in operation for 4 years. Progress on the outcomes in the strategy has been reviewed on an annual basis and the most recent report is available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/New-Strategic-Direction-for-Alcohol-and-Drugs-%20fourth-update-july-2016.pdf>.

To give the strategy its full five years of implementation, I have approved rolling forward the NSD Phase 2 for at least another year. This allows time for it to be fully embedded before completing a final review and will ensure that the development of any future strategy will be closely aligned with the new Programme for Government.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Health to outline the timeline for consultation through to implementation of the new Protect Life Strategy.
(AQW 3407/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Protect Life 2: a draft strategy for suicide prevention in the north of Ireland issued for public consultation on 9 September 2016. Consultation closes at 5pm on 4 November 2016. A post consultation report will issue in January 2017, with the final strategy planned for publication by March 2017.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Health for an update on the possibility of a Street Triage Pilot in Belfast where mental health nurses will accompany PSNI officers on the beat.
(AQW 3408/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Departments of Health and Justice jointly consulted on Improving Health within Criminal Justice, between 24 March and 20 June 2016. The consultation document was accompanied by a draft action plan, which included an action to explore the potential for providing mental health street triage and/or alternative 'safe places' to Emergency Departments and police custody for those who are in emotional crisis and/or at risk of attempting suicide. A consultation analysis is being finalised, but there was a positive response to the street triage proposal. My officials are working with the Police Service, Ambulance Service, the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency to produce a costed plan for consideration and, if appropriate, eventual prioritisation in line with a range of health and social care service development proposals.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Mental Capacity Bill; and whether she intends to bring forward any amendments to this Bill.

(AQW 3409/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Mental Capacity Bill received Royal Assent on 9 May 2016, to become the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016. The Department is currently focusing on the implementation planning for the Act. There are no plans to bring forward any amendments to the Act at this time.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health how many children are currently awaiting adoption.

(AQW 3417/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: At 23rd September 2016 there were 32 looked after children in the north of Ireland actively seeking adoptive placements through the regional Adoption Information System.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the current operation of the Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education.

(AQW 3418/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education (SUMDE) is a vital component of supporting the supply of future medical and dental staff for the North's Health and Social Care (HSC) sector. My Department keeps the SUMDE funding allocation model, which distributes nearly £38m per year, under continuous review to enhance accountability in the expenditure by HSC Trusts and ensure that it supports changes in the medical and dental undergraduate curricula delivered by QUB. For example, in 2016/17 funding of £350k has been redirected from HSC Trusts to support an increase in clinical placements in primary care settings. This is part of a progressive process to significantly rebalance the medical undergraduate curriculum to reflect the shift of service delivery from hospital to community settings under Transforming Your Care.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health how many people in South Antrim are (i) registered blind; (ii) registered as partially sighted; and (iii) diagnosed with a serious eye condition.

(AQW 3423/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not held centrally and was therefore requested from the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response can be found in Table 1 below.

The Northern HSC Trust do not employ ophthalmologists as the service is provided by visiting consultants in the Belfast HSC Trust, therefore information on those diagnosed with a serious eye condition is not available.

Table 1. Number of people in South Antrim that are registered:

Blind	209
Partially Sighted	93
Total	302

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department would claim from relevant contractors should damage be caused to public property.

(AQW 2871/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): When my Department lets contracts a clause is included which states that the contractor is responsible for the care of the Works specified in the contract and in the event of any loss or damage to public property, the contractor will rectify the damage at their own cost.

If the contractor fails to comply with the conditions of the contract my Department would, where reasonable to do so, claim from the contractor.

In cases where damage is caused by a third party contractor, my Department would be prepared to claim from the contractor for any damage caused to public property.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the plans for Northern Ireland Railways to upgrade its current trains.

(AQW 3044/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink, in conjunction with Irish Rail, has recently completed a £12.2M refurbishment of the Cross Border Enterprise carriages.

In addition, an initial fleet assessment is currently underway prior to the internal and external refurbishment of the Class 3000 fleet (23 x 3 car trains).

Translink is also currently developing a business case for additional train carriages to deliver enhanced capacity on the NI Railways network in line with increasing customer demand. This is at an early stage. Plans will be progressed subject to the availability of the necessary funding.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on implementing a residents' parking scheme in Holywood.
(AQW 3222/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I recognise that commuter parking is causing local difficulties in many locations across the north of Ireland and a number of areas, including Bangor and Holywood in the North Down area, have been identified which would benefit from such schemes.

Unfortunately, until the trial sites in Belfast, Derry and Antrim have been implemented and evaluated I am unable to indicate a timescale when further schemes might be taken forward.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Craigantlet roundabout scheme.
(AQW 3226/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware, this scheme would have a significant impact on the local environment. Consequently my officials initiated a pre-application enquiry with colleagues from the Planning Department of Ards and North Down Council, to determine whether the proposed layout will be acceptable.

When I have fully considered the comments from the pre-application enquiry, I will make a decision on the most appropriate way forward. Delivery of any scheme will then be subject to the availability of the necessary land and funding.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the budget for street lighting repairs for this financial year; and (ii) for the previous four financial years.
(AQW 3234/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The amount of my Department's budget which is earmarked for street lighting repairs for this financial year is £3,203k.

This compares to the budget for street lighting repairs in each of the four financial years as shown below:

■	2015-16	£3,996k
■	2014-15	£5,315k
■	2013-14	£4,835k
■	2012-13	£6,860k

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether any additional measures have been put in place to enhance the response to repairing broken street lights this winter.
(AQW 3235/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department aims to repair the majority of broken street lights within five working days of being reported. No additional measures have been put in place to enhance this.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has any proposals to extend the new integrated ticketing system to facilitate cross-border travel.
(AQW 3238/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink's Future Ticketing System will facilitate Cross Border Travel.

Translink are liaising on a regular basis with their counterparts in the National Transport Authority in Dublin to discuss how they can use their respective smart ticketing systems, to provide cross border interoperability on bus and rail services.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department is responsible for the protection and maintenance of the listed pier at Greencastle, Carlingford Lough.
(AQW 3293/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no responsibility for the protection and maintenance of the pier at Greencastle as it is in private ownership.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has an up-to-date strategy for the development of local airports.
(AQW 3327/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The overarching policy document for aviation within the UK is the Aviation Policy Framework (APF) which was published in 2013. This document effectively provides a 'best practice' guide to the aviation sector. The APF recommends the production of airport masterplans which include, amongst other things, infrastructure proposals and actions to minimise and

mitigate the impacts of airport operations. My Department supports the production of these masterplans and it is my intention that my Department works closely with all local airports to develop plans that most effectively supports and contributes to the economic and social development of the North.

I am aware that the Department for Transport (DfT) have commenced a review of the APF. The refreshed framework will provide strategic advice and guidance for the UK aviation sector and cover areas such as airports, safety, security, competitiveness, consumers, regulations and international aviation practices. As part of the consultation process for reviewing the APF, DfT have committed to engage fully with my Department to ensure that specific regional issues are appropriately considered.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what his Department is doing to reduce the waiting time for disabled people renewing their blue badge; and (ii) how he will ensure that no blue badge holders are impacted detrimentally by the delay in renewals.

(AQW 3337/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) I am fully aware and extremely appreciative of the needs of the people who rely on their Blue Badges. I wish to assure you that my Department is doing everything that is reasonably practicable to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. This includes the following measures:
- Employing additional staff to process Blue Badge applications (five Agency staff presently with another one due to start in the next few weeks);
 - Preference is being given to first time applications whilst other cases are dealt with in date order as we currently have approximately 9900 applications to be processed;
 - On Friday 23 September I launched a new online Blue Badge application facility which will help reduce some of the back office processing work, allowing my staff to get on with the job of issuing badges
- (ii) Measures aimed at ensuring that no blue badge holders are impacted detrimentally by the delay in renewals include the following:
- Applicants that hold an expired badge and have sent in a renewal application are being advised that traffic attendants on street and in council car parks will not issue parking tickets to any badge displayed that has expired after 1 May 2016. This information is also available to the public on the NI Direct website.
 - If a badge holder is inadvertently issued with a Penalty Charge Notice even though the expiry date on their badge is after the 1 May 2016 my Department will cancel it upon becoming aware of such cases.
 - The main organisations, such as The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and The Department of Health, who have responsibilities for disseminating information to hospitals and businesses including private car park operators, have also been informed about the situation and were again notified on 15 September 2016.
 - My Department will support badge holders' valid appeals made to private parking enforcement agents if penalised on private property. This also applies if badge holders from the North are penalised for availing of Blue Badge parking concessions on public roads under the jurisdiction of local authorities elsewhere.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the Alternative A5 Alliance lodging a second legal challenge, for his assessment of how this will affect the project and the timescale for its delivery.

(AQW 3346/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware on 24 August 2016 the Alternative A5 Alliance (AA5A) applied for leave to apply for a Judicial Review. My Department is opposing this application and an early hearing is urgently being sought.

A Public Inquiry into the proposed scheme is scheduled to open on 4 October 2016. My Department has appointed the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) as the independent Inspector to administer the Inquiry. In a letter sent to PAC on 16 September 2016, my Department welcomed the proposal of the PAC to consider issues of scope during the second week and if necessary provide a revised timetable to facilitate filing of evidence by the AA5A.

Notwithstanding the above uncertainty with the legal challenge, it is hoped that any Judicial Review proceedings will not significantly interfere with the PAC schedule or the programme for the scheme.

Subject to the successful completion of all the statutory procedures and depending on the outcome of Ministerial consideration, construction could commence in late 2017 on Phase 1A (between New Buildings and north of Strabane).

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure which projects her Department is reviewing, or plans to review, as a result of changes in funding from European sources.

(AQW 3364/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has secured, or is in the process of applying for, EU co-financing to support a range of infrastructure projects through various European programmes. However delivery of projects is not ordinarily dependent on EU funding. In this regard, our plans are regularly reviewed with the objective of delivering successful, value for money infrastructure projects across the North.

As I have already publicly indicated, my Department remains on a 'business as usual' footing in terms of its relationships and interactions with the European Union and its institutions. This position is consistent with our continuing membership of the Union.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will bring forward legislation to align Northern Ireland with the rest of United Kingdom increasing the penalties for using a mobile phone whilst driving.
(AQW 3370/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am very sensitive to the damage that can be caused by those who use a mobile telephone while driving.

I have followed with interest the media coverage of possible increases in fines and penalties for mobile phone offences in Britain. I am also aware that, following a recent Department for Transport consultation exercise on this issue, the Transport Minister intends to formally publish his response later this year.

At a meeting of the Road Safety Forum on 27 September I took the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this issue with key road safety stakeholders. Members demonstrated a clear and collective desire to tackle the use of mobile phones while driving. I have asked my officials to review our current legislation in this area, taking account of corresponding provision and proposals in both Britain and the south of Ireland. I will then decide what further actions should be taken to tackle those drivers who continue to offend.

Legal sanctions are useful and may improve the future driving behaviours of those drivers who are caught. However, they have less impact on the total population of drivers – many of whom will not be caught. The police cannot be at every corner and cannot be in every vehicle.

Public attitudes therefore need to change. I want to make the use of a mobile phone while driving as socially unacceptable as not wearing a seatbelt and as shameful as drink driving. Each of us must take responsibility for our own actions as road users. It is for this reason that road safety campaigns seek to highlight and address poor attitudes and behaviours.

My Department has been very active in seeking to get this message across – using television adverts, social media campaigns and the Community Engagement toolkit. Each of these has received positive reactions.

In summary, I believe that driver education, together with an effective legislative deterrent, represents the best approach to tackling this problem. In the coming months, I will take decisions on the detail of this approach.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the provision of a footway on Fenaghy Road between Cullybackey and Galgorm Resort.
(AQW 3413/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI is currently developing a scheme proposal to extend the existing footway from the meat processing factory on Fenaghy Road to the entrance of Galgorm Resort, a length of approximately 370m.

This proposal is currently on a long list of similar minor works schemes competing for prioritisation into a future works programme in Northern Division.

However, in the current economic climate where funding for minor works schemes of this nature is very limited I am unable to give an indication as to when it might be taken forward.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will increase investment in Local Transportation and Safety Measures works in the Western Division so that projects, including a Park and Share provision at Creggan Crossroads, can be taken forward.
(AQW 3448/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Whilst I fully support funding for Local Transport and Safety Measures and can see the merit in additional investment, my ability to do so is constrained by the existing budget allocation. Although my Department has the largest capital budget of all departments, it supports a wide range of activities including roads, water and waste water, public transport and flood management. Each of these functions could benefit from additional funding, but that is simply not possible. I have therefore had to take a balanced approach and prioritise funding to where I think will provide the most effective outcomes for the North as a whole.

The Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSM) programme is already heavily oversubscribed and has limited physical resources to deliver the many hundreds of requests which are currently under consideration.

As set out in the annual TransportNI report to the council (June 2016), schemes to the value of £450K were completed in 2015/16 and a number of schemes are already planned for the 2016/17 year. However I can assure you that the Creggan scheme will be considered when the LTSM programme is developed for 2017/18.

I should point out that a significant amount of the capital funding available will impact on the West and this will be further enhanced by the additional £10M I announced as part of my Rural Roads Initiative.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will give consideration to replicating the new penalties for using a mobile phone while driving as proposed at Westminster.

(AQW 3452/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am very sensitive to the damage that can be caused by those who use a mobile telephone while driving.

I have followed with interest the media coverage of possible increases in fines and penalties for mobile phone offences in Britain. I am also aware that, following a recent Department for Transport consultation exercise on this issue, the Transport Minister intends to formally publish his response later this year.

At a meeting of the Road Safety Forum on 27 September I took the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this issue with key road safety stakeholders. Members demonstrated a clear and collective desire to tackle the use of mobile phones while driving. I have asked my officials to review our current legislation in this area, taking account of corresponding provision and proposals in both Britain and the south of Ireland. I will then decide what further actions should be taken to tackle those drivers who continue to offend.

Legal sanctions are useful and may improve the future driving behaviours of those drivers who are caught. However, they have less impact on the total population of drivers – many of whom will not be caught. The police cannot be at every corner and cannot be in every vehicle.

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My Department has been very active in seeking to get this message across – using television adverts, social media campaigns and the Community Engagement toolkit. Each of these has received positive reactions.

In summary, I believe that driver education, together with an effective legislative deterrent, represents the best approach to tackling this problem. In the coming months, I will take decisions on the detail of this approach.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the training his staff receive in completing answers to Assembly Questions in line with departmental guidance.

(AQW 3454/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Staff with responsibility for answering Assembly Questions within my Department are encouraged to attend the Assembly Questions training course provided by the Centre for Applied Learning. The Centre is the main training provider for the NICS. The Assembly Questions training looks at the procedures, roles and responsibilities, expectations of Ministers and the importance of presenting key facts clearly, concisely and accurately.

The completion of answers to Assembly Questions was also included as a key topic in a recent series of 'Working with Ministers' workshops which were held in my Department and attended by 240 senior officials. In addition, advice is set out in a guidance document which is available through the departmental intranet.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the revenue from passenger ticket sales by Translink in the last financial year.

(AQW 3457/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The revenue from passenger ticket sales by Translink in the last financial year (2015/16) was £168.34m.

This figure includes Concessions, Pupils and Cross Channel Revenue but excludes Tour Revenue.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost to run Translink in the last financial year.

(AQW 3458/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The total cost to run Translink in the last financial year (2015/16) as reflected within the Group statutory accounts was £221.8m.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why Northern Ireland has been excluded from the planned increase in the number of penalty points issued and fines handed out to those caught using a mobile device whilst driving.

(AQW 3483/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Road traffic legislation is a devolved matter and as such the Department for Transport did not seek to include the north of Ireland when publishing their consultation on proposals to increase penalties for the offence of using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving in January 2016.

I am very sensitive to the damage that can be caused by those who use a mobile telephone while driving. I have followed with interest the media coverage of possible increases in fines and penalties for mobile phone offences in Britain. I am also aware that, following a recent Department for Transport consultation exercise on this issue, the Transport Minister intends to formally publish his response later this year.

At a meeting of the Road Safety Forum on 27 September I took the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this issue with key road safety stakeholders. Members demonstrated a clear and collective desire to tackle the use of mobile phones while driving. I have asked my officials to review our current legislation in this area, taking account of corresponding provision and proposals in both Britain and the south of Ireland. I will then decide what further actions should be taken to tackle those drivers who continue to offend.

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In summary, I believe that driver education, together with an effective legislative deterrent, represents the best approach to tackling this problem. In the coming months, I will take decisions on the detail of this approach.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the amount allocated for roads maintenance in South Antrim, broken down for each of the last five years.

(AQW 3506/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however, I can provide the member with information on road structural maintenance expenditure in Antrim, Newtownabbey and Lisburn Council areas.

Structural maintenance activities include resurfacing, surface dressing, structural drainage, structural stability and patching.

South Antrim area takes in a large part of Antrim & Newtownabbey council with a small area falling within Lisburn Council in respect of Glenavy. The expenditure detailed in table 1 below covers all these areas prior to Local Government Reform.

Table 1

Council Area	2011-12 £k	2012-13 £k	2013-14 £k	2014-15 £k
Antrim Borough Council	3,469	3,327	3,445	2,680
Newtownabbey Borough Council	3,029	2,207	2,821	2,133
Lisburn Borough Council	5,297	4,960	5,749	5,001
Total	11,795	10,494	12,015	9,814

Post Local Government Reform, expenditure for South Antrim falls into the council areas as noted in table 2 below.

Table 2

Council Area	2015-16 £k
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	3,097
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	3,674
Total	6,771

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on plans to mine gold in West Tyrone.

(AQW 3514/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Dalradian Gold Limited (DGL) is proposing a gold mine project at Curraghinalt, located north-west of Greencastle. To date my Department has not received a planning application for the project. DGL in accordance with legislative requirements submitted a Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) to my Department on 30 August. This sets out the formal consultation arrangements that DGL intend to undertake prior to submission of the gold mine planning application. A period of at least 12 weeks must elapse between giving the PAN to the Department and submitting any planning application. This means that the earliest an application could be submitted for the gold mine project is 23 November 2016. The exact timing as to when a planning application will be submitted to my Department is a matter for DGL.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the Rivers Agency's priorities for addressing the impact of invasive species in Lagan Valley, in particular Japanese Knotweed, on flooding.

(AQW 3559/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are a number of invasive plant species associated with watercourses, the most common of which are Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Rivers Agency treats invasive plant species where the structural integrity of their flood defences are likely to be compromised or where it is deemed to be causing a significant drainage impediment to a designated watercourse.

A designated watercourse is one which has been designated under the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 by the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland, for maintenance at public expense. If a watercourse is not designated, the riparian owners are responsible for its maintenance and this can be enforced under powers in the Drainage Order.

In relation to the Lagan Valley area, Rivers Agency, through its programme of regular inspection, is aware of the existence of Japanese Knotweed at a number of isolated locations along the designated reaches of the River Lagan. A number of these areas are considered to be impacting on the structural integrity of flood defences, and so Rivers Agency has commenced a programme to control the species by spraying twice a year (in early Spring and in Autumn). Japanese Knotweed is a very aggressive species and therefore it may take a prolonged period of treatment to eliminate it.

The designated reach of the Cutts River was inspected in September 2016 and Japanese Knotweed was identified. This is not currently impeding the free flow of the river and so no action is currently planned.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why he has not sought to increase penalties for people who text while driving in line with the recent changes in England and Wales.
(AQW 3611/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am very sensitive to the damage that can be caused by those who use a mobile telephone while driving.

I have followed with interest the media coverage of possible increases in fines and penalties for mobile phone offences in Britain. I am also aware that, following a recent Department for Transport consultation exercise on this issue, the Transport Minister intends to formally publish his response later this year.

At a meeting of the Road Safety Forum on 27 September I took the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this issue with key road safety stakeholders. Members demonstrated a clear and collective desire to tackle the use of mobile phones while driving. I have asked my officials to review our current legislation in this area, taking account of corresponding provision and proposals in both Britain and the south of Ireland. I will then decide what further actions should be taken to tackle those drivers who continue to offend.

Legal sanctions are useful and may improve the future driving behaviours of those drivers who are caught. However, they have less impact on the total population of drivers – many of whom will not be caught. The police cannot be at every corner and cannot be in every vehicle.

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My Department has been very active in seeking to get this message across – using television adverts, social media campaigns and the Community Engagement toolkit. Each of these has received positive reactions.

In summary, I believe that driver education, together with an effective legislative deterrent, represents the best approach to tackling this problem. In the coming months, I will take decisions on the detail of this approach.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the allocation for structural maintenance funding to Transport NI for the Fermanagh Section for this financial year; and (ii) the proposed resurfacing schemes and start dates on A class roads in excess of £50,000 for the remainder of this financial year.

(AQW 3613/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The current Fermanagh and Omagh West Section Office structural maintenance budget is some £3.0m.

The proposed resurfacing schemes on A Class roads in excess of £50k within the area for the remainder of the financial year are:

Scheme / location	Estimated Cost	Proposed start date
A46 Loughshore Rd at Cosbytown	£200k	November 2016
A46 Loughshore Rd at Carrickreagh	£250k	November 2016
A32 Tempo Road Enniskillen	£200k	On site
A32 Enniskillen Rd at Kilgortnaleague	£150k	October 2016
A35 Main St Kesh	£50k	On site

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the allocation for structural maintenance funding to Transport NI for the Dungannon Section for this financial year; and (ii) the proposed resurfacing schemes and start dates on A class roads in excess of £50,000 for the remainder of this financial year.

(AQW 3614/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- 1 The current Mid Ulster South Section Office structural maintenance budget is some £2.4m
- 2 The proposed resurfacing schemes on A Class roads in excess of £50k within the area for the remainder of this financial year are:

Scheme / location	Estimated Cost	Proposed start date
A4 Ballagh Rd Clogher adjacent to Clogher Cricket Club	£125k	Currently on site
A45 Ballynakilly Road – From Tamnamore Roundabout to Cohannon Inn	£80k	January 2017
A45 Ballynakilly Road – Moor Rd to Coash Rd	£100k	January 2017

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will be making additional funding available for minor works including a solution to the hidden dip on Ballyquin Road, Dungiven near the junction with Gelvin Road.

(AQW 3615/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI is currently developing a scheme proposal to improve the roads infrastructure in the vicinity of the junction of Gelvin Road with Ballyquin Road.

The aim of the scheme is to improve sight visibility for drivers emerging from Gelvin Road, by lowering a crest on the Dungiven side of Gelvin Road.

However, in the current economic climate where funding for minor works schemes of this nature is very limited I am unable at this stage to give an indication as to when it might be included in a works programme.

The Minister for Finance has advised that the next capital budget will cover a four year period and I will use this exercise to discuss with Executive colleagues the requirement for additional baseline funding for Minor Works schemes throughout this period.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW868/16-21, whether NI Water has concluded the detailed work on the Hyacinth Avenue, Ballykelly scheme.

(AQW 3616/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following previous flooding incidents at this location, NI Water has undertaken investigative work into the capacity issue within the local sewer network. A recent consultant's report, commissioned by NI Water, found that the preferred solution of a large storage facility in Hyacinth Avenue was not acceptable.

An extended sewer network model incorporating the storm water system and road gullies is therefore being developed for the purpose of facilitating the removal of large flows that are causing the flooding at Hyacinth Avenue.

NI Water is also conducting catchment wide investigations focused on identifying the source of storm related flows affecting its sewer system, especially at Hyacinth Avenue. The initial findings of these investigations are expected by the end of October. However, the investigation has already identified a storm sewer in Main Street that was very heavily silted-up, which has now been cleaned by NI Water.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total value of compensation claims as a result of work on Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus, broken down over the last three years.

(AQW 3620/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has not received any compensation claims over the last three years for loss of business as a result of work on Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus. One such claim was received by NIW in August 2014 and subsequently rejected. The legal position is well established and there is neither a legal duty of care by the Department nor any legal entitlement to compensation for loss of profits which is, in law, defined as "economic loss" and is not legally compensable.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of claims for compensation as a result of lost business during the installation of new water mains on North Road, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 3621/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has received no claims for compensation as a result of loss of business during the installation of new water mains on North Road, Carrickfergus.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total value of compensation claims as a result of work on Station Road, Greenisland, broken down for the last three years.

(AQW 3622/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has not received any compensation claims over the last three years for loss of business as a result of work on Station Road, Greenisland. The legal position is well established and there is neither a legal duty of care by the Department nor any legal entitlement to compensation for loss of profits which is, in law, defined as “economic loss” and is not legally compensable.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to work with Derry City and Strabane Council and Donegal County Council to introduce a Greenways Project linking Strabane to Donegal.

(AQW 3623/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I intend to publish my Strategic Plan for Greenways later this month. This plan will provide a framework to assist both central and local government to develop local schemes as part of a greenway network for the entire region, including cross border connections. The details of the greenway corridors will be provided in the published Strategic Plan.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans Translink has to upgrade its current bus fleet.

(AQW 3629/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink would like to replace on average 85 buses per year but will only be able to do so if the necessary funding is available.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail Translink’s budget for bus maintenance in the last financial year.

(AQW 3631/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In the financial year 2015-16, Translink’s budget for bus maintenance was £19.8m. This covered both Metro and Ulsterbus fleets.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many buses does Translink currently operate.

(AQW 3632/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink currently operates a combined bus and coach fleet of 1,298 vehicles. This comprises of 1,026 Ulsterbus and 272 Metro vehicles.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline when the North Road, Carrickfergus will be resurfaced, given its current uneven surfacing and the daily volume of traffic.

(AQW 3674/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise that my Department has no immediate plans to resurface the North Road in Carrickfergus. The road surface is uneven due to the high number of utility reinstatements, however, its structural condition would not currently merit inclusion on our resurfacing programme. My officials will continue to monitor and routinely inspect the North Road in the meantime, with any actionable defects recorded and repaired in accordance with current road maintenance standards.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline when a new Park and Ride facility will be provided in Dungiven to service the Translink 212 Belfast to Derry service and other bus connections; and (ii) whether land and resources have been earmarked for it.

(AQW 3677/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department’s TransportNI is currently in negotiations with a landowner regarding a potential site for a Park & Ride facility in Dungiven to service the 212 service and other bus connections. Subject to successful acquisition of the necessary lands and planning approval it is anticipated that work could begin on the Park and Ride facility in the next financial year and resources have been earmarked for this.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment (i) of the impact, if any, Brexit will have on European Union funding for the A6 road scheme; and (ii) on the impact a possible switch to a one-year budget would have on the same project.

(AQW 3678/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- i) The A6 project has in the past secured EU monies for pre-construction development studies, all of which has been drawn down. The delivery of projects is not ordinarily dependent on EU funding and in this regard, our plans are regularly reviewed with the objective of delivering successful, value for money infrastructure projects across the north.

I have made it clear that my Department will continue in its efforts to apply for EU co-financing wherever possible. I have asked my officials to continue to assess the feasibility of several projects, including the A6, and progress an application if and when the opportunity arises. To do so will, of course, be subject to projects meeting explicitly defined

criteria set by the European Commission and their relative competitiveness in comparison with many other Member State proposals.

- ii) As part of the Budget 2016-17 Statement the A6 road scheme was declared one of the Executive's flagship projects. To provide funding certainty the Executive has given a commitment to fund this project up to the period 2020-21.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much of the £10m Rural Roads Initiative has been spent. (AQW 3683/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following June Monitoring, I earmarked £10m for the Rural Roads Initiative to address the rural roads in the worst condition, thus helping to reduce a backlog of rural road resurfacing/repairs.

The improvements are targeting many short lengths roads of particularly poor condition, together with a number of longer resurfacing schemes of around 1km. It is estimated that around 1000 locations on the rural road network will be improved.

Divisions are currently finalising their programmes and work on schemes is now well underway with an estimated £4.5m already spent or committed.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the £10m Rural Roads Initiative. (AQW 3684/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following June Monitoring, I earmarked £10m for the Rural Roads Initiative to address the rural roads in the worst condition thus helping to reduce a backlog of rural road resurfacing / repairs.

The improvements are targeting many short lengths of particularly poor condition, together with a number of longer resurfacing schemes of around 1km. It is estimated that around 1000 locations on the rural road network will be improved.

Divisions are currently finalising their programmes with over two thirds of schemes already issued to contractors. Work on those schemes already programmed is now well underway with approximately a third of schemes completed.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline who is responsible for gritting the A4 Dungannon to Ballygawley dual carriageway. (AQW 3686/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Under the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) Package 2 contract, Amey Roads NI Limited and their Operator Amey Highways, are responsible for gritting the A4 dual carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many company cars does Translink currently provide for employees of Northern Ireland Railways. (AQW 3707/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink advises that Northern Ireland Railways currently has one pool car that is used for operational reasons across the NIR network. This car is not allocated to a specific employee. It does not provide company cars to employees of Northern Ireland Railways.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many staff currently work for Translink. (AQW 3709/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise that 3,790 staff currently work for Translink.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the planning application reference number for the application referred to in the Written Ministerial Statement entitled Review into PPS21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside, published on 16 July 2013. (AQW 3716/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The review into the operation of PPS21 was carried out by a previous Minister of the Environment to assess whether the policies contained within PPS21 were being interpreted and applied consistently across all Area Planning Offices.

In undertaking the review, discussions were undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders including applicants, agents and planning staff mainly from the Area Offices, as those most familiar with the operation of the policy.

You will appreciate that since the review significant changes have occurred for the planning system. Unfortunately my Department does not hold the detail of the reference numbers for planning applications to which the Area Office planning staff referred to at that time and which were included in the written statement.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on proposals for a dual carriageway on a portion of the A3 Armagh to Portadown road. (AQW 3729/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The proposal to upgrade a 6.5km section of the A3 between Portadown and Richhill to dual-carriageway standard is listed in the Investment Delivery Plan for Roads 2008 (IDP) and I am aware of the difficulties motorists face on this busy road.

However at this time no budget has been identified to progress this proposal and development work has not yet commenced. Legal Minimum Overtaking Distance

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there a legal minimum for the distance a driver should use when overtaking (i) a cyclist on the road; or (ii) a horse rider.

(AQW 3732/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There is currently no minimum distance prescribed in legislation that a driver should use when overtaking a cyclist or the rider of a horse.

The Highway Code recommends that a driver give cyclists and horse riders at least as much room as he would when overtaking a car. However this is not a legal requirement.

Failure to comply with the Highway Code rules which are not legal requirements will not, in itself, cause a person to be prosecuted. However, the Highway Code may be used in evidence in any court proceedings under road traffic legislation to establish liability.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans there are for resurfacing works at Ferguson Crescent, Castleberg. **(AQW 3734/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI plans to resurface Ferguson Crescent, Castleberg from its junction with Priest's Lane to Derg View. To avoid disruption in the town in the run up to Christmas, it is intended that the scheme will commence in January 2017 and will take four weeks to complete.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the roads being targeted by the Rural Roads Initiative in East Derry. **(AQW 3796/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: My Department holds the information requested on a Council by Council basis and not by MLA Constituency. Therefore I can advise that at present 32 roads within the Causeway Coast West area (formerly Coleraine and Limavady Council areas) are being targeted. A list of these roads is detailed below.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Ballyclough Road | ■ Gateside Road below |
| ■ Carrowreagh Road | ■ GlenedraRoad Feeny |
| ■ Ballymenagh Road | ■ Glenroe Park Dungiven |
| ■ Ballystrone Road | ■ Gortnamoyagh Road |
| ■ Ballywoolen Road | ■ Killeague Road |
| ■ Ballywoolen Road | ■ Kilmoyle Mill Road |
| ■ Bannagher Road | ■ Kurin Road |
| ■ Carrowreagh Road | ■ Liscall Road |
| ■ Castleroe Road | ■ Masteragwee Road |
| ■ Coolnasallagh Road | ■ Mettican Road |
| ■ Corick Road | ■ Newline Road |
| ■ Cranagh Road | ■ Oldtown Road |
| ■ Creamary Road | ■ Plantation Road Blackgates |
| ■ Drumbane Road | ■ Shore Avenue |
| ■ Drumsaragh Road at no 78 | ■ Tirmacoy Road |
| ■ Dunlade Road | ■ Upperlane Road |
| ■ Edenmore Road | |

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the Park and Ride facilities that will be included as part of A6 scheme between Dungiven and Derry.

(AQW 3798/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The 30km Derry to Dungiven scheme, which includes a 5km bypass of Dungiven, is well advanced in terms of development. Work is currently underway to determine the extent of the Derry to Dungiven scheme that can be delivered within the funding allocations contained in the December 2015 Budget Statement, with priority being given to commencing construction with a bypass of Dungiven and progressing westwards towards Drumahoe. As part of this scheme there are proposals to provide Park and Ride/share facilities, along the proposed A6 dual carriageway, in the vicinity of Dungiven (approximately 80 spaces), Claudy (approximately 45 spaces) and Drumahoe (approximately 200 spaces).

TransportNI is currently considering an alternative larger site for the Park and Ride facility at Dungiven. Subject to land acquisition and planning approval this could proceed ahead of the A6 scheme.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are mechanisms for planners to identify new development limits for rural settlements in circumstances where local sites previously designated for housing development are not being taken forward or likely to be taken forward in the future.

(AQW 3807/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Councils have the power to produce new Local Development Plans (LDP) for their area. The identification of new or revised settlement development limits is an issue to be taken forward in the preparation new LDP.

The majority of Councils are now working toward preparation of new LDPs in accordance with timetables agreed by my Department. In general, Councils will wish to undertake a comprehensive review of the existing area plan for their district. This will include reviewing existing settlement development limits to ensure that they remain relevant to meeting the needs of the local community.

To assist them with this exercise Councils will wish to develop criteria to ensure that their approach to reviewing and refining development limits is consistent across the district. These criteria should take account of advice and guidance set out in the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 Spatial Framework Guidance, and other advice and guidance issued by my Department (including the Housing Growth Indicator for the council district). The approach should also have regard to built and extant planning permissions for residential, employment or community uses as well as existing site allocations for these uses in the extant development plan.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many passengers used Translink in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3819/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink does not monitor the number of passengers using its services rather it records the number of passenger journeys.

The number of passenger journeys undertaken on Translink services is detailed in the NITHC Annual Report and Accounts which is available in the Assembly Library.

To assist the member the figures reported in the Annual Accounts are as follows:

- 2016: 65.1m
- 2015: 66.6m
- 2014: 66.9m

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail how many additional roads and extra miles of roads in North Antrim have been added to the gritting schedule for Winter 2016; and (ii) whether any additional budget has been allocated to this service.

(AQW 3827/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The gritting schedule for Winter 2016 within North Antrim does not include any additional roads and is consistent with the length of roads gritted last winter season 2015/16. Whilst TransportNI has completed a route optimisation project this year, this merely focussed on achieving efficiencies through better use of gritting plant and route planning; it did not seek to remove roads from the existing schedules.

A normal winter service is planned with salt barns and stockpiles being filled to maximum capacity, salt bins and grit piles being placed at strategic locations and plans are in place from now until the middle of April 2017 to be on standby to salt main roads as needed, helping drivers to cope with wintry conditions. At present there is no additional budget sought over and above that required for a normal winter season.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the Waterside/Strathfoyle Greenway in Derry is included in the new Strategic Plan for Greenways.

(AQW 3836/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I intend to publish my Strategic Plan for Greenways in October. This plan will provide a framework to assist both central and local government to develop local schemes as part of a greenway network for the entire region. The details of the greenway corridors will be provided in the published Strategic Plan.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans for tougher penalties for people using their mobile phones whilst driving.

(AQW 3914/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am very sensitive to the damage that can be caused by those who use a mobile telephone while driving.

I have followed with interest the media coverage of possible increases in fines and penalties for mobile phone offences in Britain. I am also aware that, following a recent Department for Transport consultation exercise on this issue, the Transport Minister intends to formally publish his response later this year.

At a meeting of the Road Safety Forum on 27 September I took the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this issue with key road safety stakeholders. Members demonstrated a clear and collective desire to tackle the use of mobile phones while driving. I have asked my officials to review our current legislation in this area, taking account of corresponding provision and proposals in both Britain and the south of Ireland. I will then decide what further actions should be taken to tackle those drivers who continue to offend.

Legal sanctions are useful and may improve the future driving behaviours of those drivers who are caught. However, they have less impact on the total population of drivers – many of whom will not be caught. The police cannot be at every corner and cannot be in every vehicle.

Public attitudes therefore need to change. I want to make the use of a mobile phone while driving as socially unacceptable as not wearing a seatbelt and as shameful as drink driving. Each of us must take responsibility for our own actions as road users. It is for this reason that road safety campaigns seek to highlight and address poor attitudes and behaviours.

My Department has been very active in seeking to get this message across – using television adverts, social media campaigns and the Community Engagement toolkit. Each of these has received positive reactions.

In summary, I believe that driver education, together with an effective legislative deterrent, represents the best approach to tackling this problem. In the coming months, I will take decisions on the detail of this approach.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2113/16-21, to detail (i) how many times have officials or ex-officials been referred to the PSNI for investigation since 2011; and (ii) to set out the reasons for referral.
(AQW 3969/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Pursuant to AQW 2113/16-21, since 2011 (i) there have been six occasions when officials have been referred to the PSNI for investigation and (ii) the reason for these referrals was on the basis of the alleged offences fraud and theft. There were no occasions when ex-officials have been referred to the PSNI.

This answer covers the position for the transferring functions in former Departments prior to the creation of the Department for Infrastructure in May 2016.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of incidents on the Derry to Belfast railway (i) where people have been trespassing onto the line; and (ii) where motorists have incorrectly used level crossings in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3980/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The following table outlines the number of incidents on the Derry to Belfast railway, where people have been trespassing onto the line; and where motorists have incorrectly used level crossings in each of the last three years.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Trespass Incidents	129	127	85	341
Public road crossing incidents involving motorists	70	74	66	210

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the programme for weed spraying in East Antrim; (ii) the weed spraying conducted in East Antrim in 2016 to date; and (iii) whether he will ensure that all public footpaths and roads in East Antrim are sprayed for weeds.

(AQW 3983/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Unfortunately due to funding limitations last year no weed spraying was undertaken which had created the overgrown condition of our road and footpath network throughout the north. This year I am pleased to advise I allocated funding to allow a full weed spraying programme to take place.

The weed spray operation in East Antrim was completed this year on 25 May 2016 and whilst this did decay a large proportion of the vegetation, additional remedial spot treatments were required due to the size and spread of the weeds. A further treatment of the entire East Antrim area was considered necessary and was completed on 20 September 2016 and should be another step in rectifying the current situation.

In relation to similar work in 2017-18, I will discuss with Executive colleagues the requirements for resource funding to meet service delivery demands. These discussions are ongoing as part of the Programme for Government so I am currently unable to confirm service delivery levels for next year.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on when the one-hour parking scheme will be restored in Bangor town centre following the completion of the Public Realm scheme.

(AQW 4015/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to advise that the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders have been approved by the Assembly's Infrastructure Committee and the Orders can now be made, thereby allowing enforcement by my Department's Traffic Attendants to recommence.

It is the intention to allow a period of warning to advise motorists of the recommencement of enforcement, with penalty charge notices being issued to offenders from mid October onwards.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 3031/16-21; to outline (i) why there is a price differential between the Public Service Vehicles (PSV) test for a 49+ seater bus and a taxi PSV test; and (ii) the difference between the two tests to justify the price differential.

(AQW 4028/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency, which provides the public service vehicle (PSV) test service on behalf of my Department, operates on a full cost recovery basis. The cost of delivering the taxi testing and licensing service is significantly greater than that for bus testing and licensing.

The fee for a taxi test and licence is £138.50, whereas the fee for a standard 49+ seater bus test and licence is £90.50. The price differential is primarily due to the additional costs associated with taxi plating, taxi enforcement, and information technology.

A breakdown of the costs incurred is set out below:

PSV Fee Cost Breakdown	Taxi £	Bus £
Test – Staff costs	15.97	24.23
Licensing - Staff costs	28.67	16.80
Enforcement contribution	20.00	0.00
Taxi Plating	22.05	0.00
Taxi IT System	9.93	0.00
Test Booking System	2.03	2.03
Testing Equipment	4.11	4.11
Overheads	35.67	43.17
Total Costs	138.43	90.34
Fee	138.50	90.50

Assets being Considered for Disposal by Waterways Ireland

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the assets being considered for disposal by Waterways Ireland, as announced in his recent Ministerial statement.

(AQW 4033/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: At the NSMC meeting on 24 June 2016, approval was given for the disposal of the following Waterways Ireland properties:

- Grant of a right of way at Omega, Greatdown, The Downs, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath;
- Grant of a right of way along the Grand Canal towpath at Hazelhatch, Co. Dublin;
- Grant of a 35 year lease to facilitate the construction of an access gangway and retractable pontoon at Ballyvollane, Mount Shannon Road, Annacotty, Co Limerick;
- Grant of a right of way to facilitate a prescribed right of way to property at Ballydrum, Killashee, Co. Longford; and
- Grant of a 99 year lease to Kildare County Council for an area of land and airspace over the Grand Canal and towpaths at Oberstown and the grant of an easement to facilitate the construction of the Sallins Bypass.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will provide a single point of contact for planning matters to councils, developers and the public following the transfer of planning functions to the local councils.

(AQW 4048/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Since the 01 April 2015 and the introduction of the two-tier planning system, councils are responsible for the determination of the majority of planning applications, planning enforcement and preparing local development plans for their own districts.

As the main planning authority for their own districts, councils are locally accountable in respect of the planning decisions they take within their own district and the proper application of their planning powers.

Currently each of the 11 councils have their own direct contact procedures in place which allows developers and the public to contact the council directly if they wish to seek advice on particular planning applications or seek advice on local planning matters. Within this context I believe that the existing direct lines of communication with councils are the most effective method of ensuring open and easily accessible methods of communication between councils, developers, the public and any other bodies or persons who have an interest in future development in the north.

My Department has a key commitment to support and consolidate the new planning system and I will continue to ensure my officials work collaboratively with councils to support them in the exercise of their planning functions. I will also continue to improve the planning system and ensure there it has an effective legislative, policy and guidance framework in place.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the rationale for the removal of the plaque at Bellarena new railway halt commemorating the opening by Her Majesty the Queen; and (ii) the timescale for its re-instatement.
(AQW 4169/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The rationale for the removal of the plaque was Translink's concerns about the safety of the plaque and the possibility that it could be vandalised given that the halt at Bellarena is unmanned. Consequently, Translink wishes to find a more secure location for the plaque to be displayed.

Translink has said, following the notable level of public interest in the plaque, it is arranging for it to be returned to the halt during October.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on road improvement works carried out as part of the Rural Roads Initiative in South Antrim.
(AQW 4176/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Unfortunately due to unforeseen contractual issues, work on this initiative within the South Antrim area has been delayed. I am pleased to advise however that TransportNI has recently appointed a new contractor within the Antrim and Newtownabbey area and work will now commence in October 2016. The contractor has been given a list of twenty-three sites for completion this financial year.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total number and value of compensation claims as a result of damage to cars from road deficiencies, such as potholes, broken down by constituency for the last three years.
(AQW 4178/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department cannot provide the information in the format you requested. This is because the management information system used by TransportNI records claims information on the basis of the TransportNI section offices which broadly align to the new council areas. In addition, the NICS accounting system does not differentiate between the causes of incidents which result in claims.

Table 1 overleaf details the number of vehicle damage claims received and the amount of compensation paid by the former Department for Regional Development per TransportNI Section Office over the last three financial years. These figures include claims for damage incurred on the footway and carriageway due to defects and other issues.

Table 1: Total number and value of compensation claims from 2013/14 to 2015/16

TransportNI Section Office	Number	Compensation £
Antrim & Newtownabbey	309	83,410
Ards & North Down	349	32,011
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (East)	259	24,406
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (West)	263	24,960
Belfast North	132	18,014
Belfast South	128	9,822
Causeway Coast & Glens (East)	61	4,114
Causeway Coast & Glens (West)	140	22,726
Fermanagh & Omagh (East)	174	19,360
Fermanagh & Omagh (West)	138	22,763
Lisburn & Castlereagh	592	53,185
Derry & Strabane	182	16,888
Mid & East Antrim	297	34,008

TransportNI Section Office	Number	Compensation £
Mid Ulster (North)	384	46,486
Mid Ulster (South)	154	11,583
Newry Mourne & Down (East)	271	38,461
Newry Mourne & Down (West)	545	72,842

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2637/16-21, whether video-link facilities are also to be installed in Court 3.

(AQW 3244/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): It would be the intention of the NI Courts and Tribunals Service, subject to business case approval, to install video-link facilities in court 3 at Dungannon.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for financial cyber-crime in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3304/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to financial cyber-crime are generally prosecuted under more generic descriptions, such as theft or fraud and datasets held by my Department currently do not contain information on the detail or circumstance of such offences; therefore, it would only be possible to identify convictions resulting from financial cyber-crime through a manual trawl of court records, which would incur a disproportionate cost.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of financial cyber-crime in the each of the last 5 years.
(AQW 3305/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not possible to accurately quantify the cost of cyber-crime which not only includes financial loss, but also losses due to reputational damage, the cost of putting in place additional security and infrastructure and incident response. A local accountancy firm did however estimate the cost of cyber-crime to the Northern Ireland economy at almost £100 million per year.

Financially motivated cyber-crime covers a wide range of criminal activity and can include business e-mail compromise, blackmail, fraud and identity theft. Significantly there also continues to be a high level of underreporting and whilst PSNI is working to address this, these combined factors mean that it is not possible to give an accurate breakdown of the cost of financial cyber-crime.

Education and awareness-raising is a key element in helping to reduce risk and defend against cyber-crime. The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, together with PSNI has a wide reaching engagement process utilising business briefings, the Cyber Information Sharing Partnership initiative, local media and Get Safe Online campaigns, 'Pop-Up' shop events and other engagement events to highlight the issue and educate people and businesses. This October's Get Safe Online Day will be marked by a series of events at shopping centres in Belfast, Londonderry and Lisburn on 20-22 October.

Whilst Northern Ireland is not currently funded for the dedicated Cyber Protect officers who are operating in England and Wales, a business case is being developed to enable funding under the National Cyber Security Programme, which is managed by Cabinet Office.

Victims of cyber-crime are supported by the existing support services within PSNI.

Due to current reporting mechanisms it is not possible to provide figures for frauds, blackmails, and other financially motivated crimes which utilised the cyber environment. A recent survey by the Office of National Statistics, however, estimated that 53% of all crime utilised the cyber environment to some degree in the commission of the offence.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken to educate people and businesses about financial cyber-crime.
(AQW 3306/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not possible to accurately quantify the cost of cyber-crime which not only includes financial loss, but also losses due to reputational damage, the cost of putting in place additional security and infrastructure and incident response. A local accountancy firm did however estimate the cost of cyber-crime to the Northern Ireland economy at almost £100 million per year.

Financially motivated cyber-crime covers a wide range of criminal activity and can include business e-mail compromise, blackmail, fraud and identity theft. Significantly there also continues to be a high level of underreporting and whilst PSNI is

working to address this, these combined factors mean that it is not possible to give an accurate breakdown of the cost of financial cyber-crime.

Education and awareness-raising is a key element in helping to reduce risk and defend against cyber-crime. The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, together with PSNI has a wide reaching engagement process utilising business briefings, the Cyber Information Sharing Partnership initiative, local media and Get Safe Online campaigns, 'Pop- Up' shop events and other engagement events to highlight the issue and educate people and businesses. This October's Get Safe Online Day will be marked by a series of events at shopping centres in Belfast, Londonderry and Lisburn on 20-22 October.

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Victims of cyber-crime are supported by the existing support services within PSNI.

Due to current reporting mechanisms it is not possible to provide figures for frauds, blackmails, and other financially motivated crimes which utilised the cyber environment. A recent survey by the Office of National Statistics, however, estimated that 53% of all crime utilised the cyber environment to some degree in the commission of the offence.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice what support exists for victims of financial cyber-crime.
(AQW 3307/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not possible to accurately quantify the cost of cyber-crime which not only includes financial loss, but also losses due to reputational damage, the cost of putting in place additional security and infrastructure and incident response. A local accountancy firm did however estimate the cost of cyber-crime to the Northern Ireland economy at almost £100 million per year.

Financially motivated cyber-crime covers a wide range of criminal activity and can include business e-mail compromise, blackmail, fraud and identity theft. Significantly there also continues to be a high level of underreporting and whilst PSNI is working to address this, these combined factors mean that it is not possible to give an accurate breakdown of the cost of financial cyber-crime.

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Whilst Northern Ireland is not currently funded for the dedicated Cyber Protect officers who are operating in England and Wales, a business case is being developed to enable funding under the National Cyber Security Programme, which is managed by Cabinet Office.

Victims of cyber-crime are supported by the existing support services within PSNI.

Due to current reporting mechanisms it is not possible to provide figures for frauds, blackmails, and other financially motivated crimes which utilised the cyber environment. A recent survey by the Office of National Statistics, however, estimated that 53% of all crime utilised the cyber environment to some degree in the commission of the offence.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice how many cases of financial cyber-crime have been reported in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3308/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not possible to accurately quantify the cost of cyber-crime which not only includes financial loss, but also losses due to reputational damage, the cost of putting in place additional security and infrastructure and incident response. A local accountancy firm did however estimate the cost of cyber-crime to the Northern Ireland economy at almost £100 million per year.

Financially motivated cyber-crime covers a wide range of criminal activity and can include business e-mail compromise, blackmail, fraud and identity theft. Significantly there also continues to be a high level of underreporting and whilst PSNI is working to address this, these combined factors mean that it is not possible to give an accurate breakdown of the cost of financial cyber-crime.

Education and awareness-raising is a key element in helping to reduce risk and defend against cyber-crime. The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, together with PSNI has a wide reaching engagement process utilising business briefings, the Cyber Information Sharing Partnership initiative, local media and Get Safe Online campaigns, 'Pop- Up' shop events and other engagement events to highlight the issue and educate people and businesses. This October's Get Safe Online Day will be marked by a series of events at shopping centres in Belfast, Londonderry and Lisburn on 20-22 October.

Whilst Northern Ireland is not currently funded for the dedicated Cyber Protect officers who are operating in England and Wales, a business case is being developed to enable funding under the National Cyber Security Programme, which is managed by Cabinet Office.

Victims of cyber-crime are supported by the existing support services within PSNI.

Due to current reporting mechanisms it is not possible to provide figures for frauds, blackmails, and other financially motivated crimes which utilised the cyber environment. A recent survey by the Office of National Statistics, however, estimated that 53% of all crime utilised the cyber environment to some degree in the commission of the offence.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Justice which projects her Department is reviewing, or plans to review, as a result of changes in funding from European sources.

(AQW 3365/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Justice related organisations are currently involved in a number of EU funded projects and have confirmed that they have no plans at present to review their projects.

Under EU structural funding, two projects are part-funded (40%) by the European Social Fund and delivered by Extern in partnership with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Under EU non-structural funding, justice-related funded projects are listed below:

EU Funded Projects (Non-Structural)

Project Name	Funding Programme	Organisation Name	Drawdown (€)
DESTRIERO	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	102,579.20*
HOMER	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	706,960*
SLÁNDÁIL	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	42,000*
SECTOR	Framework Programme 7	Police Service of Northern Ireland	138,776*
EMORE	Rights, Equality and Citizenship	Institute of Conflict Research	37,000*
TENSOR	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	726,125*
MEDIA4SEC	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	81,250*
GAP	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	47,000*
GAP	Horizon 2020	Upskill Enterprise Ltd	115,000*
CONTEXT	Horizon 2020	Police Service of Northern Ireland	49,417*
CONTEXT	Horizon 2020	Probation Board for Northern Ireland	47,191*
Peace Training	Horizon 2020	Institute of Conflict Research	101,250*

* The figures represent the amount of drawdown agreed by the Commission, but may differ from the actual drawdown totals due to changes that may arise during the project lifespan.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for sexual offences against a child in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 3368/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Sexual offences involving children may be prosecuted under various legislation, including the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Punishment of Incest Act 1908, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 and the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

The most recent three year period for which information in relation to prosecutions and convictions at court for sexual offences against a child is available is 2013 – 2015.

Prosecutions and Convictions at court for sexual offences specifying the involvement of a child by court division, 2013

Court Division	2013	
	Prosecutions	Convictions
Antrim	15	7
Ards	21	11
Armagh and South Down	10	8
Belfast	77	27
Craigavon	15	9

Court Division	2013	
	Prosecutions	Convictions
Fermanagh and Tyrone	17	12
Londonderry	17	6
Total	172	80

Prosecutions and Convictions at court for sexual offences specifying the involvement of a child by court division, 2014

Court Division	2014	
	Prosecutions	Convictions
Antrim	15	10
Ards	18	9
Armagh and South Down	15	9
Belfast	55	33
Craigavon	15	10
Fermanagh and Tyrone	10	6
Londonderry	11	6
Total	139	83

Prosecutions and Convictions at court for sexual offences specifying the involvement of a child by court division, 2015

Court Division	2015	
	Prosecutions	Convictions
Antrim	19	12
Ards	13	10
Armagh and South Down	10	6
Belfast	24	16
Craigavon	8	5
Fermanagh and Tyrone	10	5
Londonderry	6	5
Total	90	59

Notes:

- 1 Figures relate to cases where at least one offence was a sexual offence against a child, whether or not they were the primary offence at prosecution or conviction.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures relate to offences in the sexual offences category that specify the involvement of a child. Other offences, with more generic descriptions, but where the victim may have been a child, have not been included, as there is no way to identify victim age from data held.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will order a Serious Case Review into the monitoring by Probation NI of John Douglas Stanfield between his previous convictions and most recent, to include how such reoffending and frequency was able to occur.

(AQW 3369/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not the responsibility of the Minister of Justice to order a Serious Case Review. It is the Strategic Management Board, responsible for oversight of the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland, who commissions such reviews where they meet the required criteria.

At the time the new offences were committed, Mr Stanfield had not been subject to statutory supervision by PBNI for some years and was being risk managed by PSNI on a single-Agency basis. This case does not meet the criteria for a Serious Case

Review in that he was not being managed on a multi-Agency basis under the public protection arrangements and the offences were non-contact offences which do not meet the serious harm threshold.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to list the (i) the dates; (ii) duration; and (iii) attendance for each of the Legal Aid Strategy Group meetings, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3401/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Legal Aid Strategy Group met on a number of occasions until early 2011. It was re-instated in April 2013 and has met 18 times since then as detailed in the table below. The formal duration of the meetings is not recorded.

Date	Attendees
15/5/13	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Karen Pearson, Robert Crawford, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken
13/6/13	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Robert Crawford, Glyn Capper, Louise Laverty
16/10/13	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Paul Andrews, Minister's Special Adviser
12/3/14	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
16/6/14	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
26/6/14	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Louise Laverty
9/12/14	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
27/4/15	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
2/6/15	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
1/9/15	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
2/9/15	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
19/10/15	Minister of Justice, Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken, Pdraig Cullen, Minister's Special Adviser
16/11/15	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews
2/2/16	Minister of Justice, Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken, Minister's Special Adviser
9/2/16	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken, Pdraig Cullen
11/2/16	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken
14/4/16	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken
20/9/16	Nick Perry, David Lavery, Lianne Patterson, Mark McGuckin, Glyn Capper, Paul Andrews, Mark McGuicken

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, in instances when a number of linked Family Cases are jointly proceeding through the Court System at the same hearing but were not all funded with legal aid, what scrutiny is the Legal Services Agency taking to ensure that public funds are not expended on the non-public aided element of the cases.

(AQW 3402/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Where legal aid is in place for proceedings before the Family Courts, the legal aid certificate will prescribe the level of representation and the specific nature of the legal advice, assistance and representation that has been granted to the individual.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, each legal representative, acting on behalf of an individual in receipt of legal aid, will submit a bill in respect of the work undertaken against each legal aid certificate. The claim should only include work undertaken on foot of a legal aid certificate. This would be set out in respect of each case and be supported by appropriate documentation.

The Agency will scrutinise each bill submitted to ensure that the work claimed is in accordance with the terms of the legal aid certificate.

In family cases, where there are linked proceedings, the assessment process will include a check of other legal aid certificates that may be in place. In specific circumstances there are procedures for remunerating practitioners who are acting for the same client in more than one case which are running concurrently with the benefit of legal aid. The claim for fees will be assessed to ensure that work claimed is fair and reasonable in the context of the court proceedings.

If the review of the claim, gives rise for concern in that it is not clear why specific items of work were undertaken or they would appear to fall outside the scope of the legal aid certificate these would be disallowed or queries raised.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice what steps her Department is taking to raise the awareness of disability hate crime with the PSNI, the wider criminal justice system, people with disabilities and other key statutory, community and voluntary agencies.

(AQW 3464/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Community Safety Strategy sets out my Department's approach to tackling all forms of hate crime and the harm it causes through prevention, awareness, education and support for victims and communities. To deliver on this commitment, my Department chairs a multi-agency Hate Crime Delivery Group, which takes forward actions relating to hate crime. Membership includes PSNI, the Probation Board, Courts Service, Prison Service, the Executive Office, the Housing Executive, and Victim Support NI.

An Action Plan has been developed to deliver this commitment; this includes actions around increasing reporting and providing support for victims of all hate crime, including through the regional Hate Crime Advocacy Service which is jointly funded by the PSNI and DOJ.

The advocacy service includes a specific Disability Hate Crime Advocate based in Leonard Cheshire Disability. The main objective of the advocacy service is to encourage and support members of the disabled community to report crimes as a victim or witness, and support them in accessing relevant support agencies. The service aims to remove barriers which prevent victims of disability hate crime reporting to the PSNI including communication difficulties, access issues, fear, ignorance, and lack of support.

The advocate also works with the PSNI to raise awareness of disability hate crime, highlight the support available to victims and the importance of reporting. Examples of the work carried out include:

- All new PSNI recruits receive an awareness-raising session as part of their induction training from the disability hate crime advocate;
- The Department of Justice supported the 'Get Support to Report' Campaign which included a billboard campaign throughout Northern Ireland and a variety of media coverage over a three week period;
- A large promotional event was held in May 2016 to promote the disability hate crime advocacy service; this was supported by my Department, the PSNI, the PPS, the Housing Executive, partner agencies, members of the Health & Social Care Trust, victims of disability hate crime, and numerous statutory/community/voluntary organisations; and
- Facilitated consultations on behalf of the NI Policing Board to ensure people with disabilities could take part in the consultation on the policing plan.

This work is further supported by the PSNI #Voices campaign on social media, which recently highlighted hate crime against people with a disability, to encourage victims and witnesses to report this type of crime.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of legal aid paid in respect of Mr Paul Anthony Adair through the course of his most recent conviction and appeal.

(AQW 3481/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Legal Aid was granted to the defendant for representation by Solicitor and Junior Counsel in the Magistrates' Court under ICOS number 15/101745.

The total legal aid fees paid (including VAT) in relation to the Magistrates' Court proceedings were:

Solicitor	£811.57
Junior Counsel	£1,292.85

Legal Aid was then granted to the defendant for representation by Solicitor and Junior Counsel for the appeal hearing in the County Court under ICOS number 15/101745/A01

To date the Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland has not received a claim from the legal representatives in respect of these proceedings. Estimated fees (including VAT) are outlined in the Table below:

Solicitor	£426
Junior Counsel	£420

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice what action her Department is taking to prevent arson attacks in the Omagh area.

(AQW 3547/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The response to arson attacks is an operational matter for the PSNI. You may wish to contact the PSNI directly with your concerns on this issue.

I am however mindful that issues such as this impact on the safety of individuals in their community, and I am keen to ensure that this sense of safety is preserved. I am advised that the PSNI is working with the owners of affected buildings and other statutory agencies such as the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to reduce the likelihood of further attacks.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.

(AQW 3556/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 is being implemented in phases and many of the provisions have already been commenced.

There are plans in place for the remaining major policy areas to be implemented during the remainder of 2016 and 2017. These include the single jurisdiction provisions; the Victim Statements and the Witness Charter; Violent Offences Prevention Orders; further Live Link enhancements; the introduction of Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders; the introduction of Statutory Case Management; and Committal reform.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the indictable cases pilot; and whether she will consider extending the offences covered by the pilot.

(AQW 3557/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Indications from the indictable cases pilot are positive and criminal justice partner agencies are meeting on 20 October to consider how best, and to what other offence types, the principles from the pilot might be applied and rolled out across Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to outline the training his staff receive in completing answers to Assembly Questions in line with departmental guidance.

(AQW 3585/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Assembly Questions are directed to the business area with subject matter expertise to prepare draft responses. When doing so my staff have regard to comprehensive procedural guidance for handling written Assembly Questions which is regularly reviewed and updated where appropriate.

In addition to the guidance documentation, on the job training and coaching is provided within the business areas covering the style, format and content of draft answers. Staff drafting answers to Assembly questions can also avail of an AQ course which is available to all NICS Departments.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice what bids she has received for the £50m funding for tackling paramilitary activity.

(AQW 3588/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Cross-Departmental Programme Board has invited bids from Departments for projects to support delivery of Section A of A Fresh Start and early work on the Executive action plan. Bids agreed by the Board are summarised in the table below. A number of bids received in advance of the Three Person Panel report were deferred, and have since been invited to resubmit bids where appropriate.

Bids agreed by the Board to date are as follows:

Lead	Bid
NIHE	3 programmes on: Community Empowerment, Reimagining Communities and Bonfire Management
DfC	Preparatory work for the Fresh Start commitment for a programme to increase the influence and participation of women in community development
DfC	Scoping Study to inform how a Community Cohesion Group might support the action plan's aim of promoting a culture of lawfulness
PBNI	Aspire Programme to begin co-design with partners for an initiative focused on young men who are at risk, as specified in the action plan; roll out of the RESET pilot; and roll out of Enhanced Combination Orders pilot.
PSNI	Policing with the Community – to establish a framework which will enable the operationalisation of policing with the community in those communities still adversely affected by paramilitarism.
PPS	Support for implementation of committal reform

Lead	Bid
PPS	Support for implementation of Indictable Cases Pilot
DOJ	Procurement of research on interventions for resettlement and reintegration of offenders with paramilitary links as set out in the action plan.
DOJ	Consultative Review of constructive activity in separated prisons regime as set out in the action plan.
DOJ	Feasibility Study for a Restorative Justice Centre of Excellence
DOJ	Fresh Start Implementation Branch
DOJ	Public Awareness Campaign – paramilitarism and organised crime
Forensic Science Agency	Specialist forensics equipment to support drugs testing, a Scanning Electron Microscope to enhance firearms testing and robotics equipment to enhance DNA testing.
DOJ	Community engagement and co-design
Attorney General	Roll out of Living Law programme
PSNI	Dedicated investigative capacity to tackle paramilitarism and organised crime

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice whether a review of the outcomes achieved by Restorative Justice practices has been completed.

(AQW 3589/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There is a significant body of research from both Northern Ireland and worldwide which demonstrates the positive outcomes associated with restorative practices for all parties, including both victims and offenders.

It is on the basis of this evidence that the Department is developing an Adult Restorative Justice Strategy for Northern Ireland. Whilst restorative justice and the involvement of victims in the process is firmly embedded in our youth justice system, there has been no comprehensive, co-ordinated approach to the use of restorative practices for adults to prevent offending and re-offending, and repair the harm caused. This draft Strategy is being informed by a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations with first-hand experience of the beneficial outcomes of restorative justice, and will be published for consultation in 2017.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 467/16-21, whether she will consider introducing legislation to limit the use of Preliminary Investigations until any critical point of issue has been exhausted by all other means of representation between the defence and prosecution.

(AQW 3594/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In Line with the Fresh Start Agreement, the Department has committed to bring forward draft legislation to abolish oral evidence at Committal. In addition, the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2015 provides for statutory case management regulations to be made which will place duties on the court, the prosecution and the defence to progress cases swiftly in the interests of justice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why the process following charge and first appearance at court until a trial date is fixed is slower than in Great Britain; and will she consider replicating the process used in Great Britain.

(AQW 3595/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In 2013 the Committal process was finally abolished in England and Wales after a long period of committal reform. As a result, relevant cases are sent straight to the Crown Court from the Magistrates' Court for a pre-trial hearing. The first hearing in the Crown Court is a preliminary hearing (where a timetable for trial and for service of further evidence is set), followed by the Plea and Case Management Hearing (where final directions for trial are made and a plea is taken).

The Department of Justice legislated in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2015 to reform the committal process and work is underway to implement the relevant sections. The Justice Act 2015 specifies that murder and manslaughter offences will go straight to the Crown Court without committal. The Act also allows for the Department to specify further indictable offences that would go straight to the Crown Court, thereby avoiding the committal process.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Justice how the working group on fatal foetal abnormality differs from previous policy development processes taken by her Department.

(AQW 3647/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Previous policy development was undertaken unilaterally by the Department of Justice. The current working group operates on an inter-Departmental basis with the Department of Health and its terms of reference focus on health care provision for women with a diagnosis of fatal fetal abnormality.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Justice what assurances she can give that the report of the working group on fatal foetal abnormality will be published promptly following its conclusion.

(AQW 3648/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Publication of the report will be a matter for the Executive.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when she will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.

(AQW 3650/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The changes in the composition of the Executive, has led to a different approach to in-year monitoring. The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis. This has replaced the previous 'bidding' process and will allow for an objective assessment of genuine pressures across departments. It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services, and officials will liaise with Committees on this at each monitoring round.

As part of the June Monitoring Round process, my Department provided written briefing to the Justice Committee, and addressed questions at a Committee meeting on wider DOJ finances on 16 June.

The Department of Finance has formally commissioned the October Monitoring Round. This will consider reduced requirements, capital and other technical issues. My Department plans to update the Committee in October on plans for the next budget period and will address any questions on the in-year position at that time.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice on how many occasions the maximum sentences for animal welfare have been applied by the courts, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3692/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to animal cruelty may be prosecuted under the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 1972, the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Over the period 2011 – 2015, there were two cases in which the maximum penalty under the legislation in question was imposed in relation to a conviction for an animal cruelty offence.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the status of the PSNI funding proposal for an additional dedicated investigative capacity to tackle criminality linked to paramilitary groups.

(AQW 3721/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The PSNI bid for resource for additional investigative capacity was considered and agreed by the Cross-Departmental Programme Board at its meeting on 9 June 2016.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many safer custody cells (i) exist; and (ii) are used in HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 3749/16-21)

Ms Sugden:

- (i) There are 27 Observation Cells within Maghaberry Prison. All of these cells can be used when required.
- (ii) There are 13 Observation Cells which can be used immediately; of these 13 six are regularly used.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) when the charge of making a false and malicious report against a prison officer was withdrawn by the Northern Ireland Prison Service; (ii) on what recommendation; and (iii) what current process is in place when this occurs.

(AQW 3750/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In England and Wales the Prior Committee examined the code offences against prison discipline in 1985 and this led to a revised disciplinary code in 1989. One of the changes was that the offence of "making a false and malicious allegation against an officer" was abolished.

The offence had been long been criticized by prison reform groups as discouraging legitimate complaints by prisoners. Similar considerations led to it being removed as an offence in Northern Ireland, when the Prison and Young Offenders Centres Rules were consolidated in 1995.

If a prisoner makes an allegation against a prison officer it will be appropriately investigated. If the allegation is not substantiated no further action is taken.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of sex offenders currently risk managed by Probation Board Northern Ireland, broken down by court division.

(AQW 3751/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) does not hold this information in the format requested.

They have however provided a breakdown of sex offenders currently managed by PBNI, by Assembly constituency, in the table below. Due to the small numbers involved the figures for Mid Ulster and West Tyrone have been combined to minimise the risk of identification of the individuals concerned.

Assembly Area	People
Belfast East	16
Belfast North	39
Belfast South	51
Belfast West	9
East Antrim	15
East Londonderry	16
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	11
Foyle	16
Lagan Valley	14
Mid Ulster & West Tyrone	11
Newry and Armagh	19
North Antrim	17
North Down	15
South Antrim	13
South Down	19
Strangford	13
Upper Bann	17
Total	311

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Justice to detail how HMP Magilligan compared to other prisons within the UK prison estate on it's last inspection.

(AQW 3758/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Prisons are assessed, by either Criminal Justice Inspection NI (CJINI) or Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) (UK), against four healthy prison tests as per Annexe A and each test can have four possible outcomes as per Annexe B.

Due to the wide range of factors that are considered by the inspection teams it is not possible to directly compare the results of one prison against another.

In the last inspection Magilligan prison was assessed as follows:-

- **Safety:** Outcomes for prisoners were reasonably good against this healthy prison test.
- **Respect:** Outcomes for prisoners were reasonably good against this healthy prison test.
- **Purposeful Activity:** Outcomes for prisoners were poor against this healthy prison test.
- **Resettlement:** Outcomes for prisoners were good against this healthy prison test.

Other UK prison inspection reports are available from the HMIP website:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspections/>

Annex A – Healthy Prison Tests

Safety - prisoners, particularly the most vulnerable, are held safely.

Respect - prisoners are treated with respect for their human dignity.

Purposeful activity - prisoners are able, and expected, to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them.

Resettlement - prisoners are prepared for their release into the community and effectively helped to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Annex B - Outcomes

Each test has four possible outcomes.

Outcomes for prisoners are good.

There is no evidence that outcomes for prisoners are being adversely affected in any significant areas.

Outcomes for prisoners are reasonably good.

There is evidence of adverse outcomes for prisoners in only a small number of areas. For the majority, there are no significant concerns. Procedures to safeguard outcomes are in place.

Outcomes for prisoners are not sufficiently good.

There is evidence that outcomes for prisoners are being adversely affected in many areas or particularly in those areas of greatest importance to the well-being of prisoners. Problems/concerns, if left unattended, are likely to become areas of serious concern.

Outcomes for prisoners are poor.

There is evidence that the outcomes for prisoners are seriously affected by current practice. There is a failure to ensure even adequate treatment of and/or conditions for prisoners. Immediate remedial action is required.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the estimated cost to rebuild Magilligan Prison.
(AQW 3759/16-21)

Ms Sugden: An outline business case for the Redevelopment of Magilligan Prison was approved by the Department of Finance (then the Department of Finance and Personnel) in January 2015 for costs of £150.5 million.

These costs have been revisited to take account of construction and Capital Cost Inflation. The current estimated cost to rebuild Magilligan is £162.3million.

Project Delivery is dependent on the provision of capital funding. This will be considered as part of the process of setting the next budget. I will not be able to confirm when the rebuilding of Magilligan Prison will commence until capital funding is secured.

I am fully committed to providing a redeveloped prison at Magilligan to enable the Northern Ireland Prison Service to deliver essential programmes to address re-offending behaviour; to meet Disability Discrimination Act standards; and to replace the existing infrastructure, which has outlived its useful life and is expensive and inefficient to staff; maintain and operate.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Justice to detail if asbestos has been found in Magilligan Prison.
(AQW 3760/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In line with standard practice, due to the age of the Foyleview buildings, samples were recently taken to test for the presence of asbestos containing materials prior to forming openings for new heating pipes.

The samples identified asbestos within some of the panels of these buildings. As a precaution the buildings were immediately decanted and air tests undertaken. The air tests all came back clear.

As a precaution some Foyleview buildings remain closed whilst costed options are considered.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the sickness levels for staff at HMP Magilligan compared to other prisons.
(AQW 3767/16-21)

Ms Sugden: For the period 1st April to 31st July 2016 the sickness absence levels for staff at Magilligan prison compared to other prisons are set out in the table below.

Prison	Number of working days lost	Absence rate %
Magilligan Prison	1,724.0	7.4
Maghaberry Prison	4,596.0	8.9
Hydebank Wood College	1,839.1	12.1

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice how she plans to reduce long term sick absence in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 3770/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Department of Justice takes seriously the health and wellbeing of all staff working in the Northern Ireland Prison Service who are employed in what is a demanding and challenging environment. Sickness absence is managed in accordance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sickness Absence & Inefficiency Policy. When staff are off work due to sickness they are offered various support mechanisms to assist them to return to work at the earliest possible opportunity.

These include a dedicated Staff Welfare Service, access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall. A dedicated HR team within the Department works closely with all staff who are off through sickness to assist them return to work.

It is disappointing that sickness levels remain high and we continue to work towards reducing these. Work is currently underway in relation additional support measures.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department will work with the Department of Health to ensure that Sean Hackett receives medical treatment as was considered necessary by The Court of Appeal in September 2015.

(AQW 3831/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has been working closely with the South Eastern Trust in order to identify a suitable treatment plan that can be delivered to Mr Hackett. This was outlined at the recent hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice on 16 September 2016.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Prison Journals (PJ 1-6) are tamper proof.

(AQW 3847/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The journals used by the Northern Ireland Prison Service are not tamper proof but the pages are numbered and the journal is countersigned by managers on a daily basis.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2796/16-21, whether there are any instances of an offender levy being treated as, or dealt with by, immediate warrant; and how these instances were rectified.

(AQW 3848/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There have been occasions when an offender levy has been incorrectly applied to a forthwith warrant at court. However, those cases are identified quickly and the matter is referred back to the court to be rectified.

Where the warrant relates solely to the levy amount, the warrant would be cancelled. In the case where the warrant includes a fine amount, as well as the levy amount, a revised warrant is issued for the fine only.

This ensures the levy can be collected from prisoner earnings as intended.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what the Northern Ireland Prison Services classes as a basic domestic function.

(AQW 3849/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is not familiar with the term basic domestic function. However, the basic elements of regime delivery are often referred to as domestics and this covers aspects such as exercise, showering/ablutions provision, telephones, hot water, personal laundry, distribution of tuck shop, haircutting and provision of unlock for students to fulfil their tasks.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether an assessment has been carried out to anticipate or estimate the increased footfall and vehicles at Dungannon courthouse; and if so to provide a copy of the report.

(AQW 3850/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Under the court rationalisation proposals, it is expected that the transferring business from Magherafelt Magistrates' Court to Dungannon will generally be accommodated on those days which currently have lower volumes of court users attending court. I would not therefore anticipate a significant increase in footfall or vehicle access to Dungannon Courthouse and there are no plans to extend car parking facilities.

The decision to close a select number of courthouses is now the subject of judicial review proceedings. Consequently it is not my intention to proceed with any court closures pending the outcome of those proceedings.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what guidelines or protocols exist in her Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.

(AQW 3863/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no guidelines in my Department specifically governing how Ministerial meetings should be conducted. A decision is taken in conjunction with officials as to what support is required, and this is dependent on the nature of the meeting. A diary record of all Ministerial meetings is held.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice why her Department has not published the submissions received to the consultation on proposals to revise the cross capping scheme for certain environmental challenges; and to set out the time frame for completion of the analysis of these submissions and publication of new regulations.

(AQW 3886/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Department published its summary of responses to the consultation along with its proposed way forward on 27 September 2016. Publication could not take place before an oral briefing to the Justice Committee on 22 September.

The Department plans to make Regulations to implement its proposals by the end of the year.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice to outline Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland's assessment of Resolve restorative justice.

(AQW 3927/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland has undertaken a comprehensive pre-accreditation inspection of Resolve restorative justice scheme to ensure compliance with human rights and international obligations. Their conclusion is that Resolve meets the standard expected of non-governmental organisations that work with the criminal justice sector. They found the scheme suitable to proceed to the second stage of the accreditation process whereby all staff involved with the project are considered by a Suitability Panel, informed by AccessNI and police information.

The Suitability Panel will make a recommendation to me based on their assessment, but the ultimate decision on whether or not any scheme receives accreditation under the Government Protocol rests with me as Minister of Justice.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what laws are in place to address anti-social behaviour.

(AQW 3936/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Anti-social behaviour is a broad term used to describe a wide range of behaviours which people consider anti-social. It is used to describe inconsiderate and nuisance behaviours, such as excessive noise, littering and neighbourhood disputes.

Given the wide spectrum of behaviours which people may consider to be anti-social means that there is a range of legislation which relates to this issue, for example, Council and NIHE powers, all of which fall outside the remit of this Department.

My Department's key piece of anti-social behaviour legislation is the Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. This legislation provides for the making of a civil order, to protect the public from behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress.

An Anti-social Behaviour Order can be made on application by a 'relevant authority' (a district council, the Chief Constable or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) to a magistrates' court, or by a court where an offender is convicted of a relevant offence.

An Order can contain conditions prohibiting an individual from carrying out specific anti-social acts or from entering defined areas. Breach of an Order is a criminal offence.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will order a Serious Case Review into the management of Michael Gilbert.

(AQW 3947/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not the responsibility of the Minister of Justice to order a Serious Case Review. It is the Strategic Management Board, responsible for oversight of the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland, who commissions such reviews where they meet the required criteria.

A serious case review is considered in circumstances where an individual, whose risk of causing serious harm is currently being managed on a multi-agency basis through the public protection arrangements, is either charged with a further serious sexual offence or serious violent offence, or where a significant failure occurs in their risk management.

The objectives of a serious case review are to: (i) examine whether the agencies involved did all that could reasonably be expected of them to manage the assessed risks; and (ii) whether there are lessons to be learned about the effectiveness of the public protection arrangements.

Mr Gilbert is not subject to statutory supervision or being risk managed on a multi-agency basis and has not been convicted of a further offence which meets the serious harm threshold required for a Serious Case Review.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the legal aid costs for all court levels in Cian McCarthy's attempt to retrieve seized property.

(AQW 3948/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Legal Services Agency records show that the only grant of funding to Mr McCarthy in respect of the return of seized property was to pursue an Appeal in the Court of Appeal.

The bills of costs for the Court of Appeal, when submitted, will be subject to assessment by the Taxing Master. Therefore, the Agency is not in a position to provide an estimate of potential court costs.

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Justice to list the organisations consulted by the Working Group on Fatal Foetal Abnormality.

(AQW 3951/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In accordance with its terms of reference, I understand that the group has consulted with the following organisations:

- Northern Ireland Committee of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

- Royal College of Midwives Northern Ireland
- Royal College of Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland
- Royal College of General Practitioners Northern Ireland

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Justice whether the Working Group on Fatal Foetal Abnormality consulted with women who wanted to carry on with their pregnancy despite fatal foetal abnormality.

(AQW 3952/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I understand that the working group received evidence provided by women with experience of fatal fetal abnormality, both from those who decided to continue with their pregnancy and those who didn't.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the steps taken to address the findings of the November 2015 Report on the Unannounced Inspection of Maghaberry Prison, specifically (i) the provision for learning through the Open University being adversely affected through changes to delivery and support arrangements, particularly the restricted access to ICT; and (ii) the curriculum offered remained too narrow and some aspects of provision were not planned coherently or sufficiently aligned to the local economy.

(AQW 3959/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Further to the publication of the Inspection Report, an Action Plan is in place to address the report's recommendations. This includes the introduction of a new Distance Learning Policy which outlines delivery and support arrangements for prisoners in respect of access to Open University and other distance learning courses. The policy also covers supervised access to the internet and IT, where it is considered safe and appropriate.

The outsourcing of learning and skills provision to Belfast Metropolitan College and North West Regional College from August 2015 ensures that a wider curriculum is now offered across all prison sites. This includes Essential Skills and accredited vocational courses which have been identified as offering the best opportunities for personal development and for employment in the community upon release from custody.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Justice, in pursuant to AQW 2502/16-21, to outline the nature of the conceded cases.

(AQW 4004/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Details of appeal types lodged with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal that were subsequently conceded prior to hearing by the Education and Library Boards/Education Authority for the financial years 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16 are set out in the following table.

Cases Conceded by Appeal Type

Appeal Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Refusal to Assess (Parent)	39	38	29
Refusal to Assess (School)	23	12	21
Refusal to Statement	12	5	5
Refusal to Re-Assess (Parent)	1	0	0
Refusal to Re-Assess (School)	0	0	1
Cease to Maintain Statement	2	2	0
Total	77	57	56

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many Restorative Justice schemes attract departmental funding.

(AQW 4035/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are two organisations which are formally accredited under the 2007 Government Protocol and receive funding to work with statutory criminal justice agencies through the delivery of Community Based Restorative Justice. These are Northern Ireland Alternatives and Community Restorative Justice Ireland.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide, or place in the Assembly library, a copy of the mental wellbeing at work policy for prison staff.

(AQW 4042/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Department of Justice does not have a separate departmental Wellbeing policy. The Department participates in the NICS WELL Programme. NICS Well provides Northern Ireland Civil Service employees and associated agencies (including prison staff) with support, education and information on a wide range of health and wellbeing issues as a way of improving their overall health and wellbeing.

The WELL Programme incorporates an interactive website www.nicswell.co.uk which provides accurate, relevant and up to date information, advice and support on health and wellbeing issues.

Staff can access the WELL Programme from either a work or home computer.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will hold discussions with the Minister of Health on establishing a house or landing in HMP Maghaberry for vulnerable prisoners or those on Supporting Prisoners at Risk, with a medical or mental health nurse on duty to assist Prison Officers in monitoring and in prevention of harm.

(AQW 4043/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are currently a number of specialist landings within Maghaberry prison which cater for those prisoners who may be considered as vulnerable. Senior managers within Maghaberry Prison are of the opinion that containing vulnerable prisoners, through mental health or medical issues, within one area is potentially more detrimental to individual prisoners. Observation cells are located throughout the prison to assist in the management of the most vulnerable prisoners.

Senior management of Maghaberry Prison in conjunction with South Eastern Health Trust management are developing plans to improve the mental health support to all prisoners. This will include the co-habitation of counselling services, mental health services and a prison officer led support team in a "Mental Health Hub". This service will be implemented from mid-October.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many prisoners are serving a sentence of six months or less.

(AQW 4069/16-21)

Ms Sugden: On the 29 September 2016 there were 104 prisoners in total serving a sentence of six months or less.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to outline the total (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions in relation to fuel laundering since 2011.

(AQW 4077/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no criminal offences that relate specifically to fuel laundering. Rather, such activity may be prosecuted under more general charges relating to tax evasion, which may be prosecuted under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and/or the Criminal Attempts and Conspiracy (Northern Ireland) Order 1983. However, a manual trawl of court records has established the following numbers of prosecutions and convictions under this legislation, where the substance in question was diesel or hydrocarbon fuel.

Prosecutions and convictions at courts for tax evasion offences, where the subject matter involved was diesel or hydrocarbon fuel, 2011-2015

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2011	8	5
2012	7	6
2013	12	10
2014	9	6
2015	16	14

Notes:

- 1 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offence specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures include cases brought by Public Prosecution Service on behalf of police and other organisations.
- 5 Data for 2014-2015 are sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset while data for 2011-2013 have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to list the sentences imposed for fuel laundering since 2011.

(AQW 4078/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no criminal offences that relate specifically to fuel laundering. Rather, such activity may be prosecuted under more general charges relating to tax evasion, which may be prosecuted under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and/or the Criminal Attempts and Conspiracy (Northern Ireland) Order 1983. The following table lists disposals handed down in relation to convictions under these pieces of legislation, where the substance in question was diesel or hydrocarbon fuel.

Disposals handed down for convictions at courts for tax evasion offences, 2011 – 2015**2011**

Case #	Offence #	Disposal
1	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
2	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
3	1	Monetary Penalty
4	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
	2	Suspended Custodial Sentence
5	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
	2	Suspended Custodial Sentence

2012

Case #	Offence #	Disposal
1	1	Monetary Penalty
2	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
	2	Suspended Custodial Sentence
	3	Suspended Custodial Sentence
3	1	Monetary Penalty
4	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
5	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
6	1	Monetary Penalty

2013

Case #	Offence #	Disposal
1	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
2	1	Monetary Penalty
3	1	Monetary Penalty
4	1	Monetary Penalty
5	1	Monetary Penalty
	2	Monetary Penalty
6	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
7	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
8	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
9	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
10	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence

2014

Case #	Offence #	Disposal
1	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
2	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
3	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
4	1	Monetary Penalty
5	1	Monetary Penalty
	2	Monetary Penalty

Case #	Offence #	Disposal
6	1	Conditional Discharge

2015

Case #	Offence #	Disposal
1	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
2	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
3	1	Custodial Sentence
4	1	Monetary Penalty
	2	Monetary Penalty
5	1	Monetary Penalty
	2	Monetary Penalty
6	1	Monetary Penalty
	2	Monetary Penalty
7	1	Monetary Penalty
	2	Monetary Penalty
8	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
9	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
10	1	Community Disposal
11	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence
12	1	Monetary Penalty
13	1	Monetary Penalty
14	1	Suspended Custodial Sentence

Notes:

- Information relates to convictions which included at least one count of the offence specified.
- Information relates to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- Information includes cases brought by Public Prosecution Service on behalf of police and other organisations.
- Information provided relates to convictions at courts for tax evasion offences, where the substance involved was listed as hydrocarbon fuel or diesel.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of legal aid costs for Damien Fennell's current charges, including the costs or estimated costs of his failed application before Mr Justice Maguire on 27 September 2016.

(AQW 4116/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Legal Aid was granted to the defendant for representation by Solicitor in the Magistrates' Court under ICOS numbers 15/037905, 15/117095 and 16/008628.

The total legal aid fees paid (including VAT) in relation to the Magistrates' Court proceedings were:

Solicitor	£1,982.45 (including VAT)
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Legal Aid was then granted to the defendant for representation by Solicitor, Senior Counsel and Junior Counsel for Crown Court representation under ICOS reference 16/023017 and 16/008628. As Crown Court proceedings are ongoing, no bills have been submitted to date.

Estimated fees (including VAT) are outlined in the table below:

Solicitor	£2,528.40 (including VAT)
Senior Counsel	£3,607.20 (including VAT)
Junior Counsel	£2,168.40 (including VAT)

The Agency is precluded from providing information on civil legal aid applications. In relation to civil legal aid applications received before 1 April 2015, this is governed by Article 24 of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (NI) Order 1981. For applications received on or after 1 April 2015, the non-disclosure falls under the Civil Legal Services (Disclosure of Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to provide power of dispersal to the PSNI.
(AQW 4123/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Building safer communities by preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing the harm that it causes is a key priority for my Department.

The Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 was introduced prior to the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Executive. The then Secretary of State, Paul Goggins MP, did not introduce Dispersal Orders at that time.

During the public consultation for the current Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017, respondents to the consultation endorsed a preventive approach to anti-social behaviour, with enforcement seen as a last resort. There were no compelling arguments in support of Dispersal Orders.

My Department is, however, represented on several groups to strategically address anti-social behaviour and its associated issues. The outworking of which has led me to ask my officials to scope out, in association with relevant stakeholders, how a holistic review of anti-social behaviour can be taken forward.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Justice to outline the specific steps she has taken to implement proposal B12 of the report on Tackling Paramilitary Activity.
(AQW 4124/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) have been tasked in the Executive Action Plan to lead work on the initiative for young men, as proposed in recommendation B12 of the Three Person Panel's report. PBNI has appointed a coordinator to begin preparatory work on this programme of work. In 2016/17, this will involve working with partners in the voluntary, community and statutory sectors to develop the programme for full implementation from 2017/18, and running interventions aimed at providing mentoring support for young men in the community.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for criminal damage and arson related offences, in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 4140/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to criminal damage and arson are prosecuted under Article 3 of the Criminal Damage (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. Information in relation to convictions, where at least one offence was arson or criminal damage, has been provided in the following table. The latest 5 year period for which information is available is 2011 – 2015.

Convictions at courts for criminal damage or arson related offences by court division, 2011 – 2015

Court Division	Convictions				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	268	255	249	165	201
Ards	323	207	231	236	229
Armagh and South Down	205	178	183	196	171
Belfast	709	820	683	628	630
Craigavon	281	287	221	223	219
Fermanagh and Tyrone	285	269	213	211	234
Londonderry	245	263	305	319	263
Total	2,316	2,279	2,085	1,978	1,947

Notes:

- 1 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice what action her Department is taking in conjunction with key agencies to reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour.
(AQW 4142/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Building safer communities by preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing the harm that it causes is a key priority for my Department.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a broad term used to describe a wide range of behaviours which people consider anti-social. It is used to describe inconsiderate and nuisance behaviours, such as excessive noise, littering and neighbourhood disputes.

Given the wide spectrum of behaviours which people may consider to be anti-social there is a range of legislation available, for example, Council powers for tackling littering, noise, on-street drinking and NIHE powers for dealing with anti-social tenants, all of which fall outside the remit of this Department. However, my Department's key piece of anti-social behaviour legislation is the Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004.

In spite of an overall downward trend since 2007 of reported incidents of ASB, I am fully aware of the impact ASB and its associated issues have on local communities and individuals.

My Department is represented on several working groups to strategically address anti-social behaviour and its associated issues. These include Reducing Offending Partnerships, Police & Community Safety Partnerships, Interagency Advisory Groups, ASB forums and other partnership initiatives, all of which have key strands that focus on addressing ASB through local initiatives.

The outworking of some of these groups has led me to ask my officials to scope out, in association with relevant stakeholders, how a holistic review of anti-social behaviour can be taken forward.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of anti-social behaviour orders in Upper Bann that have been (i) issued; and (ii) breached, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4144/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There were two anti-social behaviour orders issued for defendants with an address recorded in the Upper Bann constituency over the period 2011 to 2015, one in 2011 and the other in 2013.

Three defendants with an address recorded in the Upper Bann constituency were convicted of a breach of an anti-social behaviour order during the same period, two in 2011 and the other in 2014.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of sex offenders currently risk managed by Probation Board Northern Ireland and residing in South Antrim.

(AQW 4187/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As of the 31 August 2016, Probation Board for Northern Ireland was managing 13 sex offenders in the South Antrim area.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the future of Limavady Courthouse.

(AQW 4193/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The decision to close Limavady court hearing centre was taken by my predecessor following public consultation in 2012 and ratified by him in February 2016.

My predecessor's decision to rationalise the court estate is now the subject of judicial review proceedings in the High Court. Consequently it is not my intention to proceed with court closures pending the outcome of those proceedings. As the rationalisation of the court estate is now the subject of legal proceedings it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of staff suspended from duty in Magilligan Prison in the last five years; (ii) the number reinstated in the same period; and (iii) the cost in wages, employer's pension contributions and legal fees.

(AQW 4194/16-21)

Ms Sugden:

- (i) The number of staff suspended from duty in Magilligan Prison in the last five years is seven;
- (ii) The number of staff reinstated in the same period is three; and
- (iii) The cost in wages is £133,651.17, employer's pension contributions £26,971.64. Details of payments for legal fees in respect of suspended staff are not available, the action required to provide such would incur disproportionate costs.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many people recently arrested, charged and placed on remand for terrorism offences in Lurgan entered the separated prison regime at Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry; and (ii) whether consideration was given, by age, to provide entry to Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison.

(AQW 4219/16-21)

Ms Sugden: (i) Applications for separation are a matter for the Secretary of State, should any such request be received from any prisoner then this will be processed.

(ii) No, Maghaberry holds all adult male committals (those over 21 years of age).

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for using a mobile phone while driving in (i) 2013-14; (ii) 2014-15; and (iii) 2015-16, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4264/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to using a mobile phone whilst driving may be prosecuted under Article 56A of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Departmental databases do not contain information on the location of an offence; therefore, it is not possible to provide information relating to convictions at a constituency level. Information in relation to convictions for using a mobile phone whilst driving offences, by court division, has been provided. The most recent three year period for which conviction information is available is 2013 – 2015 and information for convictions handed down during that period, for the offence specified, has been provided in the following table.

Convictions for using a mobile phone whilst driving by court division, 2013-2015

Court Division	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	67	54	80
Ards	77	64	78
Armagh & South Down	111	88	112
Belfast	131	132	151
Craigavon	135	100	117
Fermanagh & Tyrone	318	359	219
Londonderry	195	163	121
Total	1,034	960	878

Notes:

- 1 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified and to disposals at Magistrates' courts and Crown Court.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for traffic offences in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4265/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Motoring offences may be prosecuted under various pieces of legislation, for example, the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Departmental databases do not contain information on the location of an offence; therefore, it is not possible to provide information relating to convictions at a constituency level. Information in relation to convictions for motoring offences, by court division, has been provided. The most recent three year period for which conviction information is available is 2013-2015 and information for convictions handed down during that period, for the offences specified, has been provided in the following table.

Convictions for motoring offences by court division, 2013-2015

Court Division	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	1,391	1,176	1,160
Ards	1,734	1,853	1,609
Armagh & South Down	1,529	1,417	1,326
Belfast	3,000	2,822	2,621
Craigavon	1,422	1,285	1,242
Fermanagh & Tyrone	2,235	2,168	1,848
Londonderry	1,718	1,595	1,197
Total	13,029	12,316	11,003

Notes:

- 4 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 5 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified and to disposals at Magistrates' courts and Crown Court.
- 6 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what aftercare is provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to staff that were injured whilst on duty and required to leave the Service as a result.

(AQW 4281/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Department of Justice takes seriously the health and wellbeing of all staff working in the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) who are employed in what is a demanding and challenging environment. Officers injured whilst on duty are treated sympathetically and all reasonable steps are taken to provide support through regular meetings with Human Resources (HR) staff, a dedicated Staff Welfare Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall.

The HR team within the Department work closely with the Occupational Health Service (OHS) to consider whether adjustments can be put in place to support staff to return to and remain in work.

In the unfortunate event that a member of staff is unable to return to work and has to leave NIPS financial benefits may be provided under the Northern Ireland Civil Service Policies on Retirement on Medical Grounds or Inefficiency Sickness Absence.

Staff who leave NIPS can apply for further benefits under The Civil Service Injury Benefits Scheme (NI). They can also apply for services from the Charity for Civil Servants, the Prison Service Trust and the Benevolent Fund.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of (i) her Department's lessons learned regarding medication management, arising from the death of Mr Patrick Kelly, in Maghaberry Prison in March 2015; and (ii) Departmental plans to implement the recommendations of the Prisoner Ombudsman's Report.

(AQW 4298/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The death of Mr Kelly was a tragedy and my thoughts go out to his family on their loss. The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland completed a lengthy report into Mr Kelly's death and made 21 recommendations for improvement. Five of these recommendations related solely to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), 14 related directly to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEH SCT) and there were two joint recommendations. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently working to address all recommendations made by the ombudsman. This will be managed through an action plan and will be subject to scrutiny by senior managers within Maghaberry Prison. The issue of medication management within the prison setting is the responsibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2793/16-21, to outline what additional measures her departmental agencies have put in place to ensure safeguarding is protected until the Critical Incident is declared over.

(AQW 4418/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Safeguarding levels have been maintained by PSNI. Departmental agencies, within the Public Protection Arrangements framework, are operating as normal without the requirement for additional measures. They continue to work in close cooperation with PSNI, where appropriate, on assessing and managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in that area.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether cannabis is one of the illicit drugs detected regularly in, and being smuggled into, prisons locally.

(AQO 404/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The abuse of substances, both illicit and prescribed, is a societal issue and one which is a significant factor in offending behaviour. For that reason it is a problem inherited by, and concentrated within, the whole criminal system and not just in prisons.

Cannabinoids traditionally appear as one of the family of illegal drugs uncovered in prisons. They continue to be discovered in searches and are detected in drug tests on prisoners.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is committed to reducing the access to and demand for drugs by offenders. This is based around a three strand approach – to restrict supply, to reduce demand and to allow recovery.

A range of measures are in place to prevent illicit drugs coming into prison, these include the use of passive drugs dogs, visitor and staff searches. The Prison Service has placed increased emphasis on intelligence led searching and the evidence is that this approach is targeting the right people and that drugs are being detected.

The Prison Service continues to work closely with colleagues in other agencies including the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to minimise the misuse of drugs and to educate and support those prisoners who have addiction issues.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice to outline the action her Department is taking, or plans to take, to reduce crime in rural areas.

(AQO 400/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department is addressing this issue at a number of levels. At a strategic level rural and agricultural crime is a serious issue and I am very conscious of the impact, often exacerbated by a sense of isolation, any crime can have on those who live and work in rural communities.

My Department's Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017 contains a commitment to making rural communities safer by reducing opportunities to commit crime. It aligns with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) led Rural White Paper and Action Plan, to support and sustain rural communities and to deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that will contribute to safer rural communities.

My Department is committed to working with key partners in addressing all rural crime. The Rural Crime Partnership, which consists of representatives from my Department, the PSNI, NFU Mutual, the Ulster Farmers' Union and DAERA, delivers actions taken forward to support safer rural communities.

Complementing the work of my Department's Organised Crime Task Force, the cross-jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force, identified rural crime as a priority crime area for the period 4 April to 4 October 2016. This includes numerous cross border vehicle checkpoints between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to detect and deter rural crime.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships have delivered a wide range of initiatives to address crimes in their local areas. For example in the members own area, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon PCSP Action Plan includes rural crime actions such as:

- identification marking of equipment and trailers;
- promoting Farm Watch schemes;
- intergenerational projects;
- information and advice to older / vulnerable people;
- a home security programme;
- crime prevention workshops;
- neighbourhood initiatives; and
- seasonal crime prevention campaigns.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions she has had with the Secretary of State in relation to funding for historical investigations.

(AQO 401/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Stormont House Agreement was an agreement made at the end of 2014 between the Northern Ireland Executive and the British and Irish governments. Under that Agreement, the United Kingdom government committed to providing the Northern Ireland Executive with £150 million for legacy.

Since the agreement was made discussions have continued between the Northern Ireland Executive and the United Kingdom Government to ensure that the outstanding legacy issues are resolved and the bodies proposed to deal with the past are established. I have had a number of meetings with the Secretary of State, during which legacy issues were discussed. Funding has naturally formed an important part of those discussions.

My Department has never been resourced to deal with the legacy of the past. Having met a number of victims' families, I am conscious of the impact of further delay in legacy investigations and legacy inquests. My concern is that, in the absence of the necessary additional funding, it will not be possible to complete the investigation of outstanding Troubles-related deaths in a reasonable period of a time and that we will fail the families of victims.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to outline how she plans to reduce the annual cost of legal aid.

(AQO 402/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Legal aid is demand-led and exists to provide support for the most vulnerable in society to get access to justice. Last year the budget provided for over 90,000 acts of assistance. Against this background the Department is delivering a reform programme which has already reduced the fees in the criminal courts and ensured that the appropriate level of representation is granted in Criminal and Civil Courts. Further plans to reduce the annual cost of legal aid, which are at an advanced, stage include a standardised fee structure in family cases; a review of the cost of expert witnesses; and some adjustments in the types of cases that can be funded through legal aid.

We are addressing administration costs through a Transformation Programme in the Legal Services Agency which includes a Digitisation Programme.

I am also considering the recommendations in Access to Justice II and will bring forward an updated strategy for legal aid. This will include consideration of the appropriate budget for legal aid going forward.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the new fuel marker in use to reduce illegal fuel laundering.
(AQO 405/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Excise evasion is a reserved matter and policy and legal responsibility rests with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. However HMRC is a key member of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Taskforce, which I chair, and it works closely with other members across Northern Ireland law enforcement and government.

Following joint work by HMRC and its Irish counterparts, a new fuel marker, Accutrace, was introduced into UK fuel supplies on 1 April 2015. Her Majesty's Treasury has just issued the one-year review of the performance of this marker which has confirmed a reduction in the number and size of laundering plants, consistent with an overall shift away from illicit laundering. There is no evidence of successful laundering of the new marker.

HMRC will continue to keep the fuel marker under review and will take further action if required however, while accepting that the fight against fuel fraud of various sorts will be an ongoing one, I think we can all acknowledge that the fuel marker represents a success story for law enforcement and is an excellent example of cross border co-operation.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions she has had with the Chief Constable in relation to recent criminal activity in the Carrickfergus area.
(AQO 406/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have regular discussions, with both the Chief Constable and members of his senior team, on a wide range of issues.

Let me say that I cannot condone the type of criminality that has taken place in Carrickfergus in recent months. This behaviour serves no purpose other than to create fear and misery for those who live in the community.

It is particularly deplorable that police officers responding to protect the community have, on occasion, come under attack. That is totally unacceptable.

I am, however, encouraged to hear that there have been very few incidents in Carrickfergus in recent weeks. I hope this signals an end to this criminality.

To anyone who would continue, I say that it is time to stop this senseless behaviour. Not only are you damaging your community and generating fear, you are also threatening your own future by inviting a criminal record.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Justice what discussions she has had with the PSNI in relation to hate crime attacks on Orange halls in South Down.
(AQO 407/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The response to any attacks on Orange Halls, including those motivated by hate, is an operational matter for the PSNI. Whilst I have regular meetings with the Chief Constable to discuss a range of issues, I have not discussed this particular issue.

I am aware that there have been a number of attacks on symbolic premises, including Orange Halls, over the last two years across Northern Ireland, including attacks on two Halls in South Down in July this year.

I want to say upfront that I find any attack on any symbolic building unacceptable.

I understand that the PSNI has a control strategy dealing with attacks on symbolic buildings. The control strategy contains actions and activities under four strands: Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance. Under the control strategy, PSNI patrols continue to pay attention to symbolic buildings.

From the perspective of my Department, the underlying issues that can culminate in hate crimes cannot be dealt with by the criminal justice system alone and require an Executive-wide response if they are to be tackled effectively. The Executive Office leads on tackling hate and intolerance in society more widely through the Executive's 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC) Strategy.

My Department supports this work through the delivery of the Executive's Community Safety Strategy. The Strategy contains a commitment to tackle all forms of hate crime and to reduce the harm it causes through prevention, awareness and education. Partners from across the criminal justice system are engaged in delivery of this commitment.

In addition, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), which are jointly funded by my Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, work at a local level to develop solutions to local issues and to enhance community safety.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Justice to outline any collaborative strategies between her Department and the Department of Health to address incidences of suicide and self-harm in local prisons.
(AQO 408/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service takes the duty of care for all the individuals it holds in custody extremely seriously. Identifying and supporting prisoners with mental health issues during custody remains a priority for NIPS.

The Prison Service and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which is responsible for the delivery of healthcare in prisons, are committed to providing effective services to vulnerable people in custody. Both organisations work in partnership under the Supporting Prisoners at Risk procedures set out under the Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Policy.

The Prison Service is currently reviewing the Suicide and Self Harm Policy, in partnership with the Trust, to ensure that individuals at risk of suicide or self-harm receive the most effective support possible whilst in prison.

The Minister of Health and I visited Hydebank Wood on 27 September to discuss health issues in prisons, including in respect of mental health.

I will continue to work with my Ministerial colleague, the Minister of Health, to ensure that children, young people and adults in the criminal justice system are healthier, safer and less likely to be involved in offending behaviour.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Lord Morrow asked the Assembly Commission whether MLAs' staff are insured via employment liability insurance to travel and carry out duties at locations other than constituency offices and Parliament Buildings.

(AQW 3472/16-21)

Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Under the provisions of The Employer's Liability (Defective Equipment and Compulsory Insurance) (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, employers are required to insure and maintain insurance against liability for personal injury suffered by its employees i.e. to hold employer's liability insurance. This requirement applies to each Member in the role as an employer of support staff. This insurance is commonly referred to as employers' liability insurance.

The Assembly Commission procures an insurance policy which meets the legal obligation placed on each Member to hold such insurance. The policy seeks to indemnify a Member for damages and legal costs arising from a legal liability in respect of bodily injury to an employee. This cover could be utilised to meet the cost of a claim by an employee should that employee suffer an injury at his or her place of work. The place of work is generally taken to refer to either Parliament Buildings or a constituency office but it can also cover a temporary place of work, as long as the employee is undertaking duties on behalf of a Member. These duties are defined as "Parliamentary and Constituency activities related to and consequent upon Membership of the Northern Ireland Assembly, but excluding activities directly relating to the promotion or membership of any Political Party and Property Owners".

The policy does not offer cover for travel to and from the place of work or travel in the course of work. That would be a matter for each individual typically through a valid car insurance policy which includes a specific clause for business travel.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission, in relation to changes to Members' support staff pensions, to outline (i) why adequate preparation was not made before the current mandate so staff could have online access to control their arrangements; and (ii) when will such online access be available.

(AQW 3806/16-21)

Mr Hussey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Members (Salary and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016 specified that a Member could only recover employer pension contributions if those contributions were made to an approved pension scheme. The Determination also amended the terms and conditions of employment that each Member was required to adopt for the employment of staff if the Member wished to recover the cost of employing those members of staff.

After the election, Members had to adhere to the requirements of the revised Determination and provide new contracts of employment for their staff. The provision of these new contracts took some time but once they were received, each employee was placed on the payroll and pension deductions commenced immediately. Following that process, the Commission wrote to each employee confirming their enrolment in the scheme and asking the individual to provide an email address that they wish to use for pension purposes.

The pension provider (Aegon) had advised that it requires all email addresses prior to setting up the online accounts. From 6 May 2016 to date, 79 employees have still

to provide an email address. The Commission has contacted the provider to assess whether the email addresses that have been provided (for 128 employees) can be actioned now. When the online accounts are established, Aegon will correspond directly with employees about their pension account.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 14 October 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how it is intended to measure the impact of the Programme for Government on older people in the absence of a reference to Older People in the published framework document at outcome, indicator, or proposed measure level.

(AQW 2686/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We are committed to ensuring that, in tracking progress through the Programme for Government Framework, we will, wherever possible, disaggregate the evidence that we use on Section 75 grounds.

For each of the outcomes in the framework, we will produce and analyse data and other evidence in relation to the different experiences of people across all Section 75 categories.

By doing so, we intend to enable the particular needs, issues and inequalities experienced by different groups, including older people, to be identified and addressed, and the impact on each of those groups to be assessed.

We intend, where possible, to use official national statistics to monitor and report on the Programme for Government, both because these statistics are tested for robustness and reliability, and because they are available publicly. This will ensure that reporting and monitoring is as transparent as possible.

We are aware that fully disaggregated data will not be immediately available in all areas. We are committed to working to develop data over the course of the Programme for Government period to expand the areas in which this disaggregation is possible.

Ms Armstrong asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the rationale for not using the existing provision through their allocation of Special Advisers to accommodate the press secretary role.

(AQW 3386/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: This is a newly created post, jointly appointed.

The new press secretary is a person providing specialist support to us jointly, hence the use of the prerogative order made by us acting jointly under section 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Special Advisers are individually appointed by their respective Ministers.

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to whom the new Executive press secretary reports.

(AQW 3387/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The new Executive press secretary is directly accountable to us.

Mrs Palmer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site.

(AQO 242/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There is no current agreement on the Maze/Long Kesh Site.

Mr McCrossan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how West Tyrone will benefit from the Social Investment Fund.

(AQO 243/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The constituency of West Tyrone falls within the Western Social Investment Fund Zone. Substantial progress has been made in this Zone with the £8million budget committed to all projects prioritised by the local Steering Group.

One capital project prioritised will specifically benefit West Tyrone, the Youth Support Omagh Project. It aims to redevelop the current sand based surface at the Youth Sport Omagh facility into a full sized multi-purpose 3G synthetic pitch. This project is currently preparing to commence procurement of a design team.

West Tyrone is also within the area expected to benefit from the Community Premises Support project. This is a composite project that will span the legacy District Council areas of Fermanagh, Strabane, Omagh and Limavady. It will create a support fund whereby voluntary and community sector organisations in the targeted areas can apply for funding to deliver essential renovation / upgrade works to front line community services buildings or facilities to a value of £20,000. The application process opened on 28th September 2016 and is being operated by the lead partner organisation, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council.

In addition, two revenue projects are also expected to benefit West Tyrone as well as other constituencies in the Western Zone. The Work Ready West Project supplements existing unemployment initiatives through the provision of wage-based employment and training opportunities for 120 unemployed individuals per year within the Western Zone. The project targets participants over the age of 24, who are long-term unemployed and it will develop their employability skills, so enabling them to compete more effectively in the labour market. Each participant will receive 12 months sustained employment, and will receive a salary at the national minimum wage. So far 91 participants are engaged in work placements and 8 have secured full-time jobs at this point.

The Satchel project works with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of pre-school children - particularly those who are disadvantaged - to ensure they can flourish at home in preparation for school. This project continues to support the child and parents via the school setting once the child enters the education system. It will extend the service up to the age of 7. To date 152 participants are engaged in this project.

Mr Poots asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they plan to maximise Northern Ireland's influence in forthcoming negotiations to leave the European Union.

(AQO 249/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The UK Government is currently working through its approach to the planned negotiation. Multi-lateral engagement is envisaged on major policy questions affecting all administrations, such as the future of the Single Market and alternative tariff regimes, and the free movement of people.

The Cabinet Office is facilitating multi-lateral engagement between the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Devolved Administrations on a thematic basis. As set out in our 10 August letter to the Prime Minister, there are a range of sectoral issues which will have particular significance for us, such as agri-food and the single energy market. As well as being fed through to the multi-lateral forums, direct bilateral engagement and information sharing on these issues will also be required between Executive departments and their counterparts in Whitehall.

We will continue to work closely with the Irish Government through the North South Ministerial Council and we have already agreed to an intensified relationship between the Executive's Office in Brussels and the Irish Permanent Representation. A similar intensified relationship will be important with the UK Representation in order to ensure close connectivity to negotiations once they commence.

We will also continue to advance our interests through the British Irish Council and with Scotland and Wales. Our officials are also in regular contact with their counterparts in other administrations to make our views known and to proactively influence outcomes.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total number of people employed in the Executive Information Service in each of the last five years, including 2016/17, broken down by (i) Executive Department; and (ii) job title or grade.

(AQW 3690/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There are currently 55 EIS Press Officers working in nine departmental press offices.

The Executive Information Service also manages NI Direct and Government Advertising Unit (GAU), both of which operate as a shared service across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. 13 EIS staff are employed across both shared services.

In addition, there is also a Head of Operations for EIS who is responsible for Press Office, the Government Advertising Unit (GAU) and content on the nidirect website, and a Head of Forward Planning and Business Support as follows:

Department	Grade	Number
The Executive Office	Head of Operations	1
	Head of Forward Planning and Business Support	1
Total		2

The breakdown of EIS Press Office staff by department and grade is as follows:

Department	Grade	Number
The Executive Office	Principal Press Officer	2
	Senior Press Officer	2
	Press Officer	2
Department of Finance	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	2
	Press Officer	2
Department of Health	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	3
	Assistant Press Officer	2
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	3
	Press Officer	1
	Assistant Press Officer	1
Department of Justice	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	1
	Press Officer	2
	Assistant Press Officer	1
Department of Education	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	2
	Press Officer	1
Department for Communities	Principal Press Officer	2
	Senior Press Officer	4 (FTE)
	Press Officer	3
	Assistant Press Officer	2
Department for Infrastructure	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	3 (FTE)
	Assistant Press Officer	1
Department for the Economy	Principal Press Officer	1
	Senior Press Officer	2
	Press Officer	4
Total		55 (FTE)

The breakdown of Shared Service Centre staff by department and grade is as follows:

Shared Service Centre	Number
Head of nirect	1
Senior Theme Manager	5 (FTE)
Theme Manager	1
Media Monitoring Officer	1
Head of Advertising	1
Senior Advertising Officer	2 (FTE)

Shared Service Centre	Number
Advertising Officer	1
Assistant Advertising Officer	1
Total	13

* FTE = full time equivalent

Information on staffing levels within EIS for previous years is not held by HR Connect.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who advised them that they had to change the law to appoint the Executive press secretary.

(AQW 3901/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The use of the prerogative order to appoint the Executive press secretary is exercised at our discretion.

Mr Lynch asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the implementation of the Racial Equality Strategy.

(AQW 3928/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 was published last December with an ambitious but achievable programme of proposed actions. One such action is the establishment of the Racial Equality Subgroup. This Subgroup is intended to function as a strong voice within government on issues specifically affecting minority ethnic people, migrants and race relations.

Representatives from the minority ethnic sector have been identified with a view to ensuring representation of the larger ethnic groups (as per the 2011 census) and other groups which may be considered particularly vulnerable (for example, asylum seekers and refugees). We attended the inaugural meeting of the Subgroup which took place on 14 September.

Other key actions include the establishment of Departmental Racial Equality Champions and an associated shared learning forum. This will facilitate a cohesive approach to establishing appropriate ethnic monitoring. These Champions have been identified and will liaise directly with the Subgroup. A meeting of the Racial Equality Champions will be convened shortly.

Dr Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Royal Prerogative was used to appoint the Executive press secretary rather than the existing legislation.

(AQW 3953/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The new Executive press secretary is a person providing specialist support to us jointly. Therefore a new category was required to be established in the Civil Service Commissioners Order and hence the use of the prerogative order made by us acting jointly under section 23(3) of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they have consulted with children and young people on the draft Programme for Government; and what further plans they have to consult with this section of society.

(AQW 3975/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A range of organisations representing the interests of children and young people have been involved in the development of the draft Programme for Government Framework to date, and has provided views in response to the recent consultation on the Framework. A number of initiatives were also taken by departments during the consultation period to encourage the involvement of their respective stakeholder communities in this process. The Department of Education, for example, wrote to all post-primary schools asking them to encourage and support engagement with the consultation by their pupils.

We will launch a public consultation on a draft Programme for Government in the coming weeks and that will include publication of a child friendly version of the document as part of our consultation. We are committed to continuing to work with the children and young people's sector to ensure appropriate engagement in the development and implementation of the Programme.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what issues in the Brexit negotiation are specific to Northern Ireland; and how these issues will be represented.

(AQW 3991/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The issues of particular significance are set out in our letter to the Prime Minister of 10th August. It is our intention to be fully involved and represented in the negotiations on the terms of our future relationships with the EU and other countries. A copy of the letter can be found at:

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/letter-prime-minister-rt-hon-theresa-may-mp>

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a timeline on the publication of the draft Programme for Government.

(AQW 3996/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We refer you to our answer of 27 September 2016 to your question AQW 2767/16-21.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have engaged with the Commissioner for Standard on bringing forward a censure mechanism for Ministers deemed to have contravened the Ministerial Code.

(AQW 3997/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Section 51D of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 already provides a mechanism by which we can move a motion for a resolution of the Assembly censuring a Minister for failure to observe the terms of the Pledge of Office, which include compliance with the Ministerial Code of Conduct. Both the Pledge of Office and the Ministerial Code of Conduct form part of the Ministerial Code.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they discussed their intent to use the Royal Prerogative with external bodies, such as the Royal Household or Her Majesty's Government.

(AQW 4021/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: As the use of the prerogative order to appoint the Executive press secretary was at our discretion there was no need for us to discuss our intent with external bodies.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of annual pension contributions for the First Minister and deputy First Minister's Special Advisers in each year since 2007.

(AQW 4060/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We refer the member to the recent answer provided to AQW 2309/16-21.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of salary paid to the First Minister and deputy First Minister's Special Advisers in each year since 2007.

(AQW 4061/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We refer the member to the recent answer provided to AQW 2309/16-21.

Mr Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the difference between the Executive Information Service and the Executive News Service.

(AQW 4063/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Information Service (EIS) is a specialist discipline within the NICS. It provides media services and support to Executive Ministers through a team of dedicated professional staff.

The Executive News Service is run by EIS and is the generic email address which distributes all press releases for Ministers and government departments.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) departmental staff; and (ii) Northern Ireland Civil Service staff that were consulted prior to a job offer being made to the Executive Press Secretary.

(AQW 4088/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Prior to the job offer being made we consulted with Corporate HR and Departmental Solicitor's Office.

Mrs Hale asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the Programme for Government 2016-21.

(AQO 358/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We have heard a very positive response to the consultation on the draft PFG framework. Most respondents recognised that the approach we have outlined will deliver a range of outcomes for all our citizens and will improve their well-being through tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth.

We are currently finalising the next iteration of the Programme which will issue for a further period of public consultation in the near future. We want to reaffirm our commitment to secure the maximum engagement from across the community to how we intend to deliver better outcomes for all.

It will be a Programme that sets out the ambition the Executive has for all in our society.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government 2016-21.

(AQO 361/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We have heard a very positive response to the consultation on the draft PfG framework. Most respondents recognised that the approach we have outlined will deliver a range of outcomes for all our citizens and will improve their well-being through tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth.

We are currently finalising the next iteration of the Programme which will issue for a further period of public consultation in the near future. We want to reaffirm our commitment to secure the maximum engagement from across the community to how we intend to deliver better outcomes for all.

It will be a Programme that sets out the ambition the Executive has for all in our society.

Ms Gildernew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress made in implementing the Executive's commitment to removing barriers at interfaces.

(AQO 363/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive is committed to the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Headline Action to reduce and remove all interface barriers by 2023. While this is challenging work, progress is being made by engaging with, and seeking the consent and support of the people who live near the interfaces.

The Department of Justice is the lead Department for the T:BUC Headline Action for the removal of interface barriers and has advised that of a total of 59 interface barriers, work to date has reduced this number to 50, with sections of four other structures removed. Engagement has been initiated on 40 of the remaining 50 structures. Specific action plans have been developed covering 24 structures.

The Housing Executive is also making progress – having recently removed an Interface Barrier on the Crumlin Road. This is complementary to the excellent support being provided by the International Fund for Ireland's Peace Walls Programme.

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will allocate budget at the level proposed by the Victims and Survivors Service for the 2017-18 financial year.

(AQO 365/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The budget for the Victims and Survivors Service for 2016/2017 has been maintained at 2015/2016 levels with over £14m being provided to support the victims' sector.

We remain committed to ensuring that victims and survivors continue to receive the support and services required to meet their needs, as such we will give due consideration to all funding proposals received for 2017-2018.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) how many Freedom of Information requests she has received since coming to office; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by her Special Adviser; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, her Special Adviser.

(AQW 2339/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Since the Minister took up office on 25 May 2016, the Department has received 120 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, of which 52 have been answered as of 6 September 2016. Since 9 June 2016, all Freedom of Information requests have been sent to the Minister's Special Adviser for information and comment, totalling some 109 of the requests. None have been altered or amended either by, or at the request of, her Special Adviser.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of whether Northern Ireland will need to continue to comply with the EU Water Framework after the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

(AQW 2958/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The full legislative implications of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union will not be determined until after the UK's exit terms have been agreed and finalised.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) how air quality is monitored in Bangor; (ii) to detail any data on air quality in Bangor in each of the last five years; and (iii) what is being done to reduce air pollution in Bangor.

(AQW 3072/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department has responsibility for monitoring air pollution at six sites in Northern Ireland (Armagh, Ballymena, Belfast (2), Londonderry, Lough Navar), which are part of the UK's Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN); as well as sites which are used for monitoring levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and metals. These sites are used for reporting compliance with Air Quality Directives to the EU Commission. There are no such sites within Ards and North Down Borough Council area.

Under the Environment (NI) Order 2002, district councils have a statutory duty to review and assess air quality within their districts against objectives which are set out in the UK Air Quality Strategy, and prescribed in the Air Quality (NI) Regulations 2003. Where objectives are exceeded or are likely to be so, then councils must declare an Air Quality Management Area and draw up, with appropriate relevant authorities (such as Transport NI), an Action Plan. There is currently no AQMA in Bangor.

Details of air quality monitoring carried out in Ards and North Down Borough Council area are available in the council's latest Progress Report, which is available on the Department's website: <http://www.airqualityni.co.uk/laqm/district-council-reports>

Historical and current air quality monitoring data is also available at this website.

The Progress Report(s) will set out any air quality monitoring which the council currently carries out, as well as any monitoring carried out in the past, and will highlight any trends in air quality, the presence of any Air Quality Management Areas, and accompanying Action Plans to improve air quality.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 33132/11-15, whether she will (i) publish the five letters referred to; or (ii) detail the content of the letters to MLAs.

(AQW 3094/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In line with agreements on protecting the confidentiality of Executive business I will not publish material on the Executive decision-making process. I have already indicated the nature of the reservations about a public inquiry in my answer to AQW 1778.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) what discussions and/or meetings she has held or is planning to hold with the Chief Constable following the disclosure that PSNI Rural Crime Unit does not exist; and (ii) , given the amount of agricultural machinery and livestock thefts in border areas, how this is impacting on the work of the Cross-Border Crime Task Force announced in May 2016.

(AQW 3338/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: To date he Minister has held no discussions with the Chief Constable concerning the PSNI Rural Crime Unit.

My Department has not yet been directly involved with the Cross-Border Crime Task Force and is not therefore in a position to comment on any issues that may be impacting on its work.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) why her Department does not measure the amount of commercial and industrial waste produced; (ii) why there are no targets to reduce or recycle this waste; (iii) whether she has any plans to measure the total amount of waste produced; and (iv) if she has any plans to introduce reduction and recycling targets for this waste.

(AQW 3433/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Commercial waste which is collected by District Councils is monitored and reported through the WasteDataFlow system but there is no comparable system in respect of the commercial and industrial (C&I) waste which is privately collected. Waste operators are required to provide information on the waste they handle through waste transfer notes but this is not currently an effective way of providing accurate and comprehensive information on C&I arisings and recycling levels. Instead, waste surveys have been commissioned to determine information relating to C&I waste arisings and recycling figures. The latest survey, published in 2011, estimated that there was almost 1.3 million tonnes of C&I waste collected in Northern Ireland, of which 70% was diverted from landfill.

Given the lack of comprehensive data on C&I waste it has not been considered appropriate to set targets for the reduction or recycling of C&I waste.

At an operational level, an electronic management system for waste flow (eDOC) was introduced for waste operators early last year. When the scheme, which is currently voluntary, is fully implemented it should assist in the availability and quality of C&I waste data.

I would be happy to consider the introduction of reduction and recycling targets for C&I waste. However, this is dependent on the availability and accuracy of data which is required to set realistic but challenging targets and to measure their achievement.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline why her Department's website does not provide any contact details for her or her Permanent Secretary.

(AQW 3456/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department's website now includes contact details for me and my Permanent Secretary and can be accessed at the following links:

- <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/contacts/contact-ministers-office>
- <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/daera-permanent-secretary>

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what advice her Department is giving to homeowners affected by Japanese Knotweed.

(AQW 3539/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The advice provided to homeowners follows the Best Practice Management Guidance for Japanese Knotweed found at DAERA website <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/japanese-knotweed-guidance>. The treatment options are: herbicide treatment with a relevant glyphosate product, specialist onsite disposal methods such as deep burial at a depth of 5 m and off site disposal methods which would require disposal at a licenced landfill site.

In relation to landowner disputes between neighbouring properties, we advise homeowners to contact a solicitor for further advice as such cases are a civil matter between landowners. If there is reason to believe that an environmental crime is taking place contrary to the wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as amended, members of the public are advised to call the PSNI 101 number.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding.

(AQW 3575/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has not made and is not preparing any bids to the European Investment Bank at this stage.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the investigation into the pollution event on the River Faughan at the beginning of August 2016.

(AQW 3795/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) was first alerted to this incident on Monday 1 August by a member of the public who had noted a sour smell and foaming downstream of Claudy. NIEA staff were tasked to the area to investigate and concluded that some form of agricultural effluent had entered the river although no actual source could be found that evening. The investigation continued the next morning during which time a report was made to NIEA of dead fish in the river above Claudy.

Approximately two miles of the Faughan River was impacted stretching from the Killycor Bridge to Dungorkin Bridge. Staff who attended the original incident estimated the number of dead fish at around 1000. A more detailed count was completed subsequently by Loughs Agency, bringing the recorded number of dead fish to close to 2000, including salmon, sea trout, lamprey and eels. This meant the incident was then rated High Severity.

The Faughan is used to provide drinking water to Londonderry and NIEA staff alerted Northern Ireland Water to the incident during the early stages of the investigation to allow them to take appropriate action.

The Loughs Agency is in the process of compiling a prosecution file in relation to this incident and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this stage.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline her plans to roll out the Rural Business Start Up Grant.

(AQW 3810/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Rural Business Start Scheme is a pilot initiative designed to test the effectiveness of targeted funding in reducing financial poverty in rural areas. The Scheme operates as one element of my department's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme (TRPSI).

The Rural Business Start Scheme aims to encourage entrepreneurship and the creation of new self-employment opportunities for young people (18 to 30 years of age) and women and is only running in the Mid Ulster area during its pilot phase. The pilot closed for applications on Friday 30 September. A review of the pilot will be completed to determine the longer term potential of this approach and to inform the decision on whether to roll the Scheme out to other areas.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for an update on her Department's plans to input into the proposed review of the Groceries Code Adjudicator; and (ii) for her assessment on seeking the inclusion of farmers in the remit of the GCA during the review.

(AQW 3860/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- i) I understand that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) plans to launch its formal review of the Groceries Code Adjudicator later this year. I intend engaging in this review when launched and I have asked my officials to liaise closely with their counterparts in BEIS on this.
- ii) I strongly believe that those involved all along the supply chain should get a fair return for their work, including farmers. I will consider the case for the extension of the GCA's powers to investigate issues beyond those between the supermarkets and their primary suppliers. I will continue to build constructive relationships with my Ministerial

counterparts at home and in England, Scotland and Wales to look at actions to encourage sustainable growth, and a greater sharing of risk and reward, along the local agri-food supply chain.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what assessments of due diligence, including a fit and proper person test, has his Department carried out on the proposed operator of the gasification plant for Airport Road, Belfast.

(AQW 3883/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: This facility will be regulated under the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013, which for this type of installation, does not require an assessment of due diligence or fit and proper persons test on the proposed operator.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how much her Department and each of its arm's-length bodies have spent on (i) built; and (ii) natural heritage over each of the last five years.

(AQW 3896/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) Responsibility for supporting the built heritage sector transferred from the Department of the Environment on the 6th May 2016 to the new Department for Communities (DfC). Information on built heritage expenditure should therefore be sought from that department.
- (ii) The table below details how much has been spent on supporting natural heritage functions by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Total (£m)
2011-12	13.27
2012-13	12.48
2013-14	12.65
2014-15	12.03
2015-16	10.36
Total	60.79

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what guidelines or protocols exist in her Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.

(AQW 3938/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: There are no guidelines or protocols in my Department for meetings with third parties in the absence of officials. The need to retain a record of such meetings is considered on a case by case basis.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2113/16-21, to detail (i) how many times have officials or ex-officials been referred to the PSNI for investigation since 2011; and (ii) to outline the reasons for referral.

(AQW 3967/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: No DAERA officials or ex-officials have been referred to the PSNI for investigation since 2011.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the amount and value of dried mussels (i) produced; and (ii) exported in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4010/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department is responsible for the licensing and monitoring, the harvesting, on-growing and export of Live Mussels only.

The Food Standards Agency has advised that there are two industry accepted states of mussel production, Live and Cooked.

The licensing of shellfish cooking in Northern Ireland would normally fall under the remit of the District Councils, as the responsible authorities. I understand that there are currently no licensed establishments in Northern Ireland for the cooking of shellfish.

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she intends to commission research on the patterns of poverty in rural areas.

(AQW 4056/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A repository of rural statistics is available on my departmental website which includes information on a number of core themes including income and poverty. The data is disaggregated along rural/urban categories and where available by east/west.

The information will be updated in line with the revised settlement classification as data becomes available from Departments. My department also has a research programme which is delivered by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and this includes research into key issues within rural areas including accessing services and poverty.

The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure is one of the key tools that government use in measuring poverty. A review of this is currently being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) with the support of expert users and a Steering Group comprised of representatives from all Government Departments and from a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies and District Councils.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2719/16-21, whether she can provide the wording and the specific section of the application form.

(AQW 4093/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Section on Supporting Documentation in the Guide to the Young Farmers' Payment and Regional Reserve states that "the Department may seek further clarification on the evidence which has been provided". Interviews are part of the further clarification process.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2717/16-21, to detail how many applications were rejected based on this interview.

(AQW 4099/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: 15 applications for Young Farmer's Payment in 2015 were rejected as a result of the interview process.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2717/16-21, how many were invited to interview.

(AQW 4100/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: 75 applicants for Young Farmer's Payment in 2015 were invited to interview.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) when the discharge consents for Ballylumford Power Station were last reviewed; (ii) when they will next be reviewed; and (iii) what assessment has been made of the environmental impact of all discharges from the power station.

(AQW 4103/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: NIEA last reviewed all discharge consents for Ballylumford Power station in October 2014 to meet the requirements of the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED). The next review will be undertaken within 4 years of the publication of the European Commission's Best Available Techniques (BAT) Reference document for Large Combustion Plants, (which is currently at final draft stage), in compliance with the IED. Air and water quality impact assessments have been completed for all discharges from the power station.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2716/16-21, to outline the outcome of the two cases processed at second stage review.

(AQW 4133/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: One application for second stage review was received more than 42 days after the Stage One decision and was rejected accordingly. The other application for a second stage review was withdrawn by the applicant.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the funding or schemes available through her Department for rural village regeneration.

(AQW 4158/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Rural Village Renewal scheme under the LEADER component of the Rural Development Programme delivered through Local Action Groups (LAGs) had an indicative budget of £8m available to implement the scheme. LEADER is a bottom up initiative and the LAGs have indicated through their Local Rural Development Strategies that they plan to invest £12.7m in rural village renewal through LEADER going forward.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department will support farmers in Fermanagh and South Tyrone that have experienced limited crop yield in 2016.

(AQW 4207/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Support is available across all of Northern Ireland for farmers who have been impacted by the adverse weather conditions during the summer and early autumn. Recent drier weather has helped to alleviate difficulties arising from these adverse weather conditions through enabling much better progress with field operations and better conditions for the

grazing of cattle. Many farmers, including those in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, who are experiencing financial challenges as a result of limited grass and crop yield, will benefit from advance payments of the Basic Payment Scheme from 16 October. A high percentage of payments in December, will also help with cash flow issues.

Farmers in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, who are in a Business Development Group can discuss grass and crop management, winter feeding and business management with their peers. I would also encourage attendance at Feed Efficiency and Business Management Workshops which are open to all farmers and growers. CAFRE will deliver these workshops in the areas worst affected by poor weather conditions, during the autumn and winter. Information about dates and venues of these workshops in Fermanagh and South Tyrone will be available in the local press and on the DAERA website by the end of October.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2559/16-21, whether these proposals include provision for a specific bicycle trial.
(AQW 4211/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As clarified in AQW 2559/16-21, my officials in Forest Service will liaise closely with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on any recreation proposals the Council wish to develop.

As such, the nature and type of any products proposed, including the potential for bicycle trails, will be a matter for the Council.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the export of Irish greyhounds to China.
(AQW 4214/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Dogs being exported from Northern Ireland to China must be accompanied by a valid export health certificate which has been completed by an Authorised Veterinary Inspector (AVI). Applications for pet health certificates are made through the Trade Section of my department's Veterinary Service Animal Health Group.

According to Trade Section records (dating back to 2012) no health certificates were issued for the export of greyhounds from Northern Ireland to China.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has taken any action to prevent the export of Irish Greyhounds to China.
(AQW 4215/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Dogs being exported from Northern Ireland to China must be accompanied by a valid export health certificate which has been completed by an Authorised Veterinary Inspector (AVI). Applications for pet health certificates are made through the Trade Section of my Department's Veterinary Service Animal Health Group.

According to Trade Section records (dating back to 2012) no health certificates were issued for the export of greyhounds from Northern Ireland to China, therefore I am not aware of any action that needs to be taken at this time.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the impact on vulnerable marine species by the proposed Compressed Air Energy Storage project at Islandmagee.
(AQW 4222/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: An Environment Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment has been undertaken for the Compressed Air Energy Storage project at Islandmagee.

My Department has considered these assessments as part of the application process for the Marine Construction Licence, Water Abstraction Licence and Water Discharge Consent for this proposed development. Further information has been requested to provide clarification on bird monitoring results, and for more detail on potential impacts to marine food web and Common skate.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline when she will be responding to her Department's consultation into the future of payments for Areas of Natural Constraint.
(AQW 4241/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In June, following the consultation on Options for Future Support to Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC), I announced that I will not reduce the Basic Payment Scheme to fund an ANC Scheme under Pillar I of the CAP. A Pillar I to Pillar II transfer to fund an ANC Scheme in Pillar II under the Rural Development Programme will also not be introduced.

I am still considering other options but, given the pressures on both the Department's and the Executive's budget, providing any additional support will be challenging. Long-term value for money cannot be ignored, nor indeed the redistribution of Pillar I monies which is already occurring as a result of the transition towards flat rate support in Pillar I.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the number of people in 2016 that applied for the 13 to 15 year old Tractor Driving courses in Loughry and Greenmount from (a) Co. Fermanagh; and (b) Co. Tyrone; and (ii) the numbers from each area who completed the course.

(AQW 4289/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Table 1 details the number of applicants from Co Fermanagh and Co Tyrone who completed the Tractor Driving Course for 13-15 year olds at Loughry and Greenmount Campuses in 2016.

Table 1: A summary of applicants to CAFRE's Tractor Driving Course for 13 to 15 year olds from Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone in 2016.

Campus	(a) Co Fermanagh		(b) Co Tyrone	
	(i) Number of Applicants	(ii) Number who completed the course	(i) Number of Applicants	(ii) Number who completed the course
Loughry	4	3	16	13
Greenmount	1	1	6	6
Totals	5	4	22	19

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she would consider extending the slurry spreading period in recognition of the inclement weather conditions and the fact that many farmers cannot secure their final cut of silage.

(AQW 4343/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The aims of the Nitrates Directive and the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NAP Regulations) is to protect water quality by ensuring that the correct amount of nutrients are applied under favourable conditions and at a time that they can be used by growing crops, including grass.

One of the key methods for achieving this is the requirement for a closed spreading period for organic manures – including both slurry and farmyard manure. This prohibits organic manures, excluding dirty water, from being spread from midnight 15 October to midnight 31 January. Farmyard manure must not be applied from midnight 31 October to midnight 31 January. These periods represent the time when the risk of nutrient-leaching is at its highest and there is little or no plant growth. Farmers are encouraged to spread slurry and manures throughout the growing season rather than leaving applications until just before the start of the closed spreading period.

Whilst I recognise that some farmers have encountered difficult circumstances this summer which has hampered normal agricultural activities such as cutting silage and spreading slurry, the rainfall data from the Meteorological Office would indicate that whilst rainfall for Northern Ireland for June and July 2016 was above average it was considered to be in the normal range of the long-term expected average. Indeed May and August 2016 were close to or below average.

To enable the requirements of the closed spreading periods to be met, all farmers are required to have a minimum of 22 weeks slurry/manure storage for their livestock enterprises. Pigs and poultry enterprises require a minimum of 26 weeks storage. However, farmers are also further required to have regard to the storage capacity likely to be needed on their farm during periods of adverse weather conditions when, due to extended periods of wet weather, frozen ground or otherwise, the land application of organic manure is not permitted. Many farmers requiring additional storage capacity to meet the requirements availed of financial assistance from the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme.

There is no legal provision in the NAP Regulations to grant farmers a waiver and let them spread organic manure during the closed spreading period. However, under exceptional circumstances, beyond the control of and not foreseeable by an individual farmer, a defence may be made for non-compliance with some of the requirements of the NAP Regulations including spreading organic manures during the closed period. Such cases would be considered by NIEA on a case-by-case basis and must be evidence-based showing that the farmer had taken all reasonable steps to manage the situation and was left with no alternative.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how ministerial time for party business is accounted for on departmentally funded trips.

(AQW 4470/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I have not carried out any party business while on departmentally funded trips, nor do I seek opportunities to do so.

If any occasion should occur when party business is performed on such a trip, it would be carried out in my own time.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to provide the current value of the fish and shellfish catch for Northern Ireland's fishing fleet.

(AQW 4486/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The value of fish landings into the UK and abroad by NI fishing vessels in 2015 is presented in the table below.

Landings into the UK and Abroad by Vessels Administered in Northern Ireland in 2015

	Quantity (‘000 tonnes)	Value (£ million)
Demersal fish	2.3	2.5
Pelagic fish	29.8	16.1
Shellfish	15.6	27.2
Total Fish	47.7	45.8

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many pups were born in each licenced breeding establishment in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4564/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department does not hold statistical information on the number of pups born in licensed breeding establishments.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether funding will be made available to continue the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

(AQW 4700/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The current Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is programmed to run for two years (claims made in 2015 and 2016, and paid in 2016 and 2017) and is worth almost £20 million per annum.

In June, following the consultation on Options for Future Support to ANC, I announced that I will not reduce the Basic Payment Scheme to fund an ANC Scheme under Pillar I of the CAP. A Pillar I to Pillar II transfer to fund an ANC Scheme in Pillar II under the Rural Development Programme will also not be introduced.

I am still considering other options but, given the pressures on both the Department's and the Executive's budget, providing any additional support will be challenging. Long-term value for money cannot be ignored, nor indeed the redistribution of Pillar I monies which is already occurring as a result of the transition towards flat rate support in Pillar I.

Department for Communities

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline measures that he is taking to ensure that no one in need of a crisis loan will be disadvantaged by the service switching from front line staff dealing with it at a local level to a teleclaims crisis loan service; and (ii) whether he will undertake to review the new arrangements.

(AQW 2800/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 provides for the abolition of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans removing a facility to provide these discretionary support payments as part of the Social Security system. It is proposed to replace these discretionary elements of Social Fund with a new Discretionary Support scheme.

Discretionary Support is unique to Northern Ireland and is aimed to assist people on low incomes who find themselves in a financial crisis situation which presents a significant risk to the health, safety or well being of either the person making the application or their immediate family.

The main access channel to Discretionary Support will be by telephone which will ensure that everyone can access the service on a date and time that meets their need. However, for the most vulnerable who may be unable to access Discretionary Support via the telephone, a face to face service will continue to be available.

A majority of decisions on the support available will be made on the day the application is made.

If anyone is dissatisfied with the outcome of their application to Discretionary Support they may seek an internal review. If they remain dissatisfied, they may seek an external independent review by the Discretionary Support Commissioner.

Operational delivery of the Discretionary Support scheme will be subject to ongoing review. The Department is developing an evaluation framework to monitor the scheme and assess if it delivers the agreed objectives. The overall budget for the scheme will also be closely monitored and a full report on the progress of the scheme will be submitted to the Assembly at the end of each financial year.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Communities to detail how much money has been allocated to Derry City and Strabane Council for regeneration works since local government reform in 2014.

(AQW 3540/16-21)

Mr Givan: Since 2014 the Department has allocated contracts directly to the Council of £7,594,346 for regeneration works as well as £285,318 for design fees.

As Derry City and Strabane District Council was not officially established until 1 April 2015, these figures include funding to the former Derry City Council and Strabane District Council from 1 April 2014.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities whether individuals availing of the Affordable Warmth Scheme will have access to a legal route of recourse without the input of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive if the work undertaken is substandard.

(AQW 3803/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have been advised by the Housing Executive that all of the grants they process are directed to privately owned properties and that the householder is responsible for identifying and appointing a contractor to carry out the works. As a facilitator to the contract between the applicant and the contractor, not a party, the Executive is careful to ensure that it does not act in such a way as to be seen to be a party to the contract. For example it will therefore never recommend a specific contractor to an applicant.

To assist grants applicants the Housing Executive has compiled lists of contractors who are willing to carry out works under various grants and makes these lists available to applicants. In compiling these lists the Housing Executive fully consulted its internal Legal Department and the lists include very clear information and disclaimers. Applicants are therefore aware that the list is not an "approved" list, that it is a matter for the applicant as to which contractor to engage, and that they do so at entirely their own risk. It is made clear that the Housing Executive cannot verify the competence or otherwise of contractors who wished to be included on the list.

As far as possible the Housing Executive offers some protections to grants applicants. In the case of the larger Renovation and Disabled Facilities Grants where the value of the works exceeds £5,000 the applicant must select a contractor who is a member of a recognised contractor warranty scheme. A Warranty Bond must be provided and is paid for by the Housing Executive. This Bond offers protection to applicants in the event of a contractor going out of business part way through the work or if unsatisfactory work is carried out.

In the case of smaller grants such as the Affordable Warmth Scheme the payment for the grant is usually assigned to the contractor by the applicant. The Housing Executive will not make such payment until a) a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion for the works has been received from Building Control and b) they have been provided with a range of safety certificates such as a Gas Safe Certificate for gas heating and an Oftec Certificate for Oil heating where applicable. In the case of Cavity wall insulation Building Control departments will not issue a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion until they have received a CIGA Certificate for the works. All of this provides reasonable assurance that the works have been carried out to an acceptable standard.

Outside of these assurances if subsequent latent defects do occur the applicant must address them through the most appropriate legal procedure available.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities how many cases of anti-social behaviour have been recorded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive over the last two year period.

(AQW 3907/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the total number of cases of anti-social behaviour which have been recorded by them over the last two year period are as follows:

- 2014/15 – 3,052 cases
- 2015/16 – 3,230 cases

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to outline what contingency plans he has put in place, in conjunction with the Minister of Finance, in preparation for any reclassification of Housing Associations by the Office of National Statistics.

(AQW 3957/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have met with the Minister of Finance and his officials and discussed the matter of ONS in great detail. I have also met with my Executive colleagues as recently as Thursday the 29th September 2016.

Ongoing work is continuing between our officials to ensure that everyone is fully briefed and I am confident that all the preparatory work which could be done at this stage has been achieved.

The ONS report has been published and the findings are in the process of being analysed. The options to achieve a reversal of the reclassification decision are currently being considered and will be progressed accordingly.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities what powers he has that can impact on child poverty.

(AQW 3973/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Life Chances Act requires us to publish and lay before the Assembly a Child Poverty Strategy, prepare and publish annual reports on the strategy and revise the strategy every third year. The Executive's first Child Poverty Strategy, 'Improving Children's Life Chances,' was published in March 2011, annual reports have been produced and published and a review of the strategy was completed in its third year. The Executive's revised Child Poverty Strategy was published on 25 March 2016. Responsibility for poverty policy transferred to the new Department for Communities on 9 May 2016.

While my Department takes the lead for poverty policy, tackling poverty is an Executive responsibility and one which can only be tackled by working together. My Department is specifically responsible for developing a draft Social Strategy, which will set out a new approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion in a more structured and co-ordinated manner, mainstreaming this work into the new Programme for Government. Work to tackle child poverty will be integral to this Strategy. I plan to bring the draft Social Strategy to the Executive in the coming weeks, with the intention of having it issued, subject to Executive approval, for public consultation.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the future of the Enniskillen Northern Ireland Housing Executive Grants Office.

(AQW 3982/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that it is currently reviewing its grants service across Northern Ireland. This review is taking in a number of factors. The central part of the review is to consider how the Housing Executive can improve the service for grants customers, particularly with a view to shortening the processing times and delivering this service to customers in their own homes, rather than requiring them to visit an office.

The review would mean that grants offices in the West would undertake all of the grants work in the District Council areas of Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh.

The review has also considered whether some of the back-office services could be amalgamated into one office in Omagh. The original proposal was to offer a service for customers to meet grants staff or to drop off documents in the Enniskillen housing office. It would have had no impact on staffing levels.

However, following consultation with local representatives and staff, the Housing Executive has revised the proposal for the Fermanagh Office. It has concluded that the remaining six administration staff will continue to provide a grants service from the Enniskillen Office. It has also concluded that it is necessary to consolidate the remaining Technical Officers into a technical team based in the Omagh Grants Office.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of employment schemes for Job Seekers Allowance claimants.

(AQW 4002/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has a variety of programmes designed to enhance someone's employability skills and support them to move closer to the labour market, obtain employment and to remain in work.

Steps to Success

Steps 2 Success (S2S) is my Department's main adult employment programme which was introduced in October 2014. The programme is delivered across 3 regions by contracted providers and is designed to allow Lead Contractors to deliver a flexible, personalised service, tailored to meet individual need. Lead Contractors work with each participant to help them to address barriers to employment and to find and sustain work.

Each participant on the programme agrees a Progression to Employment Plan (PEP) with their S2S Employment Adviser, setting out the actions and activities that they both will undertake while participating on the programme. The PEPs are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The PEP is underpinned by Service Guarantees which ensures that all participants get the support and help to assist them to progress into employment.

Jobseeker's Allowance claimants are required to participate on S2S at certain points in their benefit claim. Those aged 18 to 24 years old are required to participate when they have been claiming JSA for 9 months. Those aged 25 years old and over will be required to participate when they have been claiming JSA for 12 months. JSA claimants with identified barriers to finding employment can enter the programme after 3 months on benefit. JSA clients referred to S2S must participate on the programme in order to maintain entitlement to benefit.

All monitoring of performance by S2S Lead Contractors is managed by 2 dedicated teams. A Contract Management Unit within my Department has the key role of managing and monitoring the delivery of S2S and ensuring that the programme is delivered to a standard which meet the terms and conditions of the S2S contract. My Department also has a Service Level Agreement with the Department for Economy's Quality Performance Team who has responsibility for evaluating the quality of the programme. A key focus of each evaluation will be on how well Lead Contractors and their supply chain partners are meeting the needs of individual participants throughout their journey from initial referral to the programme to sustained employment.

A set of key performance indicators has been developed, against which the performance of the programme is measured. The main measure of success focuses on the percentage of participants moving into employment. Based on the performance of previous programmes and the relative distance the target group is from the labour market, the expected performance level for this indicator has been set at 28%.

Official statistics providing data on the number of participants moving into and sustaining employment are published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on a quarterly basis. The latest publication shows that the percentage of participants from across Northern Ireland that have moved into employment is 24%; this varies across the three Contract Areas from 29% in the Southern region to 24% in the Belfast region and 20% in the Northern region. The S2S Statistical Bulletin is available on my Department's website and published at the following link - <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/steps-2-success-statistical-bulletin-october-2014-june-2016>.

Statistics from more recent months show that programme performance is improving and moving towards the expected performance level of 28%. This should be reflected in future statistical publications.

Into Work Training Support

Into Work Training Support (IWTS) is a pilot programme introduced on 27 April 2015 which is aimed at those clients who have been assessed by Employment Advisers as being closest to the labour market and who only require a 'light touch' or short training intervention to move them into employment at the earliest opportunity.

IWTS provides access to training support in the form of Short Accredited Training Courses (SATCs) and Non Accredited, Industry Standard Training Courses (NAISTCs) designed to meet the individual needs of clients in their journey towards employment. Participation is entirely voluntary. The programme is delivered through the network of Further Education colleges throughout Northern Ireland.

At 16 August 2016, 5,932 participants have progressed into employment within 13 weeks of completion of their IWTS course.

Youth Employment Scheme Work Experience Programme

The Youth Employment Scheme Work Experience Programme is a voluntary programme, and is available to job ready unemployed 18-24 year olds. It is available to both economically inactive clients and benefit recipients, including those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. Benefit recipients participating on the programme retain entitlement to their benefit and are offered assistance with eligible travel and childcare costs.

The programme has produced positive results with 27% of those participating gaining employment since it was introduced in August 2015.

Condition Management Programme

The Condition Management Programme (CMP) is a person-centred work-focused, health rehabilitation programme. The key aim of the programme is to help people who are unemployed to manage their health condition and symptoms, improve their confidence and well-being, and in doing so, help improve their chances of making a successful return to work.

CMP is entirely voluntary and primarily aimed at people receiving Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

The programme is delivered by experienced multi-disciplinary teams of healthcare professionals from the five Health & Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.

In April 2015 to March 2016, 292 clients in receipt of JSA participated in the programme and from April to August 2016, 125 clients. All CMP completers are assessed in relation to their employability pre and post participation on the programme. In 2015/16, 70% of those who availed of CMP showed improved employability scores on completion.

Recently Departmental staff have worked with the CMP health professional teams to make improvements to the programme particularly to have in place robust tracking of participants during and beyond their time on CMP.

My Department plans to review all its employment programmes and provision to ensure they remain of value to clients seeking to move into and remain in employment.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the amount spent by his Department on the Steps 2 Success programme, broken down by constituency, since 2013.
(AQW 4003/16-21)

Mr Givan: Steps 2 Success (S2S) is the Department's current adult return to work programme. The aim of S2S is to deliver a flexible personalised service, tailored to meet individual needs. S2S participants receive an individual, personal service to help them achieve their job goals and progress into sustained employment. S2S commenced in October 2014.

It is not possible to identify expenditure by Parliamentary Constituency for the S2S programme. Contracts for this programme were awarded to Lead Contractors who deliver the programmes across a number of areas throughout Northern Ireland, therefore any spend would include payments for all areas for which each Lead Contractor is responsible and not specifically for each Constituency.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities for the rationale behind his decision to conduct a review of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland; and whether any assessment has been made on the Charity Commission executing its duties and responsibilities in line with best practice.
(AQW 4007/16-21)

Mr Givan: As Minister responsible for oversight of the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland, I want to be able to assure the public and Assembly that the systems and relationships currently in place are effective, efficient, represent best practice and deliver value for money.

My officials have not yet completed their review of the Commission; however, if there are opportunities to improve and reform charity regulation and how it is delivered I will drive the necessary changes.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities what consideration is given to tenants' finances when projected increases in service charges are made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and then withdrawn.

(AQW 4008/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive does not levy service charges in respect of the properties occupied by its tenants.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the range of services and programmes available at Fintona Library; and (ii) what efforts being made by his Department to maximise local community participation and involvement, including partnerships with schools, playgroups and community organisations.

(AQW 4012/16-21)

Mr Givan: Libraries NI has informed me that the library in Fintona currently offers a wide range of programmes and services which are aimed at maximising local community participation and involvement. Programmes such as reading groups, the weekly 'Rhythm and Rhyme' sessions, the 'Quality Assured Class Visits' which are available to all local schools, and the Big Summer Read (throughout July and August) are designed to attract families and young children into the library. The 'One to One Assistance' and other IT programmes, such as 'Got IT?' and 'Go ON!' are designed to help people in the local community to improve their IT skills and to use library IT services including farmers and those seeking employment.

In Fintona, Libraries NI has also organised activities to encourage people in local communities to come to the library in order to learn more about how they can improve their health and well-being and tackle issues such as stress, mindfulness and nutrition. The library offers free internet access as well through the on-site public access computers and the free Wi-Fi for users with their own devices. In addition, Libraries NI provides Homecall and mobile library services in the area which, not only provide stops for the general public to use, but also calls at a number of primary schools in the general area which are at a distance from the branch library. The range of services and programmes available at Fintona Library are set out at Annex A.

Community events are also organised regularly at Fintona Library. The most recent include a celebration of Roald Dahl Day (14 September), a training session on the use of iPhoto (28 September) and a Macmillan Coffee Morning (29 September) which raised £400.

Annex A

Services and Programmes Available at Fintona Library

Services:

- Extensive collection of reading materials
- Computer & WIFI access
- Printing service
- Photocopying service
- Extensive collection of reading materials
- Access to virtual services including Britannica for children/students to help with homework
- Online collection of e-magazines/e-books which are free to download
- Online resources to help with child development such as rub-a-dub- hub
- Ancestry online
- Fax facility
- Scan to email or removable disk drive
- GOT IT – one to one IT support sessions, available on request
- Information sessions can be requested to demonstrate how the library's e-resources can help children with their homework.

Regular Programmes:

- Rhythm and Rhyme (children 0-4)
- Seasonal Story time & Crafts
- Children's Reading Groups:
 - Wizard Readers (Children aged 9-11) – Monthly
 - Junior Reading Group (Children aged 7-8) – Monthly
- School visits
- Nursery Unit visits
- Tea and Newspapers – Weekly

- Knit and Natter – Fortnightly
- Adult Reading Group – Monthly
- Mindfulness colouring – Monthly
- Tea & Puzzles – Monthly

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities his investment in independent advice provision.
(AQW 4047/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is investing £6.1m in independent advice provision in the 2016/17 year. This includes funding and support services for frontline advice organisations, housing and mortgage debt advice and support to assist people during the implementation of Welfare Reform.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities whether he would consider introducing musical instruments funding for the Lambeg fraternity.
(AQW 4049/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department provides funding to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) to fund the Musical Instruments for Bands programme. The scheme is open to bands based in Northern Ireland, which are formally constituted. ACNI has advised that eligible Bands can apply to the programme for support towards the cost of the purchase of Lambeg Drums. However I am aware that many of the Lambeg Drum fraternity are not part of a band and this anomaly will be looked at in the future.

Bands can also apply for funding for musical tuition through the Ulster-Scots Agency's Financial Assistance Scheme. In 2015, the Agency allocated approximately £9,595.00 towards tuition for Lambeg Drumming Groups.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how many homes have been built by housing associations since 2006.
(AQW 4051/16-21)

Mr Givan: Since 2006 to date housing associations have built 10,431 new social housing units.

This figure does not include the provision of new homes through the rehabilitation/re-improvement and acquisition of existing satisfactory/off-the-shelf properties which form the Social Housing Development Programme.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline the staff promotion process adopted by his Department.
(AQW 4052/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department follows normal vacancy management process when considering filling vacant posts as set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Human Resources Handbook. Staff promotion lists is one of a number of tools that may be used by the Department when considering filling vacant posts. There are two main avenues for substantive staff promotion; Trawl Competitions which are used where the post in question requires specialist skills or aptitudes and General Service promotion competitions.

General Service promotion competitions across the NICS are determined by Corporate Human Resources in the Department of Finance, in consultation with NICS Departments and Central Trade Union Side. Promotion competitions are convened as and when necessary when a demand for a particular grade is identified. Notification of new promotion competitions are advertised by HR Connect which is the transactional Human Resource service for the NICS Departments.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how many houses are managed by each housing association
(AQW 4053/16-21)

Mr Givan: The total number of units managed by each housing association at 31 March 2015 is detailed in the table below:

Name of Housing Association	Total Units
Abbeyfield & Wesley	330
Alpha	959
Apex	4596
Ark	350
Choice *	9634
Clanmil	3806
Connswater	759
Covenanter	42
Craigowen	336

Name of Housing Association	Total Units
Fold	5956
Grove	218
Habinteg	2168
Hearth	98
Helm	5546
Newington	508
NICHA	0
North Belfast	905
Rural	431
South Ulster	1048
St Matthews	202
Triangle	705
Woodvale & Shankill	456
Total	39053

* The stock figures for Open Door and Ulidia as at 31 March 2015, 401 and 1257 respectively, have been incorporated into the stock figure for Choice as both organisations have since merged with Choice. Ulidia's merger took place on 12 June 2015 and Open Door's merger took place on 1 December 2015.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the total funding provided by his Department to housing associations in each year since 2006.

(AQW 4054/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department provides funding to Housing Associations both directly and via the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

The table below shows funding provided directly to the Associations in each of the last seven years². This funding financed investment in a range of housing related projects and also the purchase of affordable homes, mainly by the Northern Ireland Co - Ownership Housing Association (NICHA).

The table also shows funding provided by the NIHE to Associations in each of the last seven years in order to finance the development of new social and affordable homes.

NIHE also provides funding to Housing Associations for other initiatives such as Supporting People; however the amount of such funding which is attributable to Housing Associations is not readily available within the Department.

Table 1: Funding Provided to Housing Associations

	2009-10 £m	2010-11 £m	2011-12 £m	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15 £m	2015-16 £m
Funding Provided Directly							
Capital	15.0	18.0	28.2	49.8	67.4 Note 1	13.0 Note 1 Note 2	102.6
Resource	0.1	-	-	-	-	0.1	0.1
Provided via NIHE							
Capital	157.3	166.8	143.1	85.1	75.4	146.1 Note 2	98.5

Notes:

1. Included within the funding is £5m (2013-14) and £7.5m (2014-15) which was paid to Roseville Trading Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of NICHA.
2. In 2014-15, NIHE administered funding of £50m payable to NICHA for the provision of affordable housing.

² Records are held for seven years in accordance with my Department's disposal of records schedule

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the window replacement scheme planned for Rectory Park, Portadown.

(AQW 4068/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the estimated start date for the double glazing scheme in Rectory Park, Portadown is 20th February 2017.

The Housing Executive had planned to start this scheme in September 2016. Unfortunately a legal challenge to the procurement exercise has resulted in a delay of approximately 14 weeks in the award of contract.

The challenge is now resolved and the Housing Executive is now working to start all schemes delayed by this issue as soon as possible.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 53040/11-16, for an update.

(AQW 4076/16-21)

Mr Givan: Negotiations between my Department, the Department of Finance and HM Treasury are ongoing.

However, significant work has been completed in preparing the operational basis upon which savings will be delivered. Fraud investigation, customer compliance visiting and case review processes are all in place and working effectively. Underpinning those operational structures is a new case selection and routing function, meaning cases can be dealt with more quickly and efficiently.

I am confident these measures, alongside work ongoing to further refine counter fraud and error operations, such as improved matching of data to target fraud, will ensure any additional investment will generate further savings and deliver strong returns as envisaged in the Fresh Start Agreement.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities to outline how Ministerial time used for party business is accounted for on departmentally funded trips.

(AQW 4094/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have not conducted any party business on departmentally funded trips.

The Ministerial Code sets out the rules and procedures for the exercise of the duties and responsibilities of Ministers. It places clear requirements on Ministers to observe the highest standards of propriety and regularity involving impartiality; ensure that their public positions are not used to promote their private interests; and declare any interests which may conflict with their responsibilities.

I am satisfied that I am fully compliant with the Code.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities what work his Department is undertaking with the private rented sector to improve safety for tenants in rented homes.

(AQW 4096/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department is currently undertaking a review of the Role and Regulation of the Private Rented Sector. The standard of properties, including safety issues, is within the scope of the review. Proposals for change resulting from the review will be published for consultation in the coming months.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 will improve standards in the HMO sector by ensuring that a landlord or any agent is a fit and proper person, and by checking the standards of physical accommodation as well as tenancy management standards. This will provide protection for tenants ensuring accommodation is safe, well managed and of good quality. New regulations under development will also require carbon monoxide alarms/detectors to be installed in all HMOs. It is the intention to have these completed and ready for implementation by April 2018.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities to outline what consideration he has given to five-yearly electrical safety checks in the private rented sector.

(AQW 4097/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is currently carrying out a review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector. The standard of properties, including electrical safety issues, is within the scope of the review. Proposals for change resulting from the review will be published for consultation in the coming months.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities to provide an update on the next stages of his Department's reviews into (i) the role and regulation of the private rented sector; and (ii) the fitness standard.

(AQW 4098/16-21)

Mr Givan: A set of proposals for change resulting from the Review of the Role and Regulation of the Private Rented Sector will be published for consultation in the coming months.

My Department has also committed to undertake a review of the Housing Fitness Standard to ensure that the legislation that governs our understanding of unacceptable housing is fit for purpose and enables us to take action to address poor housing conditions.

In March 2016 my officials circulated a discussion document setting out the case for change and potential options for the way ahead. Responses to the document are being given careful consideration, and I expect in the coming months to bring forward proposals for consultation on the future of the Housing Fitness Standard.

Mr Logan asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many housing new builds are planned over the next five years in North Antrim, broken down by property type.

(AQW 4120/16-21)

Mr Givan: As the Social Housing Development Programme is formulated on a three year basis, information on the number of new social housing schemes is currently only available for the three year period from 2016/17 to 2018/19.

There are currently 226 social housing units under construction in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency. Detail of these schemes can be found in Table 1 below.

A further 332 new social housing units are programmed to start on-site in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency as part of the Social Housing Development Programme between 2016/17 and 2018/19. The detail of these schemes is included in Table 2 below.

The annual process to formulate the Social Housing Development Programme for the period from 2017/18 to 2019/20 is currently underway, and further schemes may be added to the plans for 2017/18 and 2018/19 as part of that process.

However, please be advised that programmed schemes can sometimes be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons such as delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission.

Table 1: Social housing schemes recorded as starts but not completed (under construction) in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency at 29th September 2016

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Ark	Templemoyle (Transfer)	Kells	New Build	General Needs	3	2015/16	2017/18
Ark	Templemoyle (Transfer)	Kells	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2015/16	2017/18
Ark	Templemoyle (Transfer)	Kells	New Build	Active Elderly	5	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	61 Market Road	Ballymena	New Build	General Needs	28	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	61 Market Road	Ballymena	New Build	Active Elderly	6	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	61 Market Road	Ballymena	New Build	Physical Disabilities	2	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	Carniny Court	Ballymena	Re-improvement	Vulnerable Women	20	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	Carniny Court	Ballymena	New Build	Vulnerable Women	3	2015/16	2017/18
Fold	19-21 Pottinger Street	Cullybackey	New Build	General Needs	15	2015/16	2017/18
Fold	19-21 Pottinger Street	Cullybackey	New Build	Active Elderly	6	2015/16	2017/18
Fold	19-21 Pottinger Street	Cullybackey	New Build	Physical Disabilities	3	2015/16	2017/18
Fold	Leyland Heights	Ballycastle	New Build	General Needs	28	2015/16	2017/18

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Fold	Leyland Heights	Ballycastle	New Build	Physical Disabilities	2	2015/16	2017/18
Fold	18 Royal Court	Gracehill	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	131 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	9 Trinity Mews	Ahoghill	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	15 The Mews	Ballycastle	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	46 Leyland Meadows	Ballycastle	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	22 Gault Park	Ballymoney	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	11 Edenmore Crescent	Bendooragh	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	35 Edenmore Crescent	Bendooragh	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	5 Millicent Avenue	Balnamore	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Choice	St Mary's PS, Larne Road	Ballymena	New Build	General Needs	65	2016/17	2018/19
Choice	St Mary's PS, Larne Road	Ballymena	New Build	Active Elderly	9	2016/17	2018/19
Fold	19-21 Royal Court	Gracehill	New Build	General Needs	20	2016/17	2017/18
Rural	11 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2016/17	2016/17

Table 2: Social housing schemes programmed to start in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency as part of the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2016/17 – 2018/19 at 29th September 2016

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	Frail Elderly, Rathmoyle	Ballycastle	New Build	Elderly - Housing with Care	28	2016/17	2018/19
Clanmil	PSNI, Charlotte Street	Ballymoney	Rehab	Active Elderly	8	2016/17	2017/18
Clanmil	Station Road (T)	Dunloy	New Build	General Needs	10	2016/17	2017/18

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Fold	Ballymena Showgrounds Social Club	Ballymena	New Build	General Needs	18	2016/17	2018/19
Fold	Ballymena Showgrounds Social Club	Ballymena	New Build	Physical Disabilities	2	2016/17	2018/19
Helm Housing	Castle Street	Ballymena	New Build	General Needs	19	2016/17	2018/19
Helm Housing	21 Charles Street	Ballymoney	New Build	General Needs	7	2016/17	2018/19
Triangle	Martinstown	Martinstown	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2016/17	2016/17
Triangle	Mill House Re provision, Trostan Avenue	Ballymena	New Build	Single Homeless	21	2016/17	2017/18
Triangle	PSNI Site Broughshane	Broughshane	New Build	Active Elderly	10	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Garvaghy Avenue, Phase 2	Portglenone	New Build	General Needs	10	2017/18	2018/19
Choice	Ballymoney Road	Ballymena	New Build	Active Elderly	8	2017/18	2018/19
Choice	27 - 29 Church Street	Ahoghill	New Build	General Needs	13	2017/18	2018/19
Choice	Waveney Road	Ballymena	New Build	General Needs	14	2017/18	2018/19
Clanmil	125-127 Larne Road	Ballymena	New Build	General Needs	31	2017/18	2019/20
Habinteg	Straid Road	Ahoghill	New Build	Active Elderly	9	2017/18	2018/19
Rural	Cullybackey / Ahoghill	Cullybackey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	2A Garryduff Road (CAT 1)	Ballymoney	Re-improvement	Active Elderly	10	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Main Street	Broughshane	New Build	Active Elderly	20	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	New Street	Armoy	New Build	General Needs	6	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	2A Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	Re-improvement	Learning Disabilities	9	2017/18	2018/19
Fold	Leyland Road Phase 2	Ballycastle	New Build	General Needs	20	2018/19	2019/20
Helm Housing	Parkview/ Jubilee Court	Ballymoney	New Build	General Needs	21	2018/19	2019/20
South Ulster	Ballymena ESPs	Ballymena	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
South Ulster	Raceview Road	Cullybackey	New Build	General Needs	18	2018/19	2019/20

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to outline Northern Ireland Housing Executive schemes in Upper Bann over the next five years.

(AQW 4130/16-21)

Mr Givan: The investment programme currently planned for Upper Bann for 2016/17 and 2017/18 is set out in the table below. The commencement of all schemes is subject to factors such as available finance and the annual programme roll-on exercise.

2016-2017 Programme

Project	Scheme	Nos
External Cyclical Maintenance		
14780160	Kilwilkie	87
14780162	Rectory/Brownstown	130
14780165	Alder/Ross/Donaclon/M'lin	194
Revenue Replacement		
14700400	Obins/Corcrair Gardens	71
14700393	Trasna Way/Princeton Ave	127
17700206	Banbridge/Gilford/Dromore	84
14700397	Kilwilkie/Taghnevan	64
14700402	Churchill Park 1	71
14700403	Churchill Park 2	69
Window Replacement		
14780179	Taghnevan/ Rural	249
14780176	Rectory retrofit	221
Environmental Improvements		
14360191	Redmanville/ Corcrair EI (TBUC)	
Bathroom Kitchen Rewire		
14891000	Lurgantarry Phase 1	66
14891001	Lurgantarry Phase 2	37
External Cladding Schemes		
14801000	Seagoe Aluminiums	30
17800023	Huntly/Dunbarton/Kiltarriff	31
Heating Replacement		
14660076	Enniskeen/ Westacres 15yr	134
14660080	Mourneview/ Avenue Rd etc 15yrs	95

2017-2018 Programme

Project	Scheme	Nos
External Cyclical Maintenance		
14780164	Taghnevan	267
17780073	Cline Road/ Hillhead	216
14780163	Shankill/Aghagallon	145

Project	Scheme	Nos
Window Replacement		
17780077	Banbridge Town 2 retrofit	123
Revenue Replacement		
17700207	Maryville/Mountview	93
14700401	Rectory/Armagh Road	73
14700398	Russell Dr/Mourne Road	69
17700208	Banbridge/Seapatrick	66
14700399	Manor Dr/Pk/Waring Tce	94
Multi Element Improvements		
14840114	Wellington Street	31
Heating Replacement		
14660079	Parkmore 15 yr heating	92
17660028	Banbridge 15 yrs heating 2	98
14660081	Lurgan/ Brownlow/rural 15 yrs 2	87

The programme for Upper Bann for the remainder of the five year period cannot be confirmed at this time. The Housing Executive is currently preparing a new 10 Year Investment Plan and the programme for Upper Bann from 2018/19 onwards will be developed as part of this exercise.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of (i) soccer pitches; and (ii) Gaelic football/hurling/camogie pitches that are under the control of each local councils.

(AQW 4153/16-21)

Mr Givan: Under the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986 responsibility for the provision of facilities for sport and physical recreation, rests in the first instance with local district councils.

The 'Active Places NI' database provides a strategic view of the sports facilities recorded across Northern Ireland and can viewed on the weblink - www.sportni.net/facilities/active-places-ni/. The details of individual football pitches, Gaelic football/hurling/camogie pitches which are under council control are input to the database directly by local councils and it would be appropriate for you to contact each council directly to receive the information you seek.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline what he will do to ensure that housing associations' development plans are targeted at meeting social need in terms of addressing the social housing shortage in areas of high deprivation, such as Strabane.

(AQW 4159/16-21)

Mr Givan: New social housing in Northern Ireland is delivered through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP). The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is responsible for the delivery and day to day management of the SHDP, which is a three year rolling programme of planned social housing schemes.

The formulation of the SHDP is shaped by the Housing Executive's 'Strategic Guidelines'. These guidelines, which are reviewed annually, target new social housing development at those areas of greatest social housing need. They take into account waiting list statistics – in particular levels of housing stress, including homelessness – and ensure that new social housing is distributed equitably across a range of programme policy areas.

The Housing Executive will continue to direct housing associations to identify and bring forward development opportunities in those areas of greatest unmet social housing need. Strabane is one such area.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to update the existing legislative framework for local councils to deal with on-street drinking.

(AQW 4162/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is responsible for drinking in public bye-laws which are made under Section 90 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. Under the bye laws it is an offence for a person to consume alcohol in designated areas.

While powers exist under the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 to deal with anti-social behaviour associated with the consumption of alcohol in public places, it has not been possible to introduce them.

I understand my colleague the Justice Minister has asked her officials to scope out, in association with relevant stakeholders, how a holistic review of anti-social behaviour, and its associated issues such as on -street drinking, can be taken forward.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail the amount of grants paid in each month in 2016 to (i) the Ulster Scots Agency; and (ii) Foras Na Gaeilge.

(AQW 4163/16-21)

Mr Givan: Details of grants paid in each month in 2016 to both Agencies of the North South Language Body are shown in the table below:

2016	Ulster Scots Agency	Foras na Gaeilge
January	Nil	Nil
February	Nil	Nil
March	£220,942	£755,792
April	£75,272	£203,386
May	£120,229	£246,563
June	£130,792	£230,005
July	£294,856	£286,467
August	£173,070	£178,723
September	Nil	£287,807

There were no payments made in January and February by the then Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), until the approvals of the DCAL and Department of Finance and Personnel Ministers were confirmed. The amount paid in March 2016 to the Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge by DCAL relates to the period January to March 2016.

The grant paid in July 2016 (£294,856) to the Ulster Scots Agency by the Department for Communities relates to the period July and August 2016; whilst the amount of grant paid in August 2016 (£173,070) is properly attributable to September 2016.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities whether he will provide continued support for Employment Co-ordinators to facilitate delivery on social clauses and community benefits for major capital project spend in his Department.

(AQW 4199/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department plays a key role in the delivery of social clauses. Social Clauses are currently implemented across an extensive and diverse capital project spend portfolio, and supported through a regional frontline employment support service.

In recent months my Department has engaged with key stakeholders to seek new ways of improving and furthering the implementation of social clauses within capital spend and in supporting the development of social clause policy.

In our current draft Programme for Government Delivery Plans, my Department has proposed a range of interventions that support the delivery of community benefits and place a greater emphasis on social clauses over the Programme for Government period.

I can confirm my continued support in facilitating delivery of social clauses and community benefits within major capital project spend.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many people have applied for crisis loans as a result of the current situation with Concentrix and Tax Credits.

(AQW 4200/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department does not hold any data on the number of people that may have applied for crisis loans as a result of the current situation with Concentrix and Tax Credits.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of benefits sanctions imposed; and (ii) the benefit any sanction was imposed on, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4212/16-21)

Mr Givan: The information is not available in the format requested. As an individual may be sanctioned more than once, figures on the number of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who have had a sanction imposed cannot be provided; data can however be provided on the total number of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions imposed.

All sanctions imposed are as a result of an adverse decision on benefit entitlement. Information on the number of claimants who had their Jobseeker's Allowance sanctioned is only available from May 2011. The figure provided from 1st June 2015 is taken from a new recording system (Decision Making and Appeals Case Recorder).

Period	Number of sanctions imposed
May 2011- March 2012	6831
April 2012 - March 2013	11546
April 2013 - March 2014	8215
April 2014 - March 2015	5400
April 2015 - May 2015	1403
June 2015 - March 2016	8558

The table below shows the total number of Employment and Support Allowance sanctions imposed for failing to attend or failing to participate in a Work Focused Interview without good cause from June 2013 to March 2016.

N.B. Data is not available prior to June 2013.

Year	Number of Work Focused Interview Sanctions Imposed
June 2013 – March 14	338
April 2014 – March 15	663
April 2015 – March 16	480

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of empty homes in Strabane and Omagh. (AQW 4213/16-21)

Mr Givan: Information on the number of privately owned residential empty homes is held by the Department of Finance's Land and Property Services by Council area only. The most recent figures (as of the 31/03/16) that Land and Property Services (LPS) have provided to my Department show that there are a total of;

- 1242 empty homes in the Derry and Strabane Council area; and
- 2601 empty homes in the Fermanagh and Omagh Council area.

LPS have advised that these figures should be treated with caution as there is no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land and Property Services that their property is vacant.

Information provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive from their work on the implementation of my Department's Empty Homes Strategy show that at the 30th September 2016 there were;

- 17 reported empty homes for Strabane; and
- 20 reported empty homes for Omagh.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. (AQW 4216/16-21)

Mr Givan: To date, four groups of Syrian refugees, comprising 221 people in total, have come to Northern Ireland under the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Two more groups totalling an estimated 160 people are expected to arrive before the end of 2016.

I can advise that the plans which were put in place by Department to manage the arrival and settlement of the refugees are working very effectively and the quality of the support systems is helping them to integrate into Northern Ireland society. An ability to speak and understand English will be crucial to the success of the refugees' integration and I am pleased to report that all of the refugees who have arrived so far are accessing English language lessons and are making very good progress in developing their English skills.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities to outline the provisions made for people to learn English as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. (AQW 4217/16-21)

Mr Givan: An ability to speak and understand English will be crucial to the success of the integration into Northern Ireland society of the refugees arriving here under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Identifying suitable English language tuition is one of the top priorities for the support staff who work with the refugees.

Free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lessons are available to all refugees. English tuition for school age children can be provided in educational settings. English language lessons for the adult Syrian refugees have been provided in a variety of settings, including Further Education colleges and community based facilities. In recognition of the importance of English language skills for the integration of refugees, the Home Office is making available additional funding of £850 per adult to provide English lessons for refugees arriving in the UK through the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

My Department is in discussions with the Department for the Economy and other stakeholders on how this funding be most effectively used for the benefit of the refugees.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities if his Department has liaised with the Department of Education to ensure schools are adequately resourced to cater for pupils through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

(AQW 4218/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department and the Department of Education have been liaising through the Syrian Refugees Strategic Planning Group on issues relating to the education of young people who come to Northern Ireland under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Funding to meet education costs has been made available by the Home Office under this scheme. The claims in respect of this funding are submitted by my Department and the money is subsequently disbursed to the Department of Education.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the revitalisation of Portstewart prior to the Irish Open in 2017.

(AQW 4221/16-21)

Mr Givan: A major public realm scheme was completed in Portstewart town centre and promenade in July 2016 at a cost of £1.5 million. It was jointly funded by my Department and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. This follows on from a £260,000 investment by my Department in a revitalise scheme for property owners in Portstewart which was completed in 2014.

My officials continue to work with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council officials to determine if any other regeneration schemes could be delivered in the short time available before the Irish Open in July 2017.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to detail the current levels of housing demand in (i) the Omagh district; (ii) the Strabane district; and (iii) to detail his Department's strategy for meeting this demand.

(AQW 4246/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- i) At 31st March 2016, there were 630 applicants on the waiting list for Omagh district, 185 of which were deemed to be in housing stress.
- ii) At 31st March 2016, there were 746 applicants on the waiting list for Strabane district, 357 of which were deemed to be in housing stress.
- iii) In terms of addressing the current housing demand in the Omagh and Strabane area, the Housing Executive has advised that stock turnover should address the current housing stress demand in Omagh. The projected housing need assessment for 2015-2020 indicates there is a requirement for 10 new social housing in the Omagh town over the next five years. The Housing Executive will continue to support housing associations to identify and bring forward development opportunities to meet this need.

The five year projected housing need assessment for 2015-2020, indicates that there is a housing need for 89 new social housing units for the former Strabane Council area, 70 of which are required for Strabane Town.

The current Social Housing Development Programme 2016 -2019 plans to deliver a total of 88 new units, 69 of which are planned in Strabane town.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities to outline what financial support his Department has given to Women's Aid within the current budget.

(AQW 4250/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised me that the current Supporting People Programme budget funds 13 women's aid refuges £4,618,810 for 133 units of accommodation and 9 floating support schemes providing housing support to 1,163 women in their own homes.

The Housing Executive also contributes part funding of £113,000 for the 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline, delivered by Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, which provides information, advice and support for all those affected by domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Communities (i) whether the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is undertaking to have gas installed at remaining homes in the Causeway area; and (ii) to detail the time frame.

(AQW 4270/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The Housing Executive advises that it replaces heating systems when the appliance requires to be upgraded (in the case of room heater systems) or when it has reached the end of its life cycle. If gas infrastructure is in place, then gas is the preferred replacement option. It should be noted that some tenants refuse gas installations as tenant choice can be influenced by market fuel prices at the time of consultation.

The major towns in Causeway including Coleraine, Limavady and Ballymoney have gas networks. However, as a number of properties in the area are rural, gas heating is often not available. In these instances other heating options are offered including oil, electric and wood pellet boilers.

- (ii) The table below outlines the planned heating programme for the Causeway Area for 2016/17 and 2017/18. Programmed schemes can be delayed for a number of reasons.

Project No.	Scheme	Dwellings	Start Date
02660031	Limavady	18	Started June 2016
05660009	Ballycastle	19	Started June 2016
03660026	West Bann / Portrush / Portstewart	143	June 2017 (planned)
04661002	Ballymoney	159	August 2017 (planned)
02660032	Limavady	66	August 2017 (planned)
05660010	Ballycastle	100	September 2017 (planned)

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 3111/16-21, as his Department governs Sports NI and allocates its budget, for the rationale as to why he is refusing to reveal whether its Chief Executive is on paid suspension. (AQW 4299/16-21)

Mr Givan: While my Department governs Sport Northern Ireland and allocates its budget, the current arrangements for the Chief Executive are a matter for Sport NI as the employer. It would therefore not be appropriate for the Department to comment on individual employment matters within Sport NI.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and (ii) the annual cost of this service. (AQW 4302/16-21)

Mr Givan: Department for Communities came into existence from the 9th May 2016 and therefore the information provided is from this date.

There are eleven press officers employed in the Department for Communities. The salary cost from the 9 May amounts to £216,134.43

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Communities to detail the Causeway Coast and Glens council housing need, broken down by ward. (AQW 4305/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Association has provided the following table detailing waiting list information in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council Area broken down by Housing Need Area. Please note that "ward" is not a geographical area by which waiting list figures are reported.

Housing Need Area	Applicants	Applicants in HS	Allocations
Aghadowey	<10	<10	<10
Ardgarvan	<10	<10	0
Armoy	16	10	<10
Articlave	<10	<10	<10
Artikelly	11	<10	<10
Atlantic	<10	<10	0
Ballintoy	<10	<10	0
Ballybogey	<10	<10	<10
Ballycastle	146	92	31
Ballykelly	29	18	<10
Ballymoney North East	57	31	25
Ballymoney North West	28	<10	<10
Ballymoney South East	55	35	<10

Housing Need Area	Applicants	Applicants in HS	Allocations
Ballymoney South West	20	14	<10
Ballyrashane	<10	<10	0
Ballysally	110	61	52
Ballyvoy	<10	<10	<10
Ballywoodock	0	0	<10
Balnamore	15	10	<10
Bellarena/Magilligan	<10	<10	0
Bendooragh	<10	<10	0
Boveedy	<10	<10	0
Bushmills	35	16	13
Carnany	26	14	<10
Castlerock	23	11	11
Castleroe	<10	<10	0
Churchlands	32	19	<10
Clintyfinnan	<10	<10	<10
Cloughmills	16	10	<10
Coleraine Central	70	47	19
Corkey	<10	<10	0
Craigmore	<10	<10	<10
Cushendall	46	28	<10
Cushendun	15	<10	0
Dernaflaw	<10	<10	0
Dervock	14	<10	<10
Dromore Limavady	<10	<10	<10
Druckendult	<10	<10	0
Drumadraw	<10	<10	0
Drumsurn	<10	<10	0
Dunaghy	<10	<10	<10
Dungiven	68	43	<10
Dunloy	15	10	<10
Dunluce	<10	0	0
Farrenlester	<10	<10	0
Feeney	<10	<10	<10
Foreglen	<10	<10	<10
Garvagh	20	<10	<10
Glack	<10	0	<10
Glenkeen	<10	<10	0
Glenullin	<10	<10	0
Greysteel	16	<10	<10
Grove	<10	<10	0
Harpers Hill	67	41	32

Housing Need Area	Applicants	Applicants in HS	Allocations
Heights/Hazelbank	110	74	17
Killowen	36	27	24
Killyrammer	<10	<10	0
Kilrea	25	19	12
Largy	<10	<10	<10
Limavady Rural Cottages	<10	<10	<10
Limavady Town	198	105	82
Liscolman	<10	<10	<10
Loughgiel	14	0	<10
Macfin	<10	0	0
Macosquin	<10	<10	0
Maybouy	<10	<10	0
Millburn/Cherry Place	47	32	13
Mosside	<10	0	13
Newmills Road	39	30	<10
Portballintrae	17	13	13
Portrush	178	113	25
Portstewart	134	92	26
Rasharkin	17	11	0
Rathlin	<10	<10	0
Seacon	<10	<10	0
Stranocum	<10	<10	0
The Crescent/Windsor Avenue/James Street	<10	<10	0
Waterfoot	11	<10	0
Windyhall	<10	<10	0
Total	1,915	1,163	511

Note: <10

To protect confidentiality of individuals, waiting list and allocations data of a total of 10 or less are anonymised and are reported as <10 however the overall totals are fully reported.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Communities to detail the (i) number of applications; (ii) number of approvals; and (iii) types of improvements carried out through the Affordable Warmth Scheme in the Causeway Coast and Glens council area for 2015-16.

(AQW 4306/16-21)

Mr Givan: In 2015/16, the Affordable Warmth Scheme first full year of operation, Causeway Coast and Glens council submitted 1,058 referrals.

A total of 491 households received formal approval from the Housing Executive to install energy efficiency measures, at a value of £2.2m. Those measures included heating installation or boiler replacement, window replacement or repair, cavity wall insulation including top-up and extraction and refill where appropriate, loft insulation top up and draught proofing.

As the scheme has progressed into its second year the income assessment process has improved, resulting in a better ratio of 'approvals issued' to 'referrals made'.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Women's Centre Childcare Fund.

(AQW 4315/16-21)

Mr Givan: It is proposed that the provision of childcare, as provided under the Women's Centre Childcare Fund, will be taken forward through the Childcare Strategy, currently being considered by the Department of Education.

Department of Education officials have advised that the alternative funding measure being brought forward under the Strategy, which will likely only fund a percentage of, rather than the full childcare costs provided under Women's Centre Childcare Fund, is unlikely to be in place before April 2017.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities in relation to Licensing and Regulation of Clubs (Amendment) Bill; to outline his rationale for requiring restaurants to display the condition under which they can serve alcohol, including any public health or safety benefit.

(AQW 4317/16-21)

Mr Givan: Under the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, a number of conditions apply to the sale of alcohol in licensed restaurants. These conditions preclude the charging of an entrance fee and require the sale of alcohol to be ancillary to a main table meal, and to be paid for at the same time and on the same bill as the main table meal.

There is evidence that a number of licensed restaurants are not complying with these conditions – effectively acting as pubs, but without the associated overheads of a pub.

The Bill requires licensed restaurants to display a notice detailing the conditions which apply to the sale and consumption of alcohol in such premises.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 2861/16-21, what criteria was used to select the 2,000 homes which it is proposed will be transferred.

(AQW 4318/16-21)

Mr Givan: The process for identifying candidate estates is founded on the following principles:

- a Reflect stock investment needs - The estates have identifiable and significant investment needs and the investment will benefit the tenants.
- b Strengthen the Housing Executive's business plan – reduce the investment requirement for the Housing Executive, effect the transfers with no subsidy from the NIHE.
- c Recognise housing associations' financial capacity and capability – candidate estates should be coherent estates of a size viable for housing associations (maximum of 500 properties). Housing Associations should be able to finance the work through future rental income.
- d Acknowledge the resources required for delivery – a smaller number of individual transfer projects reduces costs.

The findings of the Stock Condition Survey and the asset performance modelling carried out as part of the DSD/NIHE Joint Asset Commission in 2014/15 have been used to inform this process.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities what support is available for capacity building for community groups wishing to engage in community planning.

(AQW 4319/16-21)

Mr Givan: The key to the successful implementation of community planning lies in joint working and effective engagement with the community and organisations that represent them. The 11 councils have led this process, working in partnership with departments, statutory bodies, agencies, businesses and the wider community, including the voluntary and community sector to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of their districts and improving the lives of citizens.

Empowerment and appropriate support for the voluntary and community sector is a key priority for my Department, to ensure that the sector is enabled to shape and better inform government policy and improve the delivery of public services. The shared vision of government and the sector is to work together as social partners to build a participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive community in Northern Ireland.

The Department is currently consulting on its provision of future strategic support to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland. Within the proposals is support for policy advocacy and co-design of public services which, in part, is intended to help increase the capacity for the Voluntary and Community Sector to engage in Community Planning. This consultation is open until 2nd November 2016.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the amount spent on employment schemes for Job Seekers Allowance claimants in Cookstown since 2011.

(AQW 4345/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department offers a wide range of support initiatives and return to work programmes to help clients overcome barriers to work and to move towards and into employment. The Department also offers a customised recruitment service tailored to the needs of employers to help them fill vacancies.

In the main, funding for these initiatives and activities is available on a Northern Ireland wide basis. Return to work programmes are delivered throughout Northern Ireland over numerous contract areas and spend is monitored on that basis. It is not possible therefore to report on spend by area.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities to outline what assessment his Department has undertaken on electrical safety of the Private Rented Sector.
(AQW 4356/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is currently carrying out a review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector. The standard of properties, including electrical safety issues, is within the scope of the review. Proposals for change resulting from the review will be published for consultation in the coming months.

In addition the review of the housing fitness standard across all tenures, including the private rented sector, is considering a range of proposals including the provision of a specific requirement in relation to domestic electrical safety. I expect to bring forward proposals for change within a public consultation in early 2017.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many new dwellings have been built by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive since 1996 under their provision to build in locations where housing associations are unable or unwilling to develop social accommodation.
(AQW 4386/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below details the total number of dwellings built by the Housing Executive between 1996/97 and 2001/02, as detailed in the annual Housing Statistics publication produced by the (former) Department for Social Development (there were no further Housing Executive new build dwellings recorded in this publication after 2001/02).

The Housing Executive is unable to document the new dwellings built specifically in relation to "locations where housing associations are unable or unwilling to develop social accommodation".

Year	Housing Executive New Build
1996/97	1,279
1997/98	560
1998/99	189
1999/2000	76
2000/01	23
2001/02	25
2002/03 to present	0

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities how the regulations accompanying the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 take account of high levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, as a region emerging from conflict.
(AQW 4422/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 and regulations stemming from it, introduce a range of welfare reforms in Northern Ireland including: Universal Credit; Personal Independence Payment; and the Benefit Cap. The Personal Independence Payment is the reform which is likely to be of most interest for those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Personal Independence Payment is a new benefit replacing Disability Living Allowance for people aged 16 to 64 years. It is designed to help people meet the extra costs that come from having a long-term health condition or disability that is expected to last 12 months or longer. In terms of taking account of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, entitlement to Personal Independence Payment is not based on having a particular health condition or impairment, rather it involves an assessment of an individual's ability to carry out certain key everyday activities. The assessment considers the impact of the claimant's condition whether it is physical, mental, cognitive, intellectual or sensory. This ensures that support is targeted at those who face the greatest challenges to taking part in everyday life.

The Fresh Start Agreement provided for a working group to bring forward proposals for utilising the additional resources made available by the Executive to mitigate the impact of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015.

In relation to conflict-related injury, the Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report recommended that where Disability Living Allowance claimants were judged to have no entitlement to Personal Independence Payment on reassessment, an additional four points would be added to those scoring at least four points in the reassessment. This would then entitle the claimant to a welfare supplementary payment for one year, equivalent to the standard rate of Personal Independence Payment component.

Regulations have been made through the Assembly and can be found at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2016/250/contents/> made. These regulations provide for the meaning of conflict related injury condition which includes those who have been psychologically injured due to the conflict.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Communities for a breakdown of where neighbourhood renewal money has been spent in South Antrim.

(AQW 4425/16-21)

Mr Givan: Within the South Antrim constituency the Grange Estate, Ballyclare is designated as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area. The areas of Carnmoney, Monkstown and Mossley are identified as Areas at Risk.

Within the 2016/17 financial year my Department has made a commitment to provide financial support of approximately £238,000 from Neighbourhood Renewal revenue funding to the Grange Estate, Ballyclare. A further £90,000 has been allocated to Carnmoney, Monkstown and Mossley areas at risk.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) any schemes to replace windows, doors or kitchens, by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in South Antrim; (ii) the areas that will benefit; and (iii) the timeframe.

(AQW 4465/16-21)

Mr Givan: The schemes currently planned for South Antrim that will deliver windows, doors or kitchens are set out in the table below. The commencement of all investment schemes is subject to factors such as available finance.

Project No.	Scheme	Dwellings	Planned Start Date
19701000	Ballymacoss Kitchens*	17	Nov 2016
21700123	Ballyclare Kitchens	67	Nov 2016
21700124	New Mossley Kitchens	95	Mar 2017
20701002	Stiles/Parkhall Kitchens	149	2017/18
21701003	Ballyduff Kitchens	84	2017/18
21841001	South Antrim Aluminium** Bungalows	26	2017/18

* Part of a larger scheme of 162 dwelling, including 17 dwellings in Glenavy.

** Part of a larger scheme of 54 dwellings which will address windows, doors and kitchens. The scheme includes 26 dwellings in South Antrim: 9 in Camlin Gardens, Crumlin; 9 in Hollybush Gardens, Ballyclare; and 8 in Grant Avenue, Randalstown.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities for his intended timetable to devolve regeneration powers to local authorities.

(AQW 4483/16-21)

Mr Givan: The extension of Regeneration and Community Development powers to Local Government did not proceed under the last mandate. The new Department for Communities (DfC) has now been established with a much wider range of responsibilities, including responsibility for local government and it will be in that context that I will wish to consider the options for going forward. Ultimately, any decision to extend powers to local government will be a matter for the Executive.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the review of the Code of Conduct for Councillors; and to outline the action he intends to take.

(AQW 4484/16-21)

Mr Givan: An independent Review Group was established in November 2015, to carry out a review of Parts 3 (principles) and 8 (rules on decision-making) of the Code of Conduct.

The Review Group invited councils and local government bodies and organisations to give their views on the Code of Conduct.

The Review Group produced its final Report and recommendations in April 2016. I have considered this Report and will shortly issue a revised Code of Conduct, together with the Review Group's Report, for public consultation.

The revised Code of Conduct must be laid before and approved by resolution of the Assembly before it can be issued and come into effect.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities whether he intends to introduce a statutory obligation on statutory partners committing to deliver local government community plans.

(AQW 4485/16-21)

Mr Givan: The statutory community planning partners are specified in subordinate legislation, namely the Local Government (Community Planning Partners) Order (NI) 2016. Statutory obligations regarding community planning are provided by Part

10 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 ("the Act"). Section 66 of the Act states inter alia that community planning partners must participate in community planning to the extent that such activity is connected to that partner's functions, and must assist the councils discharge of functions of initiating, maintaining and facilitating community planning.

Section 66(5) of the Act describes the "actions to be performed" and "functions to be exercised" in connection with community planning, as those lying within the powers of the council or the partner in question.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Communities to outline what action her Department is taking in conjunction with key agencies to deal with benefit fraud.

(AQW 4490/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department has a robust and effective counter fraud strategy, with the level of benefit fraud held at just 0.6% or less of total social security benefit expenditure over the past 7 years.

Benefit fraud often straddles wider criminality and therefore key to the success in reducing benefit fraud has been the Single Investigation Service's partnership working with other law enforcement Agencies. These include the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority, the United Kingdom Borders Agency, the National Identity Unit and colleagues in the Republic of Ireland's Department for Social Protection.

My Department also uses Proceeds of Crime Act powers to secure confiscation orders and recover the criminal benefit in more serious fraud cases. The National Crime Agency provides the necessary training and on-going monitoring, advice and guidance to my officials to enable the use of these powers.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to outline how his Department will support the Mid Ulster Drama Festival in Carrickmore to celebrate it's fiftieth anniversary in 2017.

(AQW 4500/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities funding for the Arts is mainly disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). ACNI has advised that the Mid Ulster Drama Festival can apply to its Small Grants Programme in relation to the cost of professional input to the festival such as Adjudicators. That Programme is open on a rolling basis and they must apply at least 3 months before the planned activity begins.

My Department also allocates a total of around £400,000 per year to the Community Festivals Fund (CFF) which is administered and match-funded by Local Councils. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has made a CFF offer to the Mid Ulster Drama Festival of £1,222 for the Festival in March 2017.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Communities when he was first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4524/16-21)

Mr Givan: I became aware of the report towards the end of September 2016.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Communities to detail the locations of peace walls in North Belfast owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 4526/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has a total of 9 interface sites in North Belfast which range from land, fencing and walls. The table below shows the 9 interface sites in North Belfast owned by the Housing Executive at September 2016.

Site No.	Location	Description of interface
1	York Street / Lancaster St	Brick wall with palisade fencing above runs along the perimeter of houses on Lancaster St
2	Alliance Avenue	An area of unused land adjacent to DOJ Peace wall
3	Crumlin Road, Ardoyne	Buffer fencing/vegetation/wall from Butler Walk to flax land on Crumlin road re-imaging of wall completed August 2016
4	Lower Oldpark /Mountview Court	Grass areas of land within Lower Oldpark estate
5	Carrick Hill	Fencing and vegetation runs in front of properties from Peter's Hill to Lower Regent Street
6	Brougham Street, North Queen Street	Brick wall and metal fencing with mature trees and vegetation acts as a buffer to houses in Orchard Street and Bentinck St 90 – 108 North Queen Street – fencing owned by NIHE & DOJ – options to be designed for re-imaging scheme

Site No.	Location	Description of interface
7	Halliday's Road	10 permanently steeled up houses on Halliday's Rd between Duncairn Gardens and Limestone Road Land currently being transferred to Apex HA
8	Halliday's Rd / Duncairn Gardens	Wall with gateway enabling access to both areas
9	Halliday's Rd / Limestone Rd	Two locations of blocked NIHE houses Site cleared, land currently being transferred to Apex HA for new build scheme

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Communities to outline the plans in place to ensure there is a legacy for both local residents and tourists following the 2019 Open Golf Championships in Portrush.
(AQW 4542/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Portrush Regeneration Programme is one of my Department's key priorities in the run up to the British Open Golf Championship planned for July 2019. Subject to approval by the Executive, my Department is planning a number of capital projects to be delivered. These projects include:

- A public realm scheme;
- The redevelopment of the train station;
- Measures to address parking facilities in the town; and
- An Urban Development Grant scheme.

My Department's vision is that this planned investment will create a legacy for both local residents and tourists following the 2019 tournament.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities whether the festival funding application process within local councils has been rural-proofed.
(AQW 4576/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has policy responsibility for the Community Festivals Fund which is administered by local Councils. The Policy and Guidance Framework for the Fund has recently been reviewed. The review process included consideration of the impact and needs of rural communities.

Councils are separate legal entities, and as such they are responsible for the administration of the Community Festivals Fund application processes. As statutory public authorities, Councils are required by law to comply with the relevant legislation concerning rural proofing. The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 requires that public authorities must have due regard to rural needs when, adopting or implementing policies, strategies and plans, and designing and delivering public services.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs holds the policy responsibility for ensuring that all statutory bodies (including district councils & Departments) comply with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Communities when he will publish the consultation findings of the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.
(AQW 4588/16-21)

Mr Givan: I hope to be in a position to make a decision on the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer shortly. Once I have made a decision on the programme going forward, I will publish the report on the consultation findings, as per best practice.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Communities whether an indicative programme timeframe has been developed for the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.
(AQW 4589/16-21)

Mr Givan: The consultation on the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer proposals resulted in 1,279 responses being received by the Department.

Officials are currently finalising their consideration and analysis of the responses to the consultation together with all other relevant information to inform recommendations to me on the way forward.

I hope to make a decision on the programme going forward shortly and I anticipate that the programme will be launched and open for applications in the coming months.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities to outline how the regulations accompanying the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 take account of the lack of adequate and accessible child care in the region.
(AQW 4601/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 and the regulations stemming from it, introduce a range of welfare reforms in Northern Ireland, including: Universal Credit; Personal Independence Payment; and the Benefit Cap. Universal Credit is the reform which is most relevant to the question of childcare availability.

Under Universal Credit, parents will receive support for childcare costs no matter how many hours they work. Parents will receive support of up to 85% of childcare costs (up to a limit of £646.35 per month for one child and £1,108.04 for 2 or more children).

Under the relevant legacy benefits, lack of adequate and accessible childcare can be accepted as, "good reason" for not complying with certain conditions of the benefit such as taking up suitable employment. This operational flexibility in relation to "good reason" will be carried forward under Universal Credit, in the application of Articles 31 and 32 of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015. To ensure that there is no restriction on the specific circumstances which can be taken into account, this operational flexibility will be in the guidance to support the regulations.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline how much Financial Transactions Capital has been allocated to Housing Associations in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4696/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has allocated £121.7 million in Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) loan funding to the housing associations over the past five years.

Financial Year	2012/13 (£)	2013/14 (£)	2014/15 (£)	2015/16 (£)	2016/17 (£)
Total FTC	5m	3.7m	38m	69.498m	5.502m

A further £19 million in Get Britain Building funding (the precursor to FTC loans), was allocated to housing associations within this timeframe.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities how he plans to engage with faith-based organisations during the development of his Department's new Social Strategy.

(AQO 429/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- As part of the development of the draft Programme for Government and the draft Social Strategy there was engagement with stakeholders representing all Section 75 groups, including faith-based organisations.
- I plan to bring a draft Social Strategy to the Executive in the coming weeks with the intention of having it issued, subject to Executive approval, as part of the new approach to the Programme for Government.
- Faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland have an important and distinctive place and reach in society and their community work plays a vital role in communities where they deliver many interventions on various themes.
- The important role and contribution that many faith-based organisations and communities play across society is recognised within the proposed new Social Strategy.
- During the public consultation period, we propose to engage with people across society. We would like faith-based organisations to be a part of these discussions.
- I plan to build on the ongoing faith-based engagement work in my Department and to take forward the development of a Faith Covenant modelled on the principles of the Concordat between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector, facilitating a valued and effective faith-based contribution to policy development and service delivery across Government.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the implications of the result of the referendum on membership of the European Union for the Irish language and Ulster Scots language.

(AQO 426/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- My Department will continue to meet all its obligations towards Irish and Ulster Scots, under the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
- The Council of Europe is a separate organisation from the European Union so it is not affected by the exit from the EU.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Communities how he plans to help local armed forces veterans.

(AQO 424/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- My Department is committed to working closely with armed forces veteran's representative groups and individuals to ensure that they receive all the help they require with assistance in making claims, and also with making transitions within the benefits system.

- My officials have engaged with senior representatives from the Ulster Defence Regiment(UDR) and Royal Irish Aftercare Service. This engagement has included attendance at an Aftercare staff training event to provide an overview of the Improving Benefit Uptake campaign and how help and support can be accessed through the 'Make the Call' Benefits Advice line and through my Department's Community Outreach Service. In addition, officials have offered to attend relevant family group meetings to provide information on these services.
- Officials have also delivered a presentation on Welfare Changes to the Aftercare Service.
- The Aftercare Service has shared the Veteran's Handbook with my Department's officials and we signpost to the Aftercare Service.
- My Department's policy is that members of the armed forces community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the allocation of social housing. My Department has therefore instructed the Housing Executive that the local connection requirement in its scheme for allocating social housing must not be interpreted in a way that excludes persons who have been based in Northern Ireland as members of the armed forces from applying under the Scheme. My Department received an assurance on this issue from the then-Acting Chief Executive of the Housing Executive in April 2015.
- My officials are continuing to develop proposals for the fundamental review of social housing allocations, taking into account recommendations from academic experts and the public's responses to these. I plan to publish proposals for consultation before the end of the year.
- I note that the armed forces covenant is based on the principle that members of the armed forces community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services and I can confirm that this reflects my Department's policy.
- The Ministry of Defence (MOD) introduced a new financial support scheme from 8 April 2013 for seriously injured service personnel and veterans - Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP). As the AFIP scheme relates to the armed forces it is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and falls outside the competence of the Assembly. Eligibility to the scheme is determined on a UK-wide basis by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency. In addition, AFIP is now recognised as a passport to other schemes and benefits which are available in Northern Ireland. The Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for the payment and ongoing maintenance of all AFIP awards.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Communities, when formulating his Department's anti-poverty strategy, whether he will take account of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' report entitled Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies.

(AQO 431/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- I am aware of the Report the member refers to and, indeed, agree with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights when she says that 'yet another feature of the Human Rights approach is that poverty reduction becomes a shared responsibility.'
- The definition of 'overall poverty' adopted by the UN includes social discrimination and exclusion.
- This is precisely why we have incorporated our work to tackle poverty in a much wider social strategy looking at all these inter-related issues.
- Our draft Social Strategy will recognise that measuring poverty on the basis of income alone will not show the full picture.
- The human rights approach set out in the Report 'underlines the multidimensional nature of poverty, describing poverty in terms of a range of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, and drawing attention to the stigma, discrimination, insecurity and social exclusion associated with poverty'.
- The draft Executive Social Strategy will seek to promote opportunity for everyone and tackle poverty and social exclusion.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of new homes expected to be built in Upper Bann by May 2021.

(AQO 432/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- The Social Housing Development Programme is formulated on a three year basis, so information on new social housing schemes is only currently available for the period 2016/17-2018/19.
- There are currently 45 social housing units recorded as under construction in the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency. This includes 9 units of Supported Housing.
- There are currently 112 social housing units programmed to start on-site in the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency as part of the Social Housing Development Programme between 2016/17 and 2018/19. This includes:
 - 41 units to start on site in 2016/17, 15 of which are Supported Housing;
 - 61 units to start on site in 2017/18, 18 of which are Supported Housing; and
 - 10 units to start on site in 2018/19.

- The annual process to formulate the programme for the period from 2017/18 to 2019/20 is currently underway, and further schemes may be added to the plans for 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- Programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons, such as delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the redevelopment of Queen's Parade, Bangor.
(AQO 433/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- The Queen's Parade development scheme has the potential to transform the town centre and bring new jobs, homes, shops, offices and act as a major attraction to visitors.
- Significant progress has been made since my Department stepped in and took direct control of the scheme.
- My officials are currently working with Ards and North Down Borough Council to finalise the development brief that will issue inviting the private sector to submit their proposals for the scheme.
- Developer responses to the brief will then be assessed during January 2017. This assessment will include evaluating proposals to ensure they meet with the Department and Council's vision and regeneration objectives for the town.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to detail any Barnett Consequentials from the recently announced house building fund by the Conservative government in Westminster.
(AQW 5013/16-21)

Mr Givan: The recently announced accelerated house building fund has not yet been formally implemented as Government policy. My housing officials are currently liaising with colleagues in the Department of Finance and the Department for Communities and Local Government to ascertain if and what benefits may flow to Northern Ireland from this announcement. I will keep you informed as to their progress on this matter.

Department of Education

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teaching staff trained in dealing with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Asperger's.
(AQW 3811/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The Education Authority (EA) has advised that training programmes have been delivered to tens of thousands of teachers and classroom assistants on autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Asperger's to varying degrees since 1998 mostly through the legacy education and library boards. Schools may also have accessed training from external agencies. It is not possible therefore to provide the exact number of teachers that have received training.

It is likely that the majority of nursery and primary teachers will have received some level of training and a high number of teachers in post primary schools will also have received awareness raising/training.

In addition, Middletown Centre for Autism is funded by my Department to provide training in autism. Asperger's is now included under the broad umbrella of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and ADHD is a common comorbidity with autism and children with autism and the Centre provides guidance in all of these areas as part of its training provision.

Since 2008 the Centre has provided training to 20,175 educational professionals in Northern Ireland, including teachers.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education whether if there is a limit on the number of children a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator can refer to a psychologist in each school year.
(AQW 3812/16-21)

Mr Weir: As educational psychology is a statutory service, priority is given within the service to providing the psychological advice required for statutory assessments of children's special educational needs (i.e. Stage 4 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs). The educational psychology service also provides advice for non-statutory assessments at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.

Whilst there are no limits imposed on the number of children that may be referred to an educational psychologist for assessment at Stage 3, the Education Authority (EA) operates a time allocation model for Educational Psychology Services where each school receives an allocation of educational psychologists' time and then, in partnership with the EA, the school prioritises the children for assessment.

Working closely with their named Educational Psychologist, schools prioritise their pupils' needs based on the principles of consultation, equity of access and flexibility. If information is presented to the Educational Psychologist during consultation which indicates that a pupil has exceptional circumstances, such referrals will continue to receive priority.

The EA stresses that it applies the time allocation system in as flexible a manner as possible so that, whenever possible, if a child is in relatively urgent need of an assessment, the child will get an assessment even if the time allocated to the school has already been used up.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline his definition of Christian ethos.
(AQW 3821/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department does not have a definition it uses to describe a Christian ethos.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to define the Controlled Sector.
(AQW 3822/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Controlled Sector consists of grant aided schools that are currently owned, maintained and funded by the Education Authority and are managed by a Board of Governors.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) undenominational religious education, as included in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 Article 21; and (ii) how its impact and outcome is measured.
(AQW 3823/16-21)

Mr Weir: 'Undenominational religious education' refers to Religious Education (RE) that is not distinctive of any Christian denomination but that is broadly Christian. The impact and outcomes of RE are measured through results at GCSE and AS/A2 levels, and through inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), where ETI has been invited to do so by the relevant Board of Governors/Management Committee. Church authorities/representatives also have the right of inspection, where that right is exercised in accordance with the relevant legislation. Informally, RE is also measured through academic research that has focused on the values and beliefs of young people in schools.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of why 35 per cent of pupils did not achieve a grade C or above in GCSE Maths in 2016; and (ii) to outline what steps he is taking to increase attainment.
(AQW 3824/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) There is a range of reasons which impact on the grades achieved by pupils in examinations. This includes issues such as pupil ability and motivation; teaching methods; school leadership; and the level of parental involvement. It is also important to note that for some pupils, achieving grades D-G does not represent underachievement.
- (ii) I am encouraged by the improvement in overall performance at GCSE and A level. Sustained improvement is best achieved where schools are supported and trusted to devise their own school improvement strategies. Through classroom observation and analysis of formative assessment, teachers are able to use their professional judgement to assess if a pupil is underachieving.

I will continue to focus on those policies and strategies that are driving improvement and which aim to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning which some pupils face. I will also ensure that effective practice emerging from these strategies will continue to be disseminated across the school system.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2889/16-21, to detail the organisations that are also in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal funding for salaries and running costs associated with the provision of childcare.
(AQW 3825/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department for Communities advises that of the organisations awarded Pathway Funding in 2016/17 as outlined in AQW 2889/16-21, those listed in the table below are also in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Investment funding.

Groups in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal and Pathway Funding

- An Droichead
- Ashton Community Trust
- Hobby Horse Playgroup
- Ionad Uibh Eachach
- Lower Oldpark Community Association
- Star Neighbourhood Centre

To avoid duplication of funding, applicants to the Pathway Fund were required to provide details of other funding received or applied for, which related to the services for which they sought Pathway funding. Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO), which administers the Pathway Fund, considered the other sources of funding when evaluating the need for Pathway funding.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 3057/16-21, to detail the dates on which the panel met and the attendance at each meeting.

(AQW 3826/16-21)

Mr Weir: Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO), which administers the Pathway Fund under contract to DE, advises that the moderating panel met once on 22 March 2016. The panel members, as listed in the answer to AQW 3057/16-21, were all present with the exception of Marleen Collins.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department and the Education Authority will work with Derry City and Strabane District Council to facilitate the extension of the Waterside Greenway specifically in regard to the transfer of ownership of lands.

(AQW 3833/16-21)

Mr Weir: I can confirm that officials from my Department and the Education Authority (EA) are already engaged with Derry and Strabane District Council in relation to the development of the Waterside Greenway on land adjacent to the shared site of Ebrington Primary School and Foyle College. A meeting is currently being arranged between the EA and the Council to further discuss this matter.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the current status of planned capital works at St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena; and (ii) the plans for future capital projects.

(AQW 3835/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are currently no plans for a new build project for St Louis Grammar School; however a major capital scheme is underway under the School Enhancement Programme (SEP) with total project costs valued at £4m.

The scheme involves the refurbishment and extension of the existing Convent Building to provide a Creative and Expressive Arts facility and will include facilities for Music, Drama, Art and Moving Image & Media Studies with additional space for an ICT Suite and Sixth Form Centre. The contract was awarded to TAL Ltd and work commenced on site late August 2016. It is currently anticipated that work will complete in February 2018.

In addition, a number of Minor Work Applications from the school are at various stages of planning including requests for door access controls, car parking provision and disability adaptations. The Department will consider the applications further on receipt of scoping reports for each of these works.

Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to indicate future plans for further Minor works at the school. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the number of schools in North Down that currently open their pitches for community use outside of school opening hours; and (ii) what measures he intends to take to ensure that more schools facilitate community use of their facilities outside of opening hours.

(AQW 3885/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) This information is not currently held by the Department of Education or the Education Authority.
- (ii) Responsibility for decisions relating to the use of individual school premises rests with the Board of Governors of those schools.

The Department of Education continues to encourage schools to make their premises available for use by local communities when not otherwise required for education purposes by means of existing legislation and a range of policies such as Extended Schools, Full Service programmes and commitments made through Every School a Good School. The Department's guide for school governors also highlights the responsibility which governors have in promoting the use of the school as a community facility where possible.

In January 2014, the Department issued a set of operational guidelines entitled Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools which is designed to encourage and assist schools, especially those who may not already do so, to facilitate community access to school premises. The majority of schools (81% - School Omnibus Survey 2014) currently report that they do make their facilities available for wider community use.

In line with the duties placed upon it by the Education Act (NI) 2014, the Education Authority (EA) has appointed a standing committee to help exercise its statutory functions with regard to the community use of schools.

The EA has advised that the standing committee will give consideration to the use of the Guidance Toolkit in schools. My officials will continue to work closely with EA colleagues to promote the use of the school as a community facility.

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Education to outline the Pre-School Education Advisory Group's system for the allocation of funded places for early years.

(AQW 3911/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAG) are responsible for ensuring that there is adequate pre-school provision in local areas, and make allocations of funded places to voluntary and private providers on an annual basis, based on an assessment of local need. Pre-school providers are not guaranteed a minimum allocation, or an allocation which accommodates all first preference applications.

The EA has advised that, as the 2016 pre-school admissions process was the first to be administered since the establishment of the EA, a regional approach was agreed and implemented by local PEAGs. There were 632 fewer applications from target age children in the 2016/17 academic year compared to the previous year, meaning that fewer pre-school places were required to meet demand.

In making decisions on the allocation of funded pre-school places, the EA advises that PEAGs take into consideration, inter alia:

- NISRA statistics on live births in local areas;
- Patterns of demand for pre-school provision;
- Availability of pre-school places at a local level;
- The budget allocated by the Department of Education for pre-school provision; and
- First preference applications for each individual setting.

The EA has advised that initial allocations of funded places were based on the number of places which had been allocated to settings at October 2015 and adjusted where necessary, in light of the factors listed above.

In order to meet the demand for pre-school places, PEAGs also review the places allocated in areas where this is required, for example within isolated rural communities where there is no alternative provision, and in areas where there is more demand than available places.

Additional places may be approved during or after the admissions process by the local PEAG if required.

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many groups are funded through the Education Authority, North Eastern Region; and (ii) where these groups are situated.
(AQW 3912/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since its formation on 1 April 2015, the Education Authority has operated as a single organisation and no longer reports on a regional basis. Consequently, I have responded on the basis of those groups falling under your constituency, North Antrim.

A total of 169 groups, in North Antrim have been funded through the Education Authority since its formation in April 2015. The table below provides a list of these groups and their locations.

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Ahoghill & District Playgroup Community Pre-School PG	80 Cullybackey Road, Ahoghill	BT42 1LA
Armoy Cross Community Playgroup	12 Main Street, Armoy	BT53 8RQ
Ballee Pre-School Playgroup	20 Antrim Road, Ballymena	BT42 2BJ
Trinity Presbyterian BB - (3rd Ahoghill)	Trinity Presbyterian Church Hall, Church Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 2PA
Trinity Youth Club	Trinity Presbyterian Church, Church Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 2PA
Cloney Rural Development Assn YC	Acorn Centre, 42A Crosskeys Road, Ahoghill, Antrim	BT42 2QU
Harryville Youth Club	Harryville Community Centre, 41-43 Larne Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 3AL
1st Glenwherry BB	Glenwherry Presbyterian Church, Church Rd, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 3EH
Glenwherry GB	98 Church Road, Glenwherry, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 3EH
Kells Presbyterian Church Campaigners	Kells Presbyterian Church, Church Road, Kells, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 3JU
1st Connor BB	Connor Presbyterian Church, Carncome Road, Ballymena, Co Antrim	BT42 3LA
Connor Presbyterian Girls Brigade	Connor Presbyterian Church Hall, Carncome Road, Kells, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 3LA

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
3rd Ballymena Boys Brigade	Harryville Presbyterian Church, Casement Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4BY
Harryville Presbyterian Youth Club	Harryville Presbyterian Church Hall, Casement Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4BY
Ballykeel Youth Club	20 Crebilly Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4DN
1st Broughshane Company Boys Brigade	2nd Broughshane Presbyterian Church Hall, 3 Raceview Road, Broughshane, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4JL
2nd Broughshane Girls Brigade	Main Street, Broughshane, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4JL
1st Broughshane Presbyterian Girls Brigade	54-56 Main Street, Broughshane, Antrim	BT42 4JP
Slemish Look Wider Group	Broughshane House, 70 Main Street, Broughshane, Antrim	BT42 4JW
Ballymena & District Gateway Club	Broughshane Community Centre, Knockan Road, Broughshane, Co Antrim	BT42 4JY
Broughshane Youth Club	Knockan Road, Broughshane, Antrim	BT42 4JY
St Patricks Scouts, Broughshane	St Patrick's Broughshane Parish Hall, Church Entry, Broughshane, Antrim	BT42 4LF
Buckna Presbyterian Girls Brigade	Buckna Presbyterian Church Hall, Buckna Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4LS
St Patricks (Broughshane) Guide Units	St Patrick's Church Hall, Church Entry, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4NH
1st Gracehill BB	Church Road, Gracehill, Ballymena, Antrim	BT42 4NL
Buckna BB	Buckna Church Hall, Buckna Road, Buckna, Antrim	BT42 4NR
Buckna YC	Buckna Presbyterian Church Hall, Buckna Road, Broughshane, Antrim	BT42 4NR
West Church Scout Group	15-19 Ballymoney Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 5BS
West Church GB	15-19 Ballymoney Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 5BS
4th Ballymena Boys Brigade (High Kirk)	High Kirk Presbyterian Church, Thomas Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6AZ
High Kirk GB	High Kirk Church Hall, 65-71 Thomas Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6AZ
High Kirk Presbyterian YC	High Kirk Church Hall, 65-71 Thomas Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6AZ
Ballymena Baptist Girls Brigade	18-22 Mount Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6BH
6th Ballymena Baptist BB	18-20 Mount Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6BW
All Saints Youth Club (Ballymena)	2 Cushendall Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6HE
St Columba's BS	St Columba's Church Hall, Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6JD
7th Ballymena BB	Ballyloughan Presbyterian Church Hall, Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6JE
Ballyloughan Presbyterian Girls Brigade Company	Ballyloughan Presbyterian Church, Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6JE
Waveney Youth Centre	1A Regents Park, Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6JX
20th Antrim Scout Group	Glenravel Parish Hall, Lisnamanny Rd, Martinstown, Antrim	BT43 6QH
Cloughwater BB	Cloughwater Presbyterian Church Hall, 125 Cloughwater Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6QR

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Dunclug Youth Forum, Young Ones Youth Club	Dunclug Community Centre, Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6SA
Teenscene Youth Club	88 Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6SE
Cloughwater Girls Brigade	Cloughwater Presbyterian Church, 125 Cloughwater Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6SZ
9th Ballymena Guides	St Columba's, Doury Road, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 6TU
2349 ATC Corps	ATC Hut, Lowfield Camp, St Patrick's Barracks , Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7AP
St John Ambulance Cadets	St John House, 11A Corlea Gardens, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7AR
Ballymena Sea Cadets	Army Reserve Centre, Lowfield Camp, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7AX
1st Ballymena BB	Meeting House Lane Church Hall, Meeting House Lane, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7BS
1st Ballymena Girls Brigade	Meeting House Lane, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7BS
1st Ballymena Youth Club	First Ballymena Presbyterian Church, Meeting House Lane, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7BS
Ballymena Elim Campaigners	Elim Church Hall, 42 Castle Street , Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7BT
St Patricks Church Lads Brigade Ballymena	St Patrick's Church Hall, 50 Castle Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7BT
St Patrick's GFS	St Patrick's Church Hall, 50 Castle Street, Ballymena, Antrim	BT43 7BT
1st Portglenone BB	1 Main Street, Portglenone, Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 8AA
Portglenone Girls Brigade	1st Portglenone Church Hall, Ballymena Road, Portglenone, Antrim	BT44 8AA
1st Portglenone Pres YC	2-4 Main Street, Portglenone, Antrim	BT44 8AB
Rasharkin Community Youth Club	Rasharkin Community Centre, Duneany Road, Rasharkin, Antrim	BT44 8SP
Ballyweaney Youth Club	1st Ballyweaney Pres Church, 130 Ballyveely Road, Cloughmills , Antrim	BT44 9BL
Loughgiel Community Youth Club	Millennium Centre, 38 Lough Road, Loughgiel, Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 9JN
Ballyweaney GB	126 Ballyveeley Road, Loughgiel , Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 9JW
Cloughmills Community Guides	Cloughmills Primary School, 34 Main Street, Cloughmills, Antrim	BT44 9LF
Killymurriss GB	175 Dunminning Road, Glarryford, Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 9PW
Glarryford Young Farmers Club	6 Station Road, Glarryford, Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 9RA
1st Clough BB	Clough Presbyterian Church, Springmount Rd, Clough, Antrim	BT44 9RB
Clough Presbyterian YC	35 Springmount Road, Clough, Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 9RQ
1st Killymurriss Scout Group	175 Dunminning Road, Glarryford, Ballymena, Antrim	BT44 9PW
273rd Ballymoney Reformed Presbyterian GB	Holmes Memorial Hall, Charlotte Street, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6AZ

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
2nd Ballymoney BB	Holmes Memorial Hall, Charlotte Street, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 6AZ
1st Ballymoney BB	St James's Church Hall, St James Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6BJ
St James's Presbyterian GB	St James's Church Hall, St James Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6BJ
St James's Presbyterian Youth Club	St James's Presbyterian Church, St James Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6BP
Ballymoney Army Cadet Force	36 John Street, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6DR
Roseyards GB	Roseyards Presbyterian Church Hall, Kirk Road , Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6HN
Glebeside Youth Club	18 Belford Park, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6HR
Cheers Youth Centre	21 Church Street, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6HS
Down's Syndrome Association -Ballymoney (All Sorts Y.C.)	c/o Cheers Youth Centre, 21 Church Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6HS
2nd Ballymoney Guides	St Patrick's Parish Centre, 4A Queen Street, 4A Queen Street, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 6JA
Ballymoney Independent Gateway Club	Ballymoney Social Centre, 12 Edward Street, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6JE
Ballymoney Scouts	Scout Hall, Edward Street, Edward Street, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6JE
Trinity Youth Club	Trinity Presbyterian Church, 2 Rodeing Foot, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6JJ
First Ballymoney Youth Club	65 Meetinghouse Street, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6JN
4th Antrim Scouts	The Den, Castle Community Centre, Castle Street, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 6JT
4th Ballymoney BB	Knock Road, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 6LX
Ballymoney Elim Youth	Elim Church, The Warren , Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 6TH
3rd Ballymoney BB	Church of God Youth Hall, 14 Garryduff Road, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 7AF
Church of God GB	14 Garryduff Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7AF
Church of God Youth Club	Church of God, Garryduff Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7AF
Ballymoney Baptist Youth Club	Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, 33 Garryduff Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7DB
Carnany Youth Club	17 Carnany Drive, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7HR
Finvoy (9th Route) BB	Finvoy Presbyterian Church Hall, Finvoy Road, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 7JS
1st Drumreagh BB	99 Bann Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7NA
Drumreagh GB	Drumreagh Church Hall, 100 Bann Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7NA
Drumreagh Youth Club	Drumreagh Church Hall, 100 Bann Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7NA
Finvoy Presbyterian GB	Finvoy Presbyterian Church, Finvoy Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 7NA
Roseyards (1st Route) BB	Roseyards Presbyterian Church Hall, 115 Kirk Road, Ballymoney , Antrim	BT53 8HR
Kilraughts Young Farmers Club	Moyan Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 8LD

Name of Organisation	Address	Postcode
Kilraughts Girls Friendly Association	56 Moor Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 8LW
1st Kilraughts (2nd Route) BB	56 Moyan Road, Kilraughts, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 8NX
Mosside Youth Club	Community Centre, Mosside, Antrim	BT53 8QD
Mosside (4th Route) BB	Mosside Presbyterian Church, 207 Moycraig Road, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 8QP
Armoy GB	14 Church Road, Armoy, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT53 8XG
Ballycastle GB	1 Castle Street, Ballycastle, Antrim	BT54 6AD
1st Ballycastle Rainbows, Brownies and Guides	Ramoan Parish Centre, The Diamond, Ballycastle, Antrim	BT54 6AP
Ballycastle High School YC	Ballycastle High School, 33 Rathlin Road, Ballycastle, Antrim	BT54 6LD
Ballintoy and Dunseverick YC	Ballintoy Parish Hall, Whitepark Road, Ballintoy, Antrim	BT54 6NQ
Tuesday Night Thing - TNT	Bushmills Presbyterian Church, The Main Street, Bushmills, Antrim	BT57 8QE
1st Dunluce BB	Dunluce Parish Centre, Priestland Road, Bushmills, Antrim	BT57 8QP
Dunluce YC	13 Priestland Road, Bushmills, Antrim	BT57 8QP
Mosside GB	Mosside Presbyterian Church, 207 Moycraig Road, Mosside, Ballymoney, Antrim	BT57 8QP
1st Bushmills Brownies/Guides	Bushmills Primary School, 5 Priestland Rd, Bushmills, Antrim	BT57 8QW
The Den/ Bushmills Child and YP Services	Community Hours, 12 Causeway Court, Bushmills, Antrim	BT57 8SG
Toberkeigh YC	Moycraig Road, Bushmills, Antrim	BT57 8YD
Bannside YC	Community Centre, Gotgole Road, Portglenone, Antrim	BT44 8HP
Ballymena Baptist Youth Club	Hill Street, Ballymena, Co Antrim	BT43 6BW
Bannside Youth Club	Portglenone Community Centre, 10 Gorgole Road, Portglenone	BT44 8HT
Greenlight Gateway	Unit 12, Causeway Enterprise Park, Ballycastle	BT54 6EZ
West Church GB	15-19 Ballymoney Road, Ballymena, Co Antrim	BT43 5BS
St Columba's Scouts	St Columba's Church Hall, Doury Road, Ballymena	BT43 6JD
St Patrick's Scouts	St Patrick's Church Hall, Broughshane, Co Antrim	BT42 4LF

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Education to outline the spending for the funding of early year places, broken down by constituency, in each year since 2013.

(AQW 3913/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has provided the table below outlining the funding provided to private and voluntary settings for pre-school places as part of the Pre-School Education Programme, broken down by constituency.

Pre-School Education Programme Funding

Constituency	2013/14 (£000s)	2014/15 (£000s)	2015/16 (£000s)
Belfast East	399	536	524
Belfast North	593	657	726
Belfast South	578	594	717

Constituency	2013/14 (£000s)	2014/15 (£000s)	2015/16 (£000s)
Belfast West	284	262	313
East Antrim	1,029	946	1,140
East Londonderry	1,050	1,187	1,179
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	1,462	1,359	1,368
Foyle	262	317	329
Lagan Valley	862	893	946
Mid Ulster	1,745	1,756	1,528
Newry And Armagh	1,122	1,252	1,201
North Antrim	1,081	1,189	1,033
North Down	752	756	724
South Antrim	588	587	690
South Down	1,388	1,307	1,320
Strangford	785	843	835
Upper Bann	566	621	721
West Tyrone	865	900	912

Every statutory school receives a fully delegated budget, distributed under the Common Funding Scheme. Information on the budgets provided to Nursery Schools, along with identifiable funding for early year pupils in nursery units in primary schools, is provided below. This information is not available broken down by Parliamentary Constituency, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Pre-school education Common Formula Funding

Provision	2012/13 (£m)	2013/14 (£m)	2014/15 (£m)	2015/16 (£m)
Nursery Schools	18.3	18.2	18.2	18.3
Nursery Classes/Units in primary schools ¹	21.7	21.9	23.0	23.2

Note:

- only identifiable pupil Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) and relevant Targeting Social Need (TSN) funding included in these figures

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the level of staff turnover in school kitchens in the Education Authority North Eastern Region for 2013 - 2016; and (ii) how the level of turnover compares with other Education Authority regions. **(AQW 3917/16-21)**

Mr Weir: The table below provides the answer as requested.

	2013		2014		2015		2013	2014	2015
	Perman-ent Post	Leavers	Perman-ent Post	Leavers	Perman-ent Post	Leavers			
Armagh	974	91	968	118	949	110	9.3	12.2	11.6
Ballymena	901	146	898	145	874	143	16.2	16.1	16.4
Belfast	577	102	577	93	594	84	17.7	16.1	14.1
Dundonald	612	70	625	75	626	117	11.4	12	18.7
Omagh	834	108	821	79	834	107	12.9	9.6	12.8

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail all recorded health and safety breaches in school kitchens in the Education Authority's North Eastern Region between 2013 and 2014; and (ii) to outline what actions were taken to remedy these incidents.

(AQW 3918/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that three accidents in school kitchens in the north eastern region were reported on accident report forms in the 2013-14 year. This figure does not include minor accidents, which are recorded at kitchen level in an accident book.

Where an accident has been reported, managers take remedial action, depending on the individual circumstances. Appropriate risk management and remedial actions are discussed and agreed with the Health and Safety Officer.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education how many cases of bullying have been reported via schools in the last 12 months.
(AQW 3921/16-21)

Mr Weir: Schools are not currently required to record bullying incidences in school and the only figures available to the Department are for cases where bullying has been cited as the reason for a pupil being suspended or expelled. These figures are published annually by the Department and can be accessed via the following web-page.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/pupil-suspensions-and-expulsions>

The 'Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016' was granted Royal Assent on 12 May 2016. One of the specific issues this legislation is intended to address is to introduce a requirement for all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome. This will allow us, going forward, to quantify the true scale of the problem and any emerging trends which may require further specific interventions.

While the provisions of this Act are not yet in force, I intend that they will be in place for the start of 2017-18 school year.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many students from the Strabane district achieved 5 or more GCSE's in 2016.
(AQW 3930/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information on the attainment of school leavers in 2015/16 will be available in May 2017.

Figures for 2014/15 are available in the publication below.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin>

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what he is doing to improve school transport in rural areas of West Tyrone.
(AQW 3931/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority is required to provide home to school transport assistance to facilitate the attendance of pupils in grant-aided schools. The EA continually strives to provide an effective and efficient service for pupils and in doing so conducts annual reviews of routes in all areas, including rural areas of West Tyrone, making appropriate adjustments if required. Any specific issues raised by parents regarding a particular area are investigated on an individual basis and alterations to routes, if required, are then made.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many students receive EMA (i) in West Tyrone; and (ii) in the Strabane district.
(AQW 3932/16-21)

Mr Weir: In the 2015/16 school year means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was received by:-

- (i) 790 pupils attending schools in West Tyrone.
- (ii) 292 pupils attending schools in the former Strabane District Council area.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education whether his Department will consider a scheme aimed at reinvigorating each Principals' workforce.
(AQW 3954/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme launched on the 5 September with the policy aim of enabling schools and Principals' to refresh and re-profile their teaching workforce, by providing a mechanism for teachers aged 55 years and over, who are in permanent posts, to be released from the profession at their request, and to replace the vacant posts with Recently Qualified Teachers.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education whether he will ensure that his Department will plan and fund a comprehensive programme of continuous professional development for teachers.
(AQW 3955/16-21)

Mr Weir: "Learning Leaders", my Department's Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, was published earlier this year. The Strategy provides an opportunity to refresh our thinking and build towards a vision for teacher professional learning

beyond 2020. A Year One Action Plan, published alongside the Strategy, will be implemented during the course of the 2016/17 academic year in partnership with key education stakeholders.

My Department makes available significant funding for the continuous professional development of teachers which is delivered by the Education Authority (EA) and other education partners.

Schools themselves receive delegated budgets under the Local Management of Schools funding arrangements and it is the responsibility of Boards of Governors and Principals to determine how this funding will be spent in accordance with their pupils' needs. Teacher training needs should be identified through the School Development Planning process and schools may meet the costs of some of this through their delegated budget.

My Department has also made available five staff training days (known as Baker Days) and up to five school development days which may be used for teacher training during the course of the school year at an opportunity cost of over £20m.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on any preparatory work being undertaken by his Department in relation to a new, updated survey into teacher health and wellbeing.

(AQW 3956/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education does not employ teachers; teachers are employed by the Board of Governors for each school setting.

The Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC), which is made up of representatives from the employers, sectoral interests, the Department and the teaching unions, is responsible for determining teachers' terms and conditions.

The Health and Safety Working Group of the TNC is considering the issue of Teachers' Health and Wellbeing, which includes preparatory work on a survey into teacher health and wellbeing.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education what his Department is doing to deal with food hunger that manifests during summer months as a result of no free school meals outside of term time.

(AQW 4017/16-21)

Mr Weir: Free school meals are provided to ensure that pupils, who are from families that are most in need, have access to a healthy and nutritious cooked meal during the school day. I consider this to be an effective use of my Department's available resources.

Schools may choose to work in partnership with community groups and organisations in their area to provide holiday time meals for children where the need exists.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether successful applications to the School Enhancement Programme will impact a school's ability for a future new build.

(AQW 4018/16-21)

Mr Weir: Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI), which provides guidance on the proper handling and reporting of public money, makes clear that in developing a new call under the School Enhancement Programme (SEP) the Department must have a clear benefits realisation plan for the investment of capital funds.

Potentially, where the need is proven, up to £4m can be invested at a single school site under SEP.

Consequently where a school is seeking major capital investment, such as SEP funding, the department will seek assurance that the benefit of the investment will be fully realised. This may mean deferring consideration of a major new build for the school for a number of years.

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education whether the use of free school meals can be used as an indicator that accurately represents poverty levels in rural areas.

(AQW 4055/16-21)

Mr Weir: Free School Meals is not used by the Department as an indicator of poverty in rural areas. Free School Meals is, however, commonly used by DE as a proxy indicator of wider deprivation. This is because it is highly correlated with the NISRA Multiple Deprivation Measure which comprises seven domains; deprivation income, employment, health, proximity to services, living environment, crime and disorder and income deprivation.

It must be noted that the NISRA MDM guidance advised "that although the term deprivation is often synonymous with monetary poverty, it is important to note that only the income deprivation domain is intended to measure poverty in this sense" (Page 5) http://www.nisra.gov.uk/deprivation/archive/Updateof2005Measures/NIMDM_2010_Report.pdf

Free school meals has a number of characteristics that makes it the most reliable indicator for identifying social deprivation i.e.

- it relates to the individual pupil, collecting information that is personal to the pupil's family circumstances, and is therefore more robust than an area-based measure which assumes that everyone in the same area is alike;
- it is updated on an annual basis and is therefore current;
- it is available as part of the census return and is therefore easily gathered at school and pupil level;

- it is capable of independent validation; and
- it is highly correlated with the Multiple Deprivation Measure and with the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).
- It provides an indication of the relative concentration of potentially 'disadvantaged' pupils in a given school in a way that no other indicator currently does.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Education what assistance is offered from the Education Authority to support pupils with autism. (AQW 4058/16-21)

Mr Weir: I would refer the member to AQO 201/16-21 tabled by Cathal Boylan MLA and published in Hansard on 16 September 2016.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education (i) how many grammar and secondary schools have merged; and (ii) what status have they been given. (AQW 4065/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Sustainable Schools Policy, published in 2009 underpins the Area Planning process and aims to ensure there is a network of sustainable schools to meet the educational needs of children and young people in all areas. Since the introduction of the policy, the following grammar and secondary schools have merged through a process of amalgamation instigated by the publication of a Development Proposal (DP), resulting in the formation of St Ronan's College, a voluntary grammar school.

Grammar and Secondary schools amalgamating	Year DP published	Date of decision	Date of amalgamation	Name of amalgamated school	Management Type
St Michael's Grammar St Mary's Junior High St Paul's Junior High	2013	27/02/14	01/09/15	St Ronan's College	Voluntary (Grammar)

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education (i) whether he has plans to review the primary school curriculum and; (ii) if so, to outline the timing of such a review. (AQW 4066/16-21)

Mr Weir: It has been approximately 10 years since the last overall review of the statutory curriculum so a further review is something that I intend to progress during this mandate.

The timing of such a review has yet to be determined.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils not accepted back to their school for sixth form after not achieving the relevant GCSE grades, broken down by constituency. (AQW 4086/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education does not hold this information.

While DE has a statutory responsibility to set the admissions and enrolment numbers for each school in Northern Ireland, the Boards of Governors (BoG) of post primary schools are the statutory admissions authority for their respective schools.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many children left primary school not able to read or write in the last academic year. (AQW 4136/16-21)

Mr Weir: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the international assessment undertaken here for the first time in 2011, provides an assessment of the literacy skills of our pupils in P6 (9-10 year olds). This study shows that we are the highest ranking English speaking region in the world in reading - 5th out of the 45 countries surveyed. It also highlighted that in reading, a fifth of our P6 children (19%) are performing at the advanced international benchmark – the highest level possible - compared with the international average of 8 per cent. In relation to the low benchmark, just 3 per cent of our pupils failed to reach this standard compared to an international average of 5 per cent.

At a system level my department collects information at the end of Key Stage 2 which outlines the proportion of pupils at the expected level of progression in communication and using mathematics. The data for 2014/15 shows that in Communication, the proportion not achieving the expected level was 23.2% (the associated confidence levels are 21.9% and 24.5%)³. However, not being at the expected level does not necessarily reflect an inability to read or write.

3 Due to the effect of industrial action, 2014/15 data have been weighted to account for non-response bias. The best estimate is the mean figure drawn from the sample. The lower and upper estimates are for the 95% confidence interval. There is 95% certainty that the true population value lies between the lower and higher estimates.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to outline the resources and initiatives his Department has in place helping children to read and write.

(AQW 4137/16-21)

Mr Weir: Ensuring that children and young people fulfil their academic potential, including their potential in all areas of literacy, is a focus of the entire education system. This is reflected in 'Count, Read: Succeed', our literacy and numeracy strategy, which outlines how we will raise attainment levels in both literacy and numeracy and narrow the gap in educational outcomes.

In schools, teachers and literacy coordinators play a key role in ensuring that children learn to read and write. Their work to achieve this is supported by my department, the managing authorities, by school leaders and by parents and carers.

Improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for all children remains a challenge and, given the central importance of those skills, it is one I aim to address.

The Department is currently engaged in a range of activities, both within and outside school, which support teachers and school leaders in the development of literacy skills. This includes support in the early years through the Sure Start and Pre-School Education Programmes, as well as additional support to schools via Extended Schools funding and through the Literacy and Numeracy Key Stage 2/3 CPD Project.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education (i) whether all elements of the JNC document with Terms and Conditions for youth workers is applied to all youth workers funded by either his Department or the Education Authority; and (ii) If not, which elements are not required.

(AQW 4146/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- i) The Education Authority (EA) applies the terms and conditions contained within the National 'Report of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers' [commonly referred to as the 'Pink Book'].

The exception to this is where the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs) agreed terms and conditions at a local level which included the following:

- a reduction in the working week from 37 to 36 hours [agreed as part of the negotiations relating to the introduction of Single Status in 1997];
- worker-in-training pay scales – EA operates locally agreed scales which were implemented in 2006;
- implementation of new job descriptions for Outdoor Education Centre Staff in September 2011.

- ii) EA does not apply:

- a 'Trainee' scale; or
- enhanced pay scales for staff with additional qualifications (Masters level).

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the organisations, that as a result of the changes to the criteria for the Pathway Fund, no longer receive funding.

(AQW 4149/16-21)

Mr Weir: EYO advises that the organisations in the table below were in receipt of funding from the Early Years Fund prior to its closure on 31 March 2016; and do not receive funding from the new Pathway Fund, introduced on 1 April 2016.

24 recipients of the Early Years Fund did not apply to the Pathway Fund.

Early Years Fund – Organisation Name

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| ■ 174 Trust Pre-School | ■ Bees Nees Early Years Centre |
| ■ Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup | ■ Benburb Community Playgroup |
| ■ Appletree Childcare | ■ Bunnahone Bunnies Playgroup |
| ■ Armoy Cross Community Playgroup | ■ Buttonmoon Playgroup |
| ■ Ashgrove Pre-School Playgroup | ■ Carryduff Pre-School Playgroup |
| ■ Atlas Women's Centre | ■ Castlerock Community Playgroup |
| ■ Atticall Playgroup | ■ Caw Community Playgroup |
| ■ Ballinascreen Early Years | ■ Chirpy Chicks Playgroup |
| ■ Ballougry Integrated Community Playgroup | ■ Clady Tiny Tots |
| ■ Ballykinlar Cross Community Pre-School Ltd | ■ Cloughmills Early Years |
| ■ Banagher Community Playgroup | ■ Crows Nest Community Playgroup |
| ■ Barnardos BME | ■ Derrytrasna Playgroup |
| ■ Barnardos Forward Steps | ■ Dervock Community Playgroup |
| ■ BCDA | ■ Drumellan Community Association |
| ■ Beacon Playgroup | ■ Drumsurn Parent and Toddler |

- Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup
- Dunloy Community Playgroup
- Earlybird Playgroup
- Glenarm Community Pre-School
- Greengables Playgroup
- Hansel and Gretel Pre-School
- Happy Days Playgroup
- Harbour Bears Pre-School Playgroup
- Hillside Pre-School Playgroup
- Holy Cross Pre-School
- Holy Trinity Centre
- Jack Horner and Mother Goose Playgroups
- Kilkeel Community Association
- Killeen Playgroup
- Killen Parent and Toddler
- Killyman Community Playgroup
- Kingdom Playgroup
- Krafty Kids (Ogras)
- Ladybird Playgroup
- Laurencetown Playgroup
- Leitrim Community Playgroup
- Little Acorns Playgroup Derrynoose
- Little Castle Playgroup
- Little Diamonds Community Playgroup
- Little Doves Childcare Centre
- Little Folk Playgroup
- Little Oaks Pre-School Playgroup
- Little People Playgroup
- Little Rainbows Playgroup
- Little Rascals Community Playgroup
- Little Villagers Playgroup
- Loughgiel Community Playgroup
- Macosquin Community Playgroup
- Magherafelt Women's Group (Kidz Lodge)
- Magilligan Community Playgroup
- Naiscoil an Chreagain
- Naiscoil Charn Tochair
- Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha
- NICMA
- O'Fiaich Playgroup
- Omagh Early Years Centre
- Orchard Community Playgroup
- Portaferry Playgroup
- Portrush Community Playgroup
- Poyntzpass Community Playgroup
- Rainbow Community Playgroup
- Rainbow Playgroup
- Rasharkin Community Playgroup
- Shalom House Creche
- Shankill Women's Centre
- Slievegallion Community Playgroup
- Smart Attack Childcare Services
- St Teresa's Youth Centre
- Stepping Stones Playgroup
- Stepping Stones Pre-School Nursery
- Stewartstown Tiny Tots
- Straidarran Community Playgroup
- Strangford Parent and Toddler
- Sugar and Spice Playgroup
- Sunflower Early Years Group
- Taghnevan Pre-School Playgroup
- Taylorstown Cross Community Complex
- The Cedar Foundation
- The Orchard Playgroup
- Tiny Steps Creche
- Tiny Toons Playgroup
- Tiny Tots Community Playgroup
- Tiny Tots Corner Playgroup
- Tober Tinys Playgroup
- Zero-8-Teen

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the organisations that received funding from the Pathway Fund and that previously had not been in receipt of Early Years funding, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4150/16-21)

Mr Weir: EYO advises that the organisations in the table below (broken down by constituency) received funding from the Pathway Fund and were not previously in receipt of funding from the Early Years Fund.

Pathway Fund – Recipient Name	Constituency
Ballybeen Women's Centre Ltd	Belfast East
East Belfast Mission-Bright Sparks Daycare	Belfast East
Oasis Caring in Action	Belfast East
Star Neighbourhood Centre	Belfast North
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	Belfast South
Royal Mencap Society - MENCAP	Belfast South
Sólás	Belfast South
Cairde Gaelscoil na Móna	Belfast West

Pathway Fund – Recipient Name	Constituency
Glen Community Parent Youth Group	Belfast West
Kids Together Belfast	Belfast West
Quaker Service	Belfast West
St Colums PreSchool Centre	East Londonderry
The Dry Arch Childrens Centre	East Londonderry
Bo Peeps Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Clogher Valley Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
First Housing Aid & Support Services	Foyle
Little Orchids Ltd	Foyle
Women's Centre Derry	Foyle
Jack and Jill Pre-School	Mid Ulster
Giggles Early Years Ltd	Newry and Armagh
Ballee Community Childcare	North Antrim
Home-Start North Down	North Down
Kilcooley Women's Centre	North Down
Play-A-Way Childcare Centre	Strangford
Monbrief Pre-School Playgroup	Upper Bann
Richmount Playgroup	Upper Bann
Cornabracken Child Care Ltd	West Tyrone
Denamona Pre-School Education Centre	West Tyrone
Eskra Childcare Ltd	West Tyrone
Giggles and Wiggles	West Tyrone
McClintocks Childrens Centre	West Tyrone
Nippers Alley Playgroup	West Tyrone

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the organisations that received funding from the Early Years Fund prior to the introduction of the Pathways Fund, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4151/16-21)

Mr Weir: EYO advises that the organisations in the table below (broken down by constituency) were in receipt of funding from the Early Years Fund prior to its closure on 31 March 2016.

Early Years Fund - Group Name	Constituency
Barnardos Forward Steps	Belfast East
Bloomfield Playgroup	Belfast East
174 Trust Pre-School	Belfast North
Ashton Childcare	Belfast North
Holy Cross Pre School	Belfast North
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast North
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast North
Naiscoil Ard Eoin	Belfast North
Shalom House Creche	Belfast North
Stepping Stones Pre School Nursery	Belfast North

Early Years Fund - Group Name	Constituency
An Droichead	Belfast South
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast South
Barnardos BME	Belfast South
BCDA	Belfast South
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast South
Carryduff Pre School Playgroup	Belfast South
The Cedar Foundation	Belfast South
Windsor Women's Centre	Belfast South
Blackie Creche	Belfast West
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast West
First Steps Playgroup	Belfast West
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast West
Holy Trinity Centre	Belfast West
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast West
Naiscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast West
Newhill First Steps Childcare Centre	Belfast West
Parish of Nativity Playgroup	Belfast West
Roden Street Development Group	Belfast West
Scoil na Fuiseoige	Belfast West
Shankill Women's Centre	Belfast West
St Teresa's Youth Centre	Belfast West
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	Belfast West
Whiterock Creche Centre	Belfast West
Glenarm Community Pre School	East Antrim
Greengables Playgroup	East Antrim
Hansel and Gretel Pre-School	East Antrim
Harbour Bears Pre-School Playgroup	East Antrim
Larne Community Care Centre	East Antrim
Rainbow Playgroup	East Antrim
Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup	East Londonderry
Appletree Childcare	East Londonderry
Banagher Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Castlerock Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Crow's Nest Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Drumsum Parent and Toddler	East Londonderry
Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre Ltd	East Londonderry
Limavady Community Development Initiative Ltd	East Londonderry
Little Diamonds Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Little Rascals Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Macosquin Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Magilligan Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Portrush Community Playgroup	East Londonderry

Early Years Fund - Group Name	Constituency
Straidarran Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
Orchard Community Playgroup	East Londonderry
West Bann Development	East Londonderry
Acorn Women's Group	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Benburb Community Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Bunnahone Bunnies Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Killyman Community Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Little Castle Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Ballougy Integrated Community Playgroup	Foyle
Caw Community Playgroup	Foyle
Derry Well Woman	Foyle
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	Foyle
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	Foyle
Tiny Tots Community Playgroup	Foyle
Atlas Women's Centre	Lagan Valley
Grove Community Playgroup	Lagan Valley
Ballinascreen Early Years	Mid Ulster
Beacon Playgroup	Mid Ulster
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Mid Ulster
Krafty Kids (Ogras)	Mid Ulster
Little Amps Early Years	Mid Ulster
Little Rainbows Playgroup	Mid Ulster
Magherafelt Womens Group Ltd - Kidz Lodge	Mid Ulster
Naiscoil Charn Tochair	Mid Ulster
Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha	Mid Ulster
Pomeroy Pre-School Playgroup	Mid Ulster
Slievegallion Community Playgroup	Mid Ulster
Stepping Stones Playgroup	Mid Ulster
Stewartstown Tiny Tots	Mid Ulster
Tiny Steps Creche	Mid Ulster
Tober Tinys Playgroup	Mid Ulster
Buttonmoon Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Clady Tiny Tots	Newry & Armagh
Dara Pre-School	Newry & Armagh
Earlybird Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Happy Days Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Kidzone Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Killean Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Little Acorns Playgroup Derrynoose	Newry & Armagh
Little People Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Little Villagers Playgroup	Newry & Armagh

Early Years Fund - Group Name	Constituency
Naiscoil an Chreagain	Newry & Armagh
Newry Early Years Children and Family Centre	Newry & Armagh
O'Fiaich Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Poyntzpass Community Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
The Firs Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
The Orchard Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Tiny Tots Corner Playgroup	Newry & Armagh
Armoy Cross Community Playgroup	North Antrim
Cloughmills Early Years	North Antrim
Dervock Community Playgroup	North Antrim
Dunloy Community Playgroup	North Antrim
Jack Horner & Mother Goose Playgroups	North Antrim
Loughgiel Community Playgroup	North Antrim
Rasharkin Community Playgroup	North Antrim
Taylorstown Cross Community Complex	North Antrim
Hillside Pre-School Playgroup	South Antrim
Atticall Playgroup	South Down
Ballykinlar Cross Community Pre-School Ltd	South Down
Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup	South Down
Dunnaman Childrens Centre	South Down
Kilkeel Community Association	South Down
Kingdom Playgroup	South Down
Leitrim Community Playgroup	South Down
Little Folk Playgroup	South Down
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	South Down
Strangford Parent and Toddler	South Down
Tiny Toons Playgroup	South Down
Bees Nees Early Years Centre	Strangford
Chirpy Chicks Playgroup	Strangford
Little Doves Childcare Centre	Strangford
NICMA	Strangford
Portaferry Playgroup	Strangford
Ashgrove Pre-School Playgroup	Upper Bann
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Upper Bann
Derrytrasna Playgroup	Upper Bann
Drumellan Community Association	Upper Bann
Laurencetown Playgroup	Upper Bann
Little Oaks Pre-School Playgroup	Upper Bann
Taghnevan Pre-School Playgroup	Upper Bann
Zero-8-Teen	Upper Bann
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	West Tyrone
Carebears Community Playgroup	West Tyrone

Early Years Fund - Group Name	Constituency
First Steps Community Playgroup	West Tyrone
First Steps Day Care Project	West Tyrone
Killen Parent and Toddler	West Tyrone
Ladybird Playgroup	West Tyrone
Omagh Early Years Centre	West Tyrone
Rainbow Community Playgroup	West Tyrone
Smart Attack Childcare Services	West Tyrone
Sugar and Spice Playgroup	West Tyrone
Sunflower Early Years Group	West Tyrone

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to detail the costs associated with school children having Translink passes.
(AQW 4155/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the total cost of providing home to school transport on Translink buses in 2015/16 was approximately:

- Ulsterbus - £29.5m
- Metro - £1.8m

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many children have Translink bus passes.
(AQW 4156/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the total number of children who were in receipt of home to school transport on Translink buses in 2015/16 was:-

- Ulsterbus – 47,089
- Metro – 3,382

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many additional passes would be required for every child to be provided with a Translink bus pass.
(AQW 4157/16-21)

Mr Weir: Approximately 260,000 additional passes would be required for every child to be provided with a Translink bus pass.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the 1.7 per cent reduction in pupils achieving A* to C in GCSE Mathematics.
(AQW 4160/16-21)

Mr Weir: The table below shows GCSE Grade A* to C achievement in Mathematics over the last 8 years. This data provides an opportunity to make high level comparisons over time across NI, England and Wales.

GCSE Mathematics Cumulative % A* to C

Year	N. Ireland	England	Wales
2009	60.1	57.3	53.9
2010	60.9	58.5	55.4
2011	60.9	58.8	56.4
2012	62.9	58.3	58.5
2013	64.6	57.7	52.8
2014	66.2	63.0	50.6
2015	66.6	64.1	47.5
2016	64.9	61.5	47.7

When analysing the data it is also important to recognise that, while GCSEs are taken in the main by students at 16 years at the end of key stage 4, there are also learners over this age and adults included. In addition some GCSEs are taken early each year mainly by students at 15 years of age. The result being that, year on year, the GCSE Mathematics cohort varies. It

cannot be assumed that the strength of the 16 years cohort is the same year on year and it is difficult therefore to interpret the data on this basis.

Whilst I note that there has been a slight decline in the GCSE Mathematics performance this year, I would refer you to the longer term and sustained trends in performance rather than a single year's outcome. As illustrated by the data, the long term trend for NI students taking GCSE Mathematics is positive and our students continue to outperform in this subject compared with England and Wales.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Independent Review Panel report on the Review of Integrated Education.

(AQW 4170/16-21)

Mr Weir: My officials have received a draft of the Review Panel's report and are currently undertaking a factual check. I look forward to considering the final report once this work has been completed.

The Panel has already undertaken considerable engagement with stakeholders including issuing a Call for Evidence in March this year. I will want to give careful consideration to the report's findings before deciding what further engagement might be required.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education for an update on what his Department is doing in relation to the Public Accounts Committee recommendations in the Sustainability of Schools report.

(AQW 4171/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department's response to the recommendations contained within the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report, in the form of a Memorandum of Reply, was laid in the Assembly on 10 June 2016.

The majority of the recommendations included in the PAC report correspond with those in the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Sustainability of Schools. Work on implementing recommendations is being taken forward by a number of Project Teams involving relevant Department of Education (DE) staff and, as necessary, Education Authority (EA) and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) representatives.

Progress is monitored by a Programme Board that meets monthly, with quarterly progress reports provided to the DE Board.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to outline why his Department and the Education Authority have not been able to resolve a landlord responsibility dispute regarding Blackwater Integrated College.

(AQW 4172/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education (DE) is aware that capital investment is required to improve the condition of the current school buildings occupied by Blackwater Integrated College. However DE is not in a position to invest this level of capital as the school is not vested in the schools estate because it has not yet achieved capital viability. In the interim, urgent health and safety works have been undertaken.

Discussions between DE and the Education Authority are ongoing in relation to the school.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education for an update on Priory Integrated College's new build.

(AQW 4173/16-21)

Mr Weir: I visited Priory Integrated College on 15 September and discussed the position on the new build that will be funded under the Fresh Start Agreement with the school Principal, the Vice Principal and the Chair of the Board of Governors.

The project is in the very early stages of planning. The Department and the Education Authority are working collaboratively to reach a decision on school enrolment numbers. Once that process is complete, correspondence will issue in respect of setting up the first Project Board meeting.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education whether he will be engaging with education stakeholders on the recommendations of the report on the Review of Integrated Education.

(AQW 4174/16-21)

Mr Weir: My officials have received a draft of the Review Panel's report and are currently undertaking a factual check. I look forward to considering the final report once this work has been completed.

The Panel has already undertaken considerable engagement with stakeholders including issuing a Call for Evidence in March this year. I will want to give careful consideration to the report's findings before deciding what further engagement might be required.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how many children had an attendance rate of less than 90 per cent in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4179/16-21)

Mr Weir: The numbers of pupils for the academic years 2010/11 to 2014/15; the most recent year for which information is available, with less than 90% attendance are contained in the table below.

Year	Number of pupils with less than 90% attendance		
	Primary schools	Post-primary schools	Total
2010/11	20,253	27,180	47,433
2011/12	18,782	25,018	43,800
2012/13	20,399	25,117	45,516
2013/14	16,721	21,717	38,438
2014/15	18,003	20,819	38,822

Source School Census

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the absence rates in schools in Upper Bann, including the authorised and unauthorised percentages.

(AQW 4181/16-21)

Mr Weir: The absence rates in schools in Upper Bann, including the authorised and unauthorised percentages for the most recent year for which data are available, 2014/15, are set out below:

- Absence rate 4.6%
- Authorised absence rate 3.0%
- Unauthorised absence rate 1.6%

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to outline the work his Department is undertaking in relation to the rationalisation of school holidays to assist parents in childcare and caring requirements.

(AQW 4182/16-21)

Mr Weir: While I appreciate that standardised holidays would be more suitable to meet the needs of working parents and families with childcare and caring requirements, I have no plans to further standardise school holidays at this time.

Each year a set of school holiday dates, which are harmonised to take account of the availability of school transport and meal services, are agreed by a working group representing all school sectors. Schools are informed of the harmonised dates when transport and school meal services are not available but they are allowed flexibility to operate on these days at their own discretion.

All schools have up to ten days available for school improvement/professional development purposes. Some flexibility is necessary for these days as all training could not be delivered on the same days to all schools.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education, given its increased role, to detail the additional resources he has committed to the Education Welfare Service.

(AQW 4183/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2015/16 the Department allocated £1.93m to the Education Authority (EA) to fund the delivery of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in order to support pupils and schools with low attendance levels. This represented a 22% increase in funding since 2011/12.

From 2016/17, the EWS is now funded through the EA's block grant and it is therefore for the EA to determine the level of funding that they choose to allocate to the EWS.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education, given that their absence levels are six times higher than the average, to outline the plans his Department has to address the levels of absence amongst traveller children.

(AQW 4184/16-21)

Mr Weir: The attendance levels of traveller pupils have increased by 5.6% at primary level and by 8.1% at post-primary level since 2008/09.

At present, the Department allocates an additional amount of funding to schools for each Traveller Child through the Common Funding Formula and through the Education Authority funds the dedicated Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) and the Education Welfare Service (EWS) who work closely together in order to improve the attendance of traveller pupils.

The TESS 2016/17 Delivery Plan identifies improving attendance as a key priority for how they will continue to engage with traveller families and the relevant schools to secure improved attendance.

The EWS 2016-17 Action Plan also identifies capacity building, preventative work and pilot programmes in areas with high levels of poor Traveller attendance.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to support the Education Authority in providing support to families that have had a reduction in hours in nursery placements for children with special educational needs.
(AQW 4198/16-21)

Mr Weir: Statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests with schools and the Education Authority (EA) which are responsible for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN.

The EA has advised that individual special schools have elected to provide a variety of strategies to support parents and families.

In addition, some special schools are complementing this work through their participation in the Early Intervention Transformation Programme which provides enhanced support for parents.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the progress of new build for Devenish College; and (ii) what financial provision is available for this project in financial years 2016/17 and 2017/18.
(AQW 4203/16-21)

Mr Weir: A business case for the major capital investment project to provide a new post primary school to cater for 800 pupils at Devenish College was approved in December 2014 with estimated total costs of over £23 million.

In October 2015, Isherwood & Ellis were appointed as the Integrated Design Team for the project and are currently developing conceptual designs for the new build. Enabling works at the site have recently completed and will assist in informing the design work further. A Pre-Application Discussion with Planners also took place over the summer months to seek early views on the proposed design.

Subject to the progression of designs, approval of a Planning Application and availability of funding; it is currently anticipated that a contractor will be appointed and the project will progress to site during the 2017/18 financial year.

Total expenditure in 2016/17 is estimated at £660k. The Department's capital allocation for the 2017/18 financial year is not yet known. All projects that are not contractually committed are subject to funding being available at the time to permit the project to proceed to tender stage.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each special school nursery, the number and frequency of (i) classes; (ii) hours per class; and (iii) pupils per class, for each of the last five years.
(AQW 4231/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information about pre-school provision in special schools is as follows:

2015/16

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Ardnashee School & College	2	3	20
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	1	4	5
Brookfield Special School	1	4.5	14
Castletower School	2	2.5	9
Ceara Special School	1	2.5	6
Clifton Special School	2	4.5	14
Donard Special School	2	2.75	*
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	1	5	9
Harberton Special School	1	5	13
Hill Croft Special School	2	2.5	11
Kilronan Special School	2	2.5	12
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	1	4	*
Lisanally Special School	2	2.25	7
Mitchell House Special School	1	5	6
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	4	4.67	17
Parkview Special School	2	4.5	11
Rathore School	1	2.25	16

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Roddensvale Special School	2	2.5	12
Rossmar Special School	1	3.5	5
Sandelford Special School	2	2.5	12
Sperrinview Special School	2	2.5	12
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	1	5	6
Tor Bank Special School	3	4.5	18
Willow Bridge School	1	3	5

2014/15

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Ardnashee School & College	2	3	12
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	1	4	*
Brookfield Special School	1	4.5	13
Castletower School	2	2.5	11
Ceara Special School	1	2.5	13
Clifton Special School	3	4.5	7
Donard Special School	2	2.5	7
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	1	5	10
Harberton Special School	2	5	19
Hill Croft Special School	2	2.5	13
Kilronan Special School	2	2.5	11
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	2	4	10
Knockevin Special School	1	4.5	6
Lisanally Special School	2	2.25	7
Mitchell House Special School	1	5	9
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	2	4.67	15
Parkview Special School	2	4.5	13
Rathore School	1	2.25	14
Roddensvale Special School	2	2.5	7
Rossmar Special School	1	3.5	5
Sandelford Special School	2	2.5	13
Sperrinview Special School	2	2.5	11
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	1	5	10
Tor Bank Special School	3	4.5	16
Willow Bridge School	1	3	5

2013/14

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	2	4	8
Belmont House Special School	1	3	8

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Brookfield Special School	1	4.5	11
Castletower School	2	2.5	10
Ceara Special School	1	2.5	12
Clifton Special School	3	4.5	10
Donard Special School	1	2.75	9
Fleming Fulton Special School	2	4.67	9
Foyleview Special School	3	4.5	9
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	1	5	*
Harberton Special School	2	5	18
Kilronan Special School	2	2.5	15
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	3	4	9
Knockevin Special School	2	4.5	9
Lisanally Special School	2	2.25	7
Mitchell House Special School	2	5	7
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	3	4.67	18
Parkview Special School	2	4.5	6
Rathore School	1	2.25	10
Roddensvale Special School	2	2.5	9
Rossmar Special School	1	3.5	5
Sandelford Special School	2	2.5	12
Sperrinview Special School	1	2.5	6
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	1	5	*
Tor Bank Special School	4	4.5	16
Willow Bridge School	1	3	*

2012/13

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	1	4	*
Belmont House Special School	1	3	7
Brookfield Special School	1	4.5	8
Castletower School	1	2.5	13
Ceara Special School	1	2.5	10
Clifton Special School	3	4.5	7
Donard Special School	1	2.75	*
Fleming Fulton Special School	2	4.67	10
Foyleview Special School	2	4.5	7
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	1	5	10
Harberton Special School	1	5	11
Kilronan Special School	2	2.5	11
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	2	4	7

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Knockevin Special School	2	4.5	6
Lisanally Special School	2	2.25	6
Mitchell House Special School	2	5	9
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	4	4.67	20
Parkview Special School	2	4.5	10
Rathore School	1	2.25	10
Roddensvale Special School	2	2.5	14
Rossmar Special School	1	3.5	5
Sandelford Special School	1	2.5	9
Sperrinview Special School	2	2.5	8
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	1	5	9
Tor Bank Special School	3	4.5	13

2011/12

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	1	4	*
Belmont House Special School	1	3	8
Brookfield Special School	1	4.5	7
Castletower School	2	4	6
Ceara Special School	1	2.5	11
Clifton Special School	2	4.5	10
Donard Special School	1	2.75	*
Fleming Fulton Special School	2	4.67	9
Foyleview Special School	2	4.5	6
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	1	5	9
Harberton Special School	1	5	10
Hill Croft Special School	2	4	9
Jordanstown Special School	1	4	*
Kilronan Special School	2	4	12
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	1	4	*
Knockevin Special School	3	4.5	9
Lisanally Special School	2	2.25	5
Mitchell House Special School	1	5	12
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	5	4.67	22
Parkview Special School	2	4.5	14
Rathore School	1	2.25	7
Roddensvale Special School	2	4	16
Rossmar Special School	1	3.5	7
Sperrinview Special School	2	2.5	9
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	1	5	6

	(i) No of classes	(ii) Hours per class	(iii) Enrolments
Tor Bank Special School	2	4.5	13

Source: NI school census; Education Authority

Notes:

- 1 Special school nursery pupils refer to any pupils recorded as either nursery or reception in the annual school census, or pupils aged 3 and under as of 1st July of the previous academic year. Some of these classes may have had older pupils taught in them, but have been excluded from this analysis.
- 2 * denotes fewer than 5 pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils
- 3 Enrolments are collected through the annual school census at the same point each year and can change as the academic year progresses.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment why a significant percentage of boys do not achieve a C Grade or higher in GCSE Maths; and (ii) whether his Department proposes to revise the curriculum in the future as one measure for addressing this deficit.

(AQW 4247/16-21)

Mr Weir: There is a range of reasons which impact on the grades achieved by pupils in examinations. This includes issues such as pupil ability and motivation; teaching methods; school leadership; and the level of parental involvement. It is also important to note that for some pupils, achieving grades D-G does not represent underachievement.

Sustained improvement is best achieved where schools are supported and trusted to devise their own school improvement strategies. Through classroom observation and analysis of formative assessment, teachers are able to use their professional judgement to assess if a pupil is underachieving.

I will continue to focus on those policies and strategies that are driving improvement and which aim to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning which some pupils face. I will also ensure that effective practice emerging from these strategies will continue to be disseminated across the school system.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many teaching vacancies have been advertised by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools over the past two years; and (ii) a constituency breakdown of these vacancies.

(AQW 4253/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department is not the employer of teachers, and is not responsible for the appointment of teachers.

CCMS has provided the following figures in relation to how many teaching vacancies have been advertised over the past two years:-

- (i) 01 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 - 360
- (ii) 01 April 2015 – 31 March 2016 - 394

CCMS do not hold this information by constituency, an exercise to do so would result in disproportionate costs.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what he is doing to support teachers struggling to find work.

(AQW 4254/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education (DE) is not the employer of teachers, and is not responsible for the appointment of teachers. Teachers are employed by the Board of Governors (BoG) for each school setting, with the recruitment, selection and appointment of teachers carried out in conjunction with the relevant employing authority; such as the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) or in the case of Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools by individual BoG.

I acknowledge that in the current economic climate, it can be difficult for many teachers to find employment in schools. The same can be said of graduates in a wide range of professions.

My Department and the Employing Authorities have put in place a number of policies and practices that encourage the employment of newly or recently qualified teachers when filling vacancies; which includes recommending that employers should consider Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) or experienced non retired teachers seeking to return to employment when filling vacancies, including those of a temporary nature.

You may also be aware that the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme launched on 5 September 2016. The primary aim of the Scheme is to refresh the teaching workforce, whilst providing job opportunities for those recently qualified teachers who have experienced the greatest difficulty in securing meaningful employment.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education whether (i) there is a specific criteria Council for Catholic Maintained Schools use when assessing the best interview candidate for a vacant teaching post; and (ii) previous teaching experience in that specific school is an advantage over other candidates.

(AQW 4255/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department is not the employer of teachers, and is not responsible for the appointment of teachers.

CCMS has advised that in arriving at a decision in relation to teaching posts a Selection Panel will consider information contained in the application form, performance at interview, references and if applicable a report from assessors.

CCMS has also advised that candidates with teaching experience in specific schools are not given an advantage over other candidates.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Education to outline the guidance that the Education Authority provides on adjustments that should be made in primary schools to support pupils with coeliac disease.

(AQW 4271/16-21)

Mr Weir: Nutritional Standards for School Lunches have been in place since September 2007 and standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (through breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines etc) were introduced in April 2008. Guidance on the standards, including practical booklets for schools and leaflets for parents, is available on the Department of Education (DE) website at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/nutritional-standards>

The guidance on the implementation of the nutritional standards for school lunches includes a specific section on catering for children with special diets and how this should be addressed. It is also highlighted in the joint DE and Department of Health's (DoH) Food in Schools policy – Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes.

Schools are advised that they should make the Education Authority's (EA) School Catering Service aware of any special dietary needs for pupils within their school, including pupils with coeliac disease. The catering service works in partnership, sharing joint responsibility between pupil, parent/guardian and the school to provide as far as possible a nutritionally balanced meal that meets the dietary requirements of the pupil.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Education to outline the advice his Department provides to primary schools to support and cater for pupils with coeliac disease.

(AQW 4272/16-21)

Mr Weir: Nutritional Standards for School Lunches have been in place since September 2007 and standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (through breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines etc) were introduced in April 2008. Guidance on the standards, including practical booklets for schools and leaflets for parents, is available on the Department of Education (DE) website at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/nutritional-standards>

The guidance on the implementation of the nutritional standards for school lunches includes a specific section on catering for children with special diets and how this should be addressed. It is also highlighted in the joint DE and Department of Health's (DoH) Food in Schools policy – Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes.

Schools are advised that they should make the Education Authority's (EA) School Catering Service aware of any special dietary needs for pupils within their school, including pupils with coeliac disease. The catering service works in partnership, sharing joint responsibility between pupil, parent/guardian and the school to provide as far as possible a nutritionally balanced meal that meets the dietary requirements of the pupil.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2531/16-21, to detail the number of children that availed of pre-school home teaching, broken down by former Education and Library Board area, for each of the last three years.

(AQW 4274/16-21)

Mr Weir: The information, by EA office area, on the number of children with special educational needs (SEN) that availed of the pre-school home teaching service is as follows:

EA Office	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Armagh (Southern)	127	123	124
Ballymena (North-Eastern)	28	28	26
Belfast	36	28	14
Dundonald* (South-Eastern)	-	-	-
Omagh** (Western)	n/a	n/a	n/a

* Dundonald office does not/did not have a pre-school home teaching service; however, several special schools for children with severe learning difficulties host mums and toddlers groups.

** Omagh - The total number of pre-school children supported in their home by the Omagh office pre-school service during the period September 2013 to June 2016 was 364. As support for a large number of the children carries over from one year to the next, it is not possible to break these numbers down into individual school years.

The EA reports that it is currently reviewing pre-school home teaching arrangements and its Early Years' SEN Service so that intervention can be accessed consistently across the Authority for those children who require this service.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) when occupational therapy provision was removed from Oakwood Special School Nursery; (ii) how this has been communicated to parents; (ii) for his assessment on the impact it has had on the developmental needs of children; and (iv) whether it is in breach of any statement of special educational needs of any child at the school.

(AQW 4276/16-21)

Mr Weir: Occupational Therapy delivered on site at Oakwood School is managed and provided by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSC). During the summer term, the BHSC determined that occupational therapy would not be delivered in the school but would be delivered in the community. This was communicated by the BHSC to the parents concerned.

However, I can confirm that officers in the Education Authority (EA) and BHSC have made suitable arrangements that will allow for therapy to be delivered on the campus during the school day. This should be in place shortly and parents will be informed accordingly

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to provide (i) a copy of the draft childcare strategy; and (ii) the consultation response analysis.

(AQW 4308/16-21)

Mr Weir: A draft version of the Childcare Strategy was published for public consultation in July 2015 and can be accessed on-line at www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/childcare-strategy

Consultation on the Childcare Strategy ended in November 2015. Approximately 300 on-line and written responses were received in addition to the inputs from six consultation events and two specialised events, one for parents and one for children. A composite analysis of the consultation responses will be published on the Departmental website when complete.

I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many Council for Catholic Maintained Schools vacant teaching posts since 2014 have been filled by an individual that had previous experience in the same school, as either a substitute or supply teacher.

(AQW 4320/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department is not the employer of teachers, and is not responsible for the appointment of teachers. However, CCMS have provided the information in the table below which sets out the number of vacant teaching posts since 2014 which have been filled by an individual that had previous experience in the same school, as either a substitute or supply teacher.

Apr 14 – Mar 15	176
Apr 15 – Mar 16	237
Apr 16 – Sept 16	133

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to list the Ministerial visits he has undertaken since taking up office, including the (i) date; (ii) purpose; and (iii) parliamentary constituency visited.

(AQW 4352/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have made 69 visits since taking up office; I have provided the details in the table below:

Date	Purpose	Parliamentary constituency
26 May 2016	Visit to Bangor Grammar School, Bangor	North Down
27 May 2016	Official opening of SEP facilities at Belfast High School, Newtownabbey	East Antrim
2 June 2016	Visit to Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	West Belfast
2 June 2016	Visit to Arvalee School and Resource Centre, Omagh	West Tyrone
2 June 2016	Site visit to Strule, Omagh	West Tyrone

Date	Purpose	Parliamentary constituency
6 June 2016	Visit Birches Primary School, Portadown	Upper Bann
8 June 2016	Visit to Ballymacash Primary School – Playboard Awards	Lagan Valley
8 June 2016	Visit to Killowen Primary School, Lisburn	Lagan Valley
8 June 2016	Visit to Castle Gardens Primary School, Newtownards	Strangford
14 June 2016	Visit to Cairnshill Primary School, Belfast	South Belfast
15 June 2016	Visit to Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	Newry and Armagh
15 June 2016	Visit to St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle	South Down
15 June 2016	Attend 50th Year Show at Bloomfield Primary School, Bangor	North Down
16 June 2016	Visit to Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt	Mid Ulster
16 June 2016	Visit to Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	Mid Ulster
16 June 2016	Official opening of Eglinton Primary School, Londonderry	Foyle
16 June 2016	Meeting at Garvagh Primary School, Coleraine	East Londonderry
21 June 2016	80th Anniversary celebration event at Groggan Primary School, Ballymena	North Antrim
22 June 2016	Attend Shared Education Day of Celebration at St Columba's College, Portaferry	Strangford
22 June 2016	Visit Fairview Primary School, Ballyclare	South Antrim
23 June 2016	Attend the GCSE Digital Technology Teacher Upskilling Event at Belfast Metropolitan College	West Belfast
24 June 2016	Present the Rights Respecting School Award – Ballyholme Primary School, Bangor	North Down
24 June 2016	Visit to Clifton Special School, Bangor	North Down
24 June 2016	Shared Education Project Event, Bangor Academy, Bangor	North Down
28 June 2016	Visit to Blythefield Primary School, Belfast	South Belfast
29 June 2016	Visit to Ravenscroft Nursery School, Belfast	East Belfast
29 June 2016	Visit to Sullivan Upper to mark signing of SEP Contract, Holywood	North Down
30 June 2016	Visit to Ballymena Nursery School, Ballymena	North Antrim
30 June 2016	Visit to Castle Tower School, Ballymena	North Antrim
6 July 2016	Launch "Kinder Time" Project at Kilcooley Women's Centre, Kilcooley Primary School, Bangor	North Down
22 July 2016	Visit to Linenhall Library – Book Illustration Summer Scheme	South Belfast
26 July 2016	VIP Visit to Portora Royal School, Enniskillen	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
1 August 2016	Visit Fostering Achievement Summer Scheme, Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	Strangford
3 August 2016	Visit to Middletown Centre for Autism, Middletown	Newry and Armagh
18 August 2016	GCE A level Results Day, Sullivan Upper School, Holywood	North Down
18 August 2016	Visit to Greater Shankill transition summer scheme, Belfast	North Belfast
25 August 2016	GCSE results day – Methodist College, Belfast	South Belfast
25 August 2016	GCSE results day – Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Belfast	East Belfast

Date	Purpose	Parliamentary constituency
7 September 2016	Visit to Glynn Primary School, Larne	East Antrim
7 September 2016	Visit to Rathcoole Primary School and Nursery Unit, Newtownabbey	North Belfast
7 September 2016	Visit to Victoria College, Belfast	South Belfast
8 September 2016	Visit to St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	South Down
8 September 2016	Visit to Ballynahinch Primary School, Ballynahinch	Strangford
8 September 2016	Glenlola Collegiate School Prize Giving Ceremony, Bangor	North Down
12 September 2016	Photocall with DfI Minister at Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast	South Belfast
13 September 2016	Visit to Arvalee School, Omagh	West Tyrone
13 September 2016	Sod cutting for new build at St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
13 September 2016	Prize day at St Patrick's College, Dungannon	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
14 September 2016	Official opening of new SEP facilities at Belfast Royal Academy, Belfast	North Belfast
14 September 2016	Visit to Wallace High School, Lisburn	Lagan Valley
14 September 2016	Visit to Kilcooley Primary School, Bangor	North Down
15 September 2016	Visit to Holywood Primary School, Holywood	North Down
15 September 2016	Visit to Holywood Nursery School, Holywood	North Down
15 September 2016	Visit to Priory Integrated College, Holywood	North Down
15 September 2016	Visit to Killard House Special School, Donaghadee	North Down
16 September 2016	Official hand-over of two mobile classrooms at St Columbanus, Bangor	North Down
19 September 2016	Participate in the world's largest lesson – Christ the Redeemer School, Dunmurry	West Belfast
20 September 2016	Official opening of Community Garden at Ashfield Boy's High School, Belfast	East Belfast
21 September 2016	Visit the SEP at St Joseph's GS, Donaghmore	Mid Ulster
22 September 2016	Bangor Grammar School Prize Giving, Bangor	North Down
22 September 2016	Visit to Ballyclare High School Prize Night	South Antrim
28 September 2016	Visit to Dromore Central Primary School, Dromore	Lagan Valley
28 September 2016	Visit to Dromore High School, Dromore	Lagan Valley
28 September 2016	Visit Helping Hands Autism Resource Centre, Ballybeen	East Belfast
29 September 2016	Visit to Hazelwood Integrated College, Newtownabbey – Annual Prize Giving	North Belfast
30 September 2016	Official opening of Loughries Integrated Primary School, Newtownards	Strangford
30 September 2016	Visit to Glastry College	Strangford
06 October 2016	Visit to Lisneal College, Londonderry	Foyle
06 October 2016	Visit St Cecilia's College, Londonderry	Foyle
06 October 2016	NILGA Conference	Foyle

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of the planned rebuild for Rossmar Special School, Limavady.

(AQW 4354/16-21)

Mr Weir: Rossmar Special School in Limavady was included in the Department's announcement of June 2012 listing 18 major capital investment projects to advance in planning.

A business case for the project was originally approved in October 2013; however following a review of the need for special school provision for post-16 pupils in the area, a revised business case was submitted and approved in March 2015 with estimated total costs of over £9 million.

An Integrated Consultant Team, Samuel Stevenson, have been appointed and designs are now well progressed and a planning application has been submitted. Work is underway to procure a contractor to take forward the build and it is anticipated that work may commence on site early in the new year.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Education whether there has been a reduction in school counsellors in the Limavady area.

(AQW 4355/16-21)

Mr Weir: There has been no reduction in ICSS (Independent Counselling Service for Schools) provision with each grant aided post primary school entitled to 3 counselling sessions per week for schools with up to 1000 pupils and 5 sessions per week for schools with over 1000 pupils.

From 1 January 2015 schools have also been offered an additional drop-in session each week.

The decision to use the service is a matter for each school.

Schools are also at liberty to fund their own, or additional, counselling service from their own resources. The Department has no role in these cases.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education for his Department's assessment of the importance of schools leading, supporting and managing people well for sustainable results; and if he is aware of the success of Sacred Heart College, Omagh in achieving an Investors in People Silver Award.

(AQW 4358/16-21)

Mr Weir: Effective leadership within a school is important for pupil outcomes and raising standards. Developing staff and supporting and encouraging talent across a school is an essential requirement for any school wishing to attain the Investors in People accreditation. I offer my congratulations to everyone at Sacred Heart College on achieving the Investors in People Silver Award.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education with specific reference to any protections enshrined in European Union (EU) law that are not currently transposed; for his assessment how the exit from the EU will impact on children.

(AQW 4383/16-21)

Mr Weir: The UK Government will be responsible for overseeing negotiations to leave the EU and establishing the future relationship between the UK and EU. Whilst the UK Government will be engaging with the devolved administrations as the negotiations progress, it is too early at this stage to make an assessment of any potential impact on children arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The Prime Minister has given a commitment that the Northern Ireland Executive will be fully involved and represented in the negotiations and the issue of the ambit of EU law will be considered in this context.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education whether (i) he can give an undertaking that his Department will investigate Killyleagh Integrated Primary's maintenance and repair issues given the recent collapse of a classroom ceiling and; (ii) refurbishment will be prioritised to ensure pupil and staff safety.

(AQW 4433/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for Killyleagh Integrated Primary School. In relation to the recent incident, the EA has advised that the ceiling has been repaired, as has the pipework that was leaking. Pipework within the proximity has been checked and replaced as was deemed necessary. The area is now safe.

The EA will have the opportunity to submit Killyleagh Integrated Primary School for consideration in any future capital announcement.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Education whether he would consider using unspent Executive Childcare Fund monies to offset the cost of VAT added to childcare provided in a residential setting under the Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 4620/16-21)

Mr Weir: The £12 million Executive Childcare Fund, which has been incorporated into the Delivering Social Change Central Fund, is being used to resource the Key First Actions of the Childcare Strategy, notably the Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme.

I am aware of the issue of VAT being charged on home childcare. I understand that the Department of Health, which regulates childcare agencies, is looking into this matter. My officials will work with colleagues in the Department of Health to establish how this matter has arisen and what can now be done about it.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the deficit or surplus position of every primary school, broken down by (a) school; and (b) Education Authority region as per the submitted three year financial plan that Principals make each year. (AQW 4773/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since its formation on 1 April 2015, the Education Authority has operated as a single organisation and no longer reports on a regional basis. Consequently, I have provided a list of all primary schools' surplus or deficit positions as at 31 March 2016.

I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Education when he was first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4821/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have not had sight of this report.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education for an update on the process of area planning for primary schools.

(AQO 459/16-21)

Mr Weir: Over recent months the Education Authority, CCMS and the sectoral support bodies have been working together to produce draft Area Plans for primary, post-primary and special school provision to cover the planning period April 2017 to March 2020. The Area Plans draw upon all available evidence to identify strategic priorities for action regionally, and across each of the eleven Local Government District planning areas.

The Education Authority will publish the draft Area Plans which will be subject to an eight week period of public consultation this autumn. The outcome will inform the preparation of a supporting Annual Action Plan for the first year of the new planning period.

The Annual Action Plan will contain details of specific proposals for action to determine the shape of education provision in local areas. These actions will include details of Development Proposals (DP) for named schools to give effect to the proposed changes and further statutory consultation will be undertaken for each DP.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Education how his Department is progressing plans for additional classrooms to meet the critical accommodation needs of Gaelcholáiste Dhoire, Dungiven.

(AQO 450/16-21)

Mr Weir: Initial plans for the provision of specialist accommodation on the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council site, adjacent to Dungiven Castle, have been put on hold as I have asked officials to explore alternative options for provision of accommodation for the school.

This action has been taken as I don't believe that the current option represents best value for public money.

The Department has received a pre-proceedings letter regarding potential judicial review proceedings and I would not therefore propose to make further comment regarding this matter.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Education to outline his budget for the Childcare Strategy.

(AQO 451/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Childcare Strategy is being delivered on a phased basis. The first phase, which was launched in 2013, comprises fifteen Key First Actions.

These Actions are resourced from the Delivering Social Change Central Fund, which incorporates the earlier £12 million Executive Childcare Fund.

To date, nearly £9 million has been allocated to the Key First Actions. These include the School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, which has awarded some £6 million to support more than 3,000 low cost childcare places, and projects supporting childcare for children with a disability.

I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

As funding to date has been from the Executive's central funds, DE's baseline budget does not include funding for implementing the final Childcare Strategy. The resources required to implement the Executive's Childcare Strategy will be determined as the Strategy is finalised and agreed over the coming months.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education how much of the schools budget, on average, is used for cleaning services and grounds maintenance.

(AQO 452/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2015-16 approximately £35 million of the Education Budget was used for cleaning services and grounds maintenance. This equated to less than 2% of the total Education Budget. This does not include costs for those schools operating under PPP/PFI arrangements, where the cost of cleaning and other services are part of the unitary charge. Nor does it include expenditure incurred by Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated schools, as my Department does not routinely collate this level of detailed information in respect of these 88 schools.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's capital development plans for St Comhghall's College, Lisnaskea.

(AQO 453/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are currently no major capital projects planned for St Comhghall's College and given the substantial Major Capital Investment Programme underway, a further call for projects is not anticipated at present.

I am currently considering the merits of making a call for new projects to be advanced in planning under the School Enhancement Programme. You will be aware that this programme involves projects to refurbish and/or extend current school buildings at a cost of between £0.5 and 4 million.

A Minor Capital Works scheme to undertake a fire risk assessment and associated works at the school is currently in planning. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of Minor Works it is not possible to indicate future plans for further works at the school. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme.

(AQO 454/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme launched on 5 September 2016 and will operate on a pilot basis for the 2016/17 academic year.

All information in relation to the Scheme can be found on the Department of Education website.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education for an update on the School Enhancement Programme.

(AQO 455/16-21)

Mr Weir: 15 School Enhancement Programme (SEP) schemes have now been completed and 30 schemes are currently on site with one further scheme approved to move to construction and expected to be on site in this financial year.

There are 2 schemes with final designs approved but held at the pre-tender stage; these are currently delayed due to the constrained capital budget.

The remaining 5 schemes are continuing to advance in planning to the final design stage at which point they will be held in sequence pending available capital budget. Delays on these projects have been due mainly to statutory matters.

I am currently reviewing the opportunity for a second call for projects under the School Enhancement Programme and hope to be able to make an announcement on this within the current financial year.

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education to outline any engagement his Department has had with the Public Health Agency to prepare pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds entering primary school.

(AQO 456/16-21)

Mr Weir: Collaboration between education and health is crucial in the early years, as is the partnership with parents.

Officials in my Department have been working in collaboration with the Department of Health (DoH), and the Public Health Agency (PHA) in delivering a range of projects as part of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) Workstream 1. EITP is a Northern Ireland Executive / Atlantic Philanthropies Delivering Social Change Signature Programme.

Workstream 1 of the EITP aims to equip all parents with the skills needed to give their child the best start in life. Each of the programmes within Workstream 1 – Getting Ready for Baby, Getting Ready for Toddler and Getting Ready to Learn are focused on universal services. The universal nature of the programmes will therefore include all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

DoH leads on EITP Workstream 1 and DE leads on the Getting Ready to Learn element of this. PHA and the Education Authority are collaborating on the Getting Ready for Toddler programme which has aligned a named Health Visitor to every pre-school education setting with DE funded places. The PHA is in the pilot phase of introducing the 3+ Health Review, using the Ages & Stages Questionnaire, and this review is conducted by Health Visitors with parents in statutory and non-statutory pre-school education settings. The 3+ Health Review will identify children in need of additional support so that interventions can be agreed.

The PHA also plays a prominent role in the Department's Sure Start Programme, which provides targeted early years services to children aged 0-4 and their families in the top 25% most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. Departmental officials liaise with PHA on the provision of Speech and Language support in Sure Start. DE also engaged PHA in the implementation of actions emanating from the independent review of the Sure Start programme.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Education whether any of the financial costs incurred by teachers coaching for transfer tests, including the production of associated materials, will be met by his Department or by the Education Authority.
(AQO 457/16-21)

Mr Weir: The revised guidance on post-primary transfer issued on 7 September 2016, sets out how primary schools may supply support materials, carry out preparation for tests during core teaching hours, coaching in exam technique, and/or providing familiarisation with a testing environment.

Schools are free to exercise this right in line with the wishes of parents and pupils, and in keeping with the principles of the common funding formula which delegates responsibility as to how a school spends its budget.

There is no additional funding being made available to schools.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the unity bridge project, which will link St. Mary's High School and Limavady High School.
(AQO 458/16-21)

Mr Weir: DE is progressing the Shared Education Campus project in Limavady and will ensure that space is retained on both the St. Mary's and Limavady High School sites so that the bridge can be constructed. The 'unity bridge' project is however a Causeway Coast and Glens Council project which will be progressed separately from the Shared Education Campus project.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Education for an update on the recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer for the Education Authority.
(AQO 460/16-21)

Mr Weir: The recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer for the Education Authority is being managed by the Education Authority Board. The post was advertised on 7 September 2016 with a closing date of 29 September 2016 for applications. The short listing process will take place on 11 October 2016 with preliminary interview and assessment to be undertaken late October. The final panel is scheduled to meet on 16 or 17 November 2016. It is anticipated that the appointment will be made towards the end of the 2016/17 financial year.

This is an ongoing recruitment completion and it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Department for the Economy

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what is the current operating capacity of the Moyle inter-connector.
(AQW 2389/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): Current operating capacity of the Moyle interconnector is up to 500 megawatts in both directions, but network restrictions in Scotland mean that export from Northern Ireland is limited to 300 megawatts.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the mechanisms in place for Ministerial oversight of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme since its introduction.
(AQW 2528/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Ministerial responsibilities for the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme since its introduction have included approving the policy and business case and securing Assembly approval to the necessary legislation.

Responsibility for the detailed design and ongoing oversight of the scheme rests with Departmental officials and Ofgem as the scheme administrator.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether disciplinary action has followed from the local management of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.
(AQW 2546/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme is subject to scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee and there is also an independent investigation into allegations about the operation of the scheme. It would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage on disciplinary matters.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on plans to increase mobile phone coverage in Lisnaskea.
(AQW 2765/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The telecommunications market in Northern Ireland is fully privatised and decisions on where and when to invest are made on a commercial basis.

According to Ofcom's Connected Nations Report 2015, geographic voice not-spots in Northern Ireland are 5% of the landmass. This compares to 13% for the UK as whole.

The UK Government has put in place an agreement with the Mobile Network Operators through which the mobile industry will invest £5 billion in UK infrastructure and increase coverage by 2017.

It is envisaged that, by the time this investment is completed, mobile not-spots in Northern Ireland will be reduced to 0.3% of the landmass.

In addition, the mobile market in the UK is highly competitive and fast moving and the operators are constantly evolving their networks and developing new products and services that can offer better coverage and more adaptable packages.

My Department must await the outcome of these investments in order to determine if further public intervention will be required.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy, in relation to SEM paper SEM-16-041, whether SONI has the management structures to be an independent transmission system operator; and to outline these structures.
(AQW 2903/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: As I have indicated in my response to AQW 2376/16-21, SEM-16-041 was published by the Single Electricity Market Committee. It proposes measures to mitigate potential conflicts of interest in relation to market operator and transmission system operator roles associated with the implementation of the Integrated Single Electricity Market and Delivering a Secure Sustainable System projects. It further proposes measures to revise management and director structures within the EirGrid group. When implemented it will be a matter for the Utility Regulator and SEM Committee to monitor to ensure compliance.

Mr Ford asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans for the Further Education sector.
(AQO 435/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Further Education colleges are at the core of our education system and along with other partners will play a major role in delivering the Programme for Government and the skills agenda.

The Further Education sector in Northern Ireland consists of six regional colleges which operate across 40 campuses. The sector employs approximately 3,500 Full Time Equivalent staff including lecturers and support staff. It had a turnover of approximately £260 million in 2014-15. It engages 90,000 learners annually and works with over 10,000 businesses across Northern Ireland.

The key focus in Further Education is the implementation of Further Education Means Success, the strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, which is being taken forward through a series of projects to be delivered over a five year period.

The programme will develop a world class professional and technical education system designed to strengthen the economy through upskilling and innovation, and will address educational disadvantage and engage those hardest to reach.

Employer engagement is an integral strand of Further Education Means Success. There will be an enhanced role for colleges to work more strategically with employers and other key stakeholders to design and develop qualifications and a curriculum that meet current and future skills needs. There will be a focus on support for strategically important areas of the economy, including higher level skills and STEM subjects and colleges will provide tailored and flexible solutions to employers.

Colleges are also integral to the implementation of the Youth Training and Apprenticeships Strategies, of which employers are key.

The Executive is committed to supporting the Further Education sector and the next five years will see planned investment in the college estate of £250 million which will be largely targeted on delivering six new college campuses.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on his Department's input into the Executive Office's negotiations on the outcome of the Referendum on Membership of the European Union.
(AQO 439/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I have met with Dr Liam Fox MP, Secretary of State for International Trade, Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and David Davis MP, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union. I have also met with James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The purpose of all of these meetings has been to discuss how best Northern Ireland's interests can be advanced in negotiations to exit the European Union.

It is essential that the views of businesses are heard as we progress towards an EU exit. I, along with the DAERA Minister, Michelle McIlveen, have set up a joint Brexit Consultative Committee. This Committee is made up of representatives from key stakeholder groups and organisations from across the agri-food, fisheries and environmental sectors and is co-chaired by myself and the DAERA Minister.

Our first meeting took place in September and I was greatly encouraged by the contributions made by members as well as the commitment they demonstrated to ensure we achieve the best outcome for Northern Ireland as we leave the European Union.

I have also put arrangements in place to ensure effective and timely communications with wider business interests. The Chief Executive of Invest NI and the Permanent Secretary of the Department for the Economy jointly chair a Business Liaison Group which provides regular feedback about the key issues of interest to business arising from the decision to exit the European Union. This information is fed into the Executive's analysis.

A similar group has been set up to obtain views from the main business representative bodies in Northern Ireland.

My officials are contributing to the work of an Inter-departmental Coordinating Group established to support and advise the Executive on preparations for the UK leaving the European Union. Their task is to ensure that issues falling within my Department's responsibilities are properly addressed.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the findings of the Skills Barometer report.
(AQO 443/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer is a key tool in assessing the demand and supply of skills across the economy, both now and into the future.

It emphasises the importance of growing our Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics skills base and increasing the numbers with mid tier skills levels including Foundation degrees.

In order to build the momentum of economic growth in Northern Ireland, my Department is using the Barometer to ensure our programmes are focused on meeting skill needs and that those who are making labour market decisions clearly understand the opportunities.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the most recent manufacturing export figures.
(AQO 444/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The most recent statistics from HMRC showed that the total value of exports of goods from Northern Ireland was £6.7 billion over the year to June 2016. This was an increase of almost 10% on the previous year and is especially welcome in that Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK to witness an increase in total exports over the period.

I am particularly encouraged by the fact that exports to the United States, one of our key market places increased by almost 75%. These statistics are a real testament to the strength of our local businesses as they continue to enter new markets and develop existing ones.

Department of Finance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance which recommendations from the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Response to the Executive's Review of the Financial Process in Northern Ireland, that aimed to improve the transparency on the financial process, have been adopted; and to outline the reasons for not adopting each other recommendation.
(AQW 3602/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The report on the Review of Financial Processes in Northern Ireland has not yet been discussed by the Executive. Without the Executive's agreement the proposals it contains cannot be implemented.

The original review was written on the basis of a 12 department structure which, since the start of this mandate, is no longer in place. The review will need to be revisited to reflect this and other issues that have arisen since it was originally written. However, the intended transparency and ethos of accountability that the review intends to bring to this Assembly will not change.

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of businesses in North Antrim receiving small business rate relief.
(AQW 4117/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Information is not available on the number of businesses receiving Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR).

- (i) As at 31st August 2016, 1,845 properties in the North Antrim constituency were benefitting from SBRR.
- (ii) This represents 39.8% of all non-domestic properties in the North Antrim constituency.

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Finance what plans he has to relieve the rates burden on small and medium enterprises.
(AQW 4118/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department is working on a set of proposals to give effect to recommendations from the full policy evaluation of Small Business Rate Relief, completed in December 2014 by Neil Gibson's Economic Policy Unit, taking into account feedback on a subsequent discussion paper on the future of the scheme issued by my Department earlier this year.

I intend to bring forward better targeted proposals in the coming weeks.

In tandem with this, in the coming weeks I plan to present a paper to the Executive and Committee in relation to the wider outcomes from the Non Domestic Rates Review. This will be informed by the full public consultation exercise that took place at the start of this year.

More generally my Department continues to provide a range of support to small and medium sized enterprises, which comprise around 98% of all businesses here. That support includes Industrial Derating, a District Rate Convergence scheme, and the Back in Business scheme to support new occupiers of long term vacant properties in their all important first year of business.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW 3399/16-21, whether the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development will be able to re-coup costs from other Departments or arm's-length bodies should they locate staff in the Ballykelly building.

(AQW 4258/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am not aware of any plans by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to recoup capital build costs from other Departments or arm's-length bodies should they locate staff in the Departments headquarters building at Ballykelly.

Once constructed, the Ballykelly building will form part of the Civil Service Estate which is managed centrally by my Department. Operational costs in multi-occupancy buildings are attributed to occupiers.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance to outline the statutory obligations established by the Northern Ireland Act in relation to the budgetary process.

(AQW 4671/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Northern Ireland Act 1998 states:-

"The Minister of Finance and Personnel shall, before the beginning of each financial year, lay before the Assembly a draft budget, that is to say a programme of expenditure proposals for that year which have been agreed by the Executive Committee in accordance with paragraph 20 of Strand One to the Belfast Agreement."

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance to outline (i) how much money has been allocated through Financial Transactions Capital in the financial year 2015-16; (ii) which Departments received an allocation; and (iii) how much FTC was unallocated.

(AQW 4693/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Allocations to departments of ringfenced Financial Transactions Capital in 2015-16 totalled £129.3 million, including £11.3 million to DETI, £9.0 million to DHSSPS, £94.5 million to DSD and £14.5 million to OFMDFM. All available funding was allocated to departments.

Department of Health

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health for an update on medical staffing levels at the South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen.

(AQO 414/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): There are 145 medical posts across 10 specialities in the South West Acute Hospital. This figure includes 47 Doctors in Training. The Western Health and Social Care Trust continuously works proactively and energetically on the recruitment of staff. There are currently 69 vacancies. Fourteen doctors have already been appointed within the last year and a further 14 are in the process of being appointed. The Trust also recruits from overseas, especially for vacancies which are particularly hard to fill.

I wish to reassure the Member that patients are not at risk due to staffing levels. The Trust works with the medical staff to develop job plans to deal with gaps in services and locums are engaged as necessary. The absolute focus is the maintenance of patient safety, and ensuring that a high quality service continues to be delivered to patients.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Health what contingency plans her Department has in place to address the winter pressures on hospitals.

(AQO 415/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I have allocated £13 million from June monitoring monies for unscheduled care and winter pressures. This funding will be invested in a number of areas to improve patient flow in unscheduled care, including winter pressures, capacity expansion on acute sites and staffing within emergency departments.

The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have been working with the Health and Social Care Trusts' unscheduled care locality networks to develop plans setting out arrangements to ensure resilience of unscheduled care services during the winter period.

The plan for each area is currently being finalised. They include a comprehensive range of additional or enhanced measures to manage expected winter demand, as far as possible avoiding the need for patients to go to hospital, or where this is necessary, avoiding the need for admission through the usage of ambulatory pathways. Where patients do require admission to hospital, the plans propose a range of additional and enhanced measures to optimise patient flow on a seven-day basis, including timely discharge.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's plans for capital investment in East Antrim.
(AQO 416/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: At present capital investment in East Antrim is focused on maintaining the HSC and NIFRS estate. These are mostly minor improvement works and upgrades which are conducted as required.

I'm keen to progress the redevelopment of the Antrim Area Hospital site, provide a new mental health facility at Antrim Area Hospital, health and care centres at Newtownabbey, Antrim, Larne, and Carrickfergus and a replacement fire station at Cushendall. However, further investment in East Antrim is ultimately dependent on budget availability. To that end, I've been working closely with my Executive colleagues on the Budget 2017 process which I expect will conclude by the end of this year.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the role of community pharmacies in supporting reform of the health and social care system.
(AQO 417/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Community pharmacies have a clear role in supporting reform of the health and social care system. They help people to get well and stay well, dispensing approximately 40 million prescription items a year, providing advice and information about medicines and healthy lifestyles, as well as offering services to improve the safe, effective use of medicines and to support self care and prevention.

There are currently 533 community pharmacies in the North of Ireland, employing highly qualified pharmacists supported by dedicated healthcare teams. Community pharmacies are therefore an important resource within local communities and it is estimated that on a daily basis approximately 9% of the population visit a community pharmacy.

My Department's vision for community pharmacy's contribution to the reform of the health and social care system in the North of Ireland is set out in a number of strategic documents which are currently being implemented including: 'Transforming Your Care', 'Making it Better through Pharmacy in the Community' and the 'Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework'.

Optimising the benefits of medicines is an important enabler of reform and the skilled community pharmacy workforce are applying their clinical skills to help achieve better health outcomes for patients and promote healthy lifestyles. Community pharmacies also support reform by helping reduce demand on GP and other acute services through the provision of advice and treatment for common complaints, without the need for a doctor's appointment.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health how many midwives are trained in hypnobirthing.
(AQO 418/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are currently 29 midwives trained in hypnobirthing.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health whether there are any plans for a new community health centre in Bangor.
(AQO 419/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Plans for a new community health centre in Bangor are included in the Health and Social Care Board's draft Strategic Implementation Plan which sets out proposals for future investment in primary care infrastructure.

This programme of future investment is still under consideration and cannot be progressed until the two current pilot projects for health and care centres in Lisburn and Newry are evaluated. This evaluation is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

Delivery of the new community health centre in Bangor will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Health whether the waiting time for elective orthopaedic surgeries has increased since 2015.
(AQO 420/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The average number of weeks patients have waited for admission for the trauma and orthopaedic speciality has increased since 2015, from 23.4 weeks at 31st March 2015 to 28.8 weeks at 30th June 2016.

Rising demand for orthopaedic services is being driven by many factors including the increasing older population, higher patient expectations, improvements in technology and a wider range of available procedures.

The Health and Social Care Board is working with Trusts to take forward a range of actions to reform the way in which elective care services are delivered.

Recent initiatives to support the increase in Orthopaedic capacity include:

- Waiting list validation of all patients waiting over 9 months;
- Increasing orthopaedic Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) capacity to ensure all routine back/spinal referrals are assessed initially by an ICATS practitioner;
- The development of regional agreed outpatient referral guidance using the British Orthopaedic Association Clinical Commissioning Guidelines with the Clinical Communication Gateway system;
- The continued rollout of E-triage to support medically led triage for orthopaedic referrals; and
- A recent review of the orthopaedic medical workforce highlighted the current shortfall in Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) consultant posts and a range of appointments have been made across the Trusts to address this including a locum Orthopaedic consultant post in the Western Trust.

I have said consistently since becoming Minister in June that tackling excessive waiting times is high on my agenda. On the 25 October I will set out my vision for health and social care which will include specific actions to reduce waiting times and deliver sustainable improvement in this area.

Department for Infrastructure

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the schedule for the cutting of grass verges in the Colin area. (AQW 2799/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): My Department's TransportNI officials will be completing two grass cuts during this season. The first cut in the Colin area was completed in June 2016 and the second cut is scheduled for completion by the end of October 2016.

In addition to this my officials will also carry out further grass cutting where it is considered necessary for road safety.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he intends to introduce a hourly rail service between Derry and Coleraine. (AQW 2945/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The introduction of an hourly service between Derry and Coleraine is dependent upon my Department securing the necessary resource funding to subsidise Translink to enable the expansion of the service. This is currently estimated at £1.4m per annum.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the opening of the passing loop at Bellarena on 28 January 2016, why the hourly rail service from Belfast to Derry is still five years from completion. (AQW 3095/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The completion of Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Derry track relay will create the potential for the introduction of an hourly service between Belfast and Derry. The introduction of such a service is dependent upon my Department securing the necessary resource funding to subsidise Translink to operate the additional services required. This is currently estimated at £1.4m per annum.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail his Department's policy concerning the upgrade of road safety measures. (AQW 3512/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department takes the lead in the delivery of road safety in the north and works in partnership with the PSNI and emergency services to deliver road safety improvements. Our work is driven by the NI Road Safety Strategy to 2020 which contains collision and casualty reduction targets along with supporting performance indicators and action measures that have been established to achieve them. The current strategy can be accessed at <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-road-safety-strategy-2020-statistics#toc-0>

Over 95% of collisions where road users are killed or seriously injured are as a result of road user behaviours. The main causes of death and serious injury on our roads are consistently shown to be inattention or careless driving, speeding, drink or drug driving and failure to wear a seatbelt when involved in a collision. It is for this reason that our road safety campaigns concentrate on changing these behaviours.

There are also measures that can be undertaken on the road network that can reduce the likelihood and severity of collisions, especially those involving vulnerable road users, such as children, the elderly, pedestrians and cyclists. These include traffic calming installations that may deploy road humps, pedestrian crossings, gateway features, central islands, and enhanced signing and road markings. Specific treatments such as safety zones and part time 20mph speed limits are also some of the tools available for traffic engineers to deploy at schools. These remedial measures have reduced the number of collisions on the road network.

My Department investigates all collisions notified by the PSNI and implements appropriate remedial measures to prevent similar types of collisions in the future.

All of the above initiatives have contributed to considerable improvements in road safety across the north in the past years. Further roll out of road safety measures is subject to the level of financial resources being made available to my Department.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the development of the proposed Park and Ride facility for Portadown.

(AQW 3627/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has given approval to Translink to take forward a project to extend Park and Ride facilities at Portadown Railway Station. Translink has completed the Community Consultation process for the proposal and a full and detailed planning application for the project will be submitted before the end of November this year. Subject to the Council Planning Approval process, Translink intends to launch a procurement exercise for main building contractors with a view to commencing construction in the financial year 2017/18.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the other revenue streams available to Translink apart from ticket sales and funding from the Executive.

(AQW 3628/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Other Revenue streams for Translink are:

- Tours income
- Income from private or contract hire of a vehicle
- Car park income
- Commercial property rental income
- Advertising income
- Income from in-station activities including:
 - Rental income
 - Bank service tills
 - Vending machine commission
 - Photo booths
 - Issuing smartcards (including yLink and 24+)
 - Telecoms site rental

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans his Department has to upgrade Glencam Road, Omagh.

(AQW 3645/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has carried out some improvements to the Glencam Road in recent years and the vast majority of the road is in reasonable condition. It is however accepted that a section between the Gortin Road and Killybrack Road, close to the Highfield development, does require work to be brought up to a standard similar to the rest of the road.

I understand that historically there have been some difficulties in obtaining land to allow improvement to this stretch of road, but given its further deterioration, my officials will have further discussions with the landowner to see if an appropriate solution can be achieved.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total passenger miles delivered on the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Rail Service; broken down for each of the last five years.

(AQW 3679/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Passenger mileage is not recorded, however service mileage (trains in passenger service) operated on the Belfast to Dublin corridor in the past five years are shown below:

Enterprise Mileage

Year	Services	Mileage Joint NIR/IE
2011 - 2012	5,479	621,866
2012 - 2103	5,479	621,866
2013 - 2014	5,479	621,866
2014 - 2015	5,479	621,866
2015 - 2016	5,479	621,866

In addition, it should be noted that the Belfast – Dublin route is operated jointly by NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann with Iarnród Éireann operating approximately 40% of all trains or 248,746 miles per annum.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) a connecting service has been considered to bring rail passengers to and from Limavady Junction; and (ii) consideration has been given to providing a rail halt at Ballykelly.

(AQW 3680/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- i) Translink has no plans to provide a connecting service to Limavady junction. It has advised however that a two hourly bus service (No 134) operates between Coleraine and Limavady.
- ii) There are currently no plans to provide a new rail halt at Ballykelly. Stopping at an additional halt on this 90 mph section would result in trains arriving at the 'passing loops' later, and subsequently delaying other trains. This would increase the running time, reduce the overall line frequency, and distort the timetable.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what plans his Department has to set up a taskforce in preparation for leaving the European Union.

(AQW 3696/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following the vote to leave the European Union on 23 June 2016, the Executive established an Interdepartmental Co-ordinating Group (ICG) to strategically assess Brexit implications for the north. My Department is a member of the ICG.

In August, I approved the establishment of a small Brexit Planning Team to manage and represent departmental (and stakeholder) interests throughout the withdrawal process. The team has commenced work to identify some of the key issues and potential opportunities facing the department and has already met with several key sectoral stakeholders to better understand specific concerns and possible impacts.

The team has also recently met with counterparts in the Department for Transport's EU Exit unit and it will continue to engage with Whitehall, other Devolved Administrations and the South as required.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many buses are currently surplus to demand and are mothballed by Translink; and (ii) the costs to maintain them.

(AQW 3708/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink currently have six buses that are maintained to operational standards which are used in the event of an emergency or planned maintenance. The average cost maintaining each vehicle is £480 per year.

There are a further 40 vehicles owned by Translink that are life expired. These vehicles are going through a disposal process as they are no longer fit for passenger service. There are no engineering costs associated with these vehicles.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the number of parking tickets issued in towns and villages in Upper Bann in each of the last two years.

(AQW 3713/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Parking Tickets, known as Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) can only be issued where parking restrictions exist in sufficient quantity to merit providing the parking enforcement service. Please see the table below for the numbers of PCNs issued in the towns and villages in the Upper Bann constituency in the last two financial years.

	01/04/2014 – 31/03/2015	01/04/2015 – 31/03/2016
Banbridge	1694	1328
Portadown	3734	3875
Lurgan	1841	1523
Tandragee	8	8
Gilford	7	8

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much has been paid out in public liability claims for damage caused to vehicles owing to road surface issues, broken down by constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3715/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department cannot provide the information in the format you requested. This is because the management information system used by TransportNI records claims information on the basis of the TransportNI section offices which broadly align to the new council areas. In addition, the NICS accounting system does not differentiate between the causes of incidents which result in claims.

Table 1 overleaf details the amount of compensation paid in respect to vehicle damage claims by the former Department for Regional Development per TransportNI Section Office in each of the last five financial years. The figures include compensation for damage incurred on the footway and carriageway due to defects and other issues.

Table 1: Compensation paid in respect to vehicle damage claims.

TransportNI Section Office	Compensation £				
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Antrim & Newtownabbey	22,140	11,915	48,279	12,662	22,469
Ards & North Down	15,966	10,684	12,661	6,109	13,241
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (East)	12,936	5,454	10,445	3,657	10,304
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (West)	24,134	5,309	8,357	6,007	10,596
Belfast North	1,436	2,635	628	10,156	7,231
Belfast South	11,232	4,889	3,276	3,027	3,518
Causeway Coast & Glens (East)	16,570	1,624	562	2,301	1,251
Causeway Coast & Glens (West)	5,292	3,718	11,417	3,953	7,356
Fermanagh & Omagh (East)	12,214	6,685	10,904	3,368	5,087
Fermanagh & Omagh (West)	16,500	4,457	4,333	13,616	4,814
Lisburn & Castlereagh	25,206	13,740	18,083	14,085	21,018
Derry & Strabane	18,134	8,829	3,337	2,875	10,675
Mid & East Antrim	22,243	8,414	16,635	7,304	10,069
Mid Ulster (North)	40,182	12,773	16,525	7,915	22,047
Mid Ulster (South)	25,344	6,643	6,691	2,917	1,975
Newry Mourne & Down (East)	32,292	7,642	25,609	6,989	5,863
Newry Mourne & Down (West)	43,143	12,401	33,580	16,615	22,648

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what responsibility his Department has, if any, for road safety measures to improve visibility at the entrance to properties or lanes on rural roads.

(AQW 3797/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that my Department has no responsibility to improve visibility at private entrances to properties or lanes on rural roads. The owner of an entrance or lane has responsibility for the access with the public road.

Where the owner proposes to improve visibility, the works should be carried out under a permit issued by TransportNI and to the standards set out in my Department's planning guidance document Development Control Advice Note 15 Vehicular Access Standards. This same standard is also applied to all new private accesses onto the public road network submitted as part of a planning application.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Oireachtas regarding flood alleviation and prevention in border areas affected by flooding in 2015.

(AQW 3808/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have had no discussions with my counterpart in the Oireachtas about flood alleviation as yet. However, officials from my Department routinely discuss such matters with the Office of Public Works (OPW). Rivers Agency has a long established relationship with OPW and meet typically twice a year to discuss issues of common interest, so far this year meetings took place in February and May. In addition my Department also engages with other organisations in the South about operational issues in the area of flood risk management. For example, there is a very close working relationship with the ESB in Ballyshannon to ensure that the hydrometric power stations on the Erne systems are being managed in a manner which minimises the risk of widespread flooding during periods of adverse weather.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many complaints were received concerning LED street lights in Upper Bann.

(AQW 3813/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has recorded 267 complaints in relation to the street lighting LED retrofit project in the Banbridge and Craigavon area.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what training programmes does Translink run for its staff.
(AQW 3815/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink provides a wide range of training courses for its staff. These courses include:

- technical training;
- vocational training;
- personal development; and
- leadership and management training.

All courses are in line with Translink's organisational aims and objectives.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of bus stations.
(AQW 3816/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink currently operate and maintain 23 bus stations throughout the bus service network.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline Transink's plans to increase passenger numbers.
(AQW 3817/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Programme for Government sets out a clear objective to grow Public Transport usage and my Department is taking this forward in conjunction with key providers of services.

Translink has developed long term investment strategies for bus and rail services and will work with my Department and other key stakeholders to develop funding plans and policy support to deliver significant passenger growth. Successful delivery of these growth plans will contribute significantly to the transport network.

A number of investment projects are already underway that will contribute to future passenger number growth and these include:

- Belfast Rapid Transit;
- Expanded Park and Ride Programme; and
- Further integration of transport across the North and South of Ireland through the development of transport hubs in both Belfast and Derry.

In the short term, Translink continues to maximise passenger growth through commercial initiatives including promotions and innovative use of technology.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will visit Donaghadee to assess the state of repair of William Street and Beechfield Drive.
(AQW 3818/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I would refer the Member to my letter to him dated 28 July 2016 relating to William Street and Beechfield Drive. The situation has not changed in the past two months and I would therefore reiterate that a site visit is not deemed necessary at this time.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the Blueways he is developing and marketing.
(AQW 3820/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Waterways Ireland is the lead organisation in developing blueways in collaboration with, amongst others, local authorities and tourism offices.

Waterways Ireland are currently collaborating with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, the Forestry Service, private sector representatives and representatives of the community and voluntary sectors to establish a blueway on the Erne Navigation.

Waterways Ireland has also been involved with other stakeholders in the 'Recreational, Tourism and Commercial Product Identification Study' for the Lower Bann corridor which includes the Lower Bann Navigation from Toome to Coleraine. Waterways Ireland will work with local authorities and other stakeholders in developing and marketing the blueway.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the capacity of the treatment works in Ederney, Co. Fermanagh with a breakdown of (i) the maximum number of homes that the current works will treat; (b) the number of homes currently discharging to the treatment works; and (iii) whether he plans to replace the treatment works.
(AQW 3878/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The design capacity of Ederney Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW) is 848 population equivalent (PE). PE is related to, but not the same as population and is based on the types of businesses, public buildings etc discharging into the WWTW. A PE assessment was carried out in 2012 and indicated that the actual PE being received at the WWTWs was 858, which included for discharge from 325 properties and from a nursery and primary school.

Whilst NI Water cannot stipulate the maximum number of homes that the current WWTW will treat, it is considered that the treatment works is operating at capacity.

There are currently no plans within the PC 15 period (2015-21) to upgrade the Ederney WWTW but this may change if sufficient funding is made available during this period.

Mrs Barton asked nister for Infrastructure to outline (i) if the winter service procedures for the Transport NI Western Division have been reviewed for the incoming season; and (ii) to detail the changes for the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area.

(AQW 3879/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: With the aim of making the gritting operation more efficient, my Department has carried out a 'route optimisation' exercise across the north which involved a review of existing routes and lorry usage as well as facilities for storing materials and plant.

A report arising from this exercise came up with recommendations for new routes which minimized the number of lorries involved in the gritting operation but which importantly did not compromise the length of time for completing gritting of all routes in the schedule.

One of the outcomes of the route optimization exercise was that 'routine' salting operations will no longer be undertaken from the TransportNI depot in Fivemiletown. This means that the roads previously gritted from Fivemiletown Depot will in future be treated by lorries operating from Enniskillen, Omagh or Moygashel.

The 'new' routes will deliver a reduced treatment time for all roads to a maximum of 3½ hours with 94% of all routes being completed within three hours. In addition almost 80 percent of all priority routes (Trunk Road Network) will now be completed within the first hour of gritting.

All of the changes arising from the route optimization project will be implemented for the 2016/17 winter service season and the situation will be kept under review.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on his Department's co-operation with local councils on gritting public pavements.

(AQW 3888/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that as of September 2016 all councils have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding or exchanged letters agreeing local arrangements with my Department for the removal of ice and snow from town centre footways during prolonged severe winter weather.

This is obviously a very positive outcome, which will provide an important public service during prolonged severe weather.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total roads maintenance expenditure by service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3895/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Departments roads structural maintenance expenditure by service activity in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Roads Structural Maintenance by Activity

Activity	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
	£k				
Resurfacing & Reconstruction	90,156	81,751	102,497	74,108	38,809
Patching	22,920	20,646	20,476	15,590	10,790
Structural Drainage	7,363	7,289	8,441	7,802	4,452
Total Structural Maintenance	120,439	109,686	131,414	97,500	54,051

Structural maintenance activities include resurfacing, surface dressing, refurbishment, structural drainage, structural stability and patching.

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on traffic calming measures planned for Old Warrenpoint Road, Newry and Chapel Road, Camlough.

(AQW 3972/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: You will be aware from my correspondence on 23 September that officials from my Department are to meet with members from Newry Mourne and Down Council to discuss concerns at Old Warrenpoint Road. Following this meeting, I have instructed my officials to carry out a further review of this area.

With regard to Chapel Road, Camlough, I can confirm that an assessment has been completed and this location is not currently being considered for inclusion on a works programme, at this time.

The current programme is committed and details of this and any future measures will be provided in our Annual Report to Councils available at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many train services have been cancelled on (i) the Belfast to Derry line; and (ii) the Coleraine to Portrush line due to mechanical problems in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3979/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The following table outlines the number of train services that have been cancelled on (i) the Belfast to Derry line; and (ii) the Coleraine to Portrush line due to mechanical problems in each of the last three years.

	Belfast – Derry Line Cancellations	Portrush Branch Line Cancellations
2013 (Jan-Dec)	0	8
2014 (Jan-Dec)	3	7
2015 (Jan-Dec)	2	3

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all the Ministerial visits he has undertaken since taking up office, including the (i) date; (ii) purpose; and (iii) constituency visited.

(AQW 4009/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have detailed below all visits that I have undertaken since taking up office.

Date	Purpose	Constituency
02/06/2016	Sod Cutting A24 Temple Cross Roads	South Down
09/06/2016	Bike Week Launch Belfast City Hall	Belfast South
15/06/2016	NI Chamber of Commerce – Minister on the Move Event, Beech Hill Country House, Derry	Foyle
15/06/2016	Meeting with residents in Laurel Hill and Clarence Avenue, Derry re: parking	Foyle
16/06/2016	Irish News Workplace Awards, Titanic Building	Belfast East
17/06/2016	Bike to Work Day – Cycle from QUB to City Hall	Belfast South
19-22/06/2016	Ministerial trip to Rotterdam for Ten-T Days Conference	N/a
06/07/2016	Derry Transport Hub Announcement – Derry Train Station	Foyle
20/07/2016	Visit to Narrow Water Bridge	Newry & Armagh
28/07/2016	Visit to Transport Hub, Chamber of Commerce, Victoria Street	Belfast South
29/07/2016	Meeting with residents at Greencastle Pier Road re: Greencastle Ferry	South Down
08/08/2016	Visit to Cutts River Control Structure at Coleraine	East Londonderry
08/08/2016	RiverFest 2016 – Waterways Ireland Coleraine Town Hall	East Londonderry
11/08/2016	Visit To Belfast Harbour	Belfast East
15/08/2016	Visit to TransportNI Offices at Rathkeltair House, Downpatrick	South Down
15/08/2016	Visit to Drumaroad Water Treatment Works, Castlewellan	South Down
16/08/2016	Visit to Rathlin Island to meet residents association	North Antrim
22/08/2016	Joint Visit to Stena Line with Minister O Muilleoir, Belfast	Belfast East
07/09/2016	Visit to Traffic Control Centre Belfast for Interview with Good Morning Ulster	Belfast East
07/09/2016	Visit to East Bridge Street & Finaghy Road North	Belfast South
08/09/2016	Visit to East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme. Orangefield Park/Victoria Park	Belfast East
10-11/09/2016	British Irish Association Conference in Oxford England	n/a
12/09/2016	Visit to Forge Integrated Primary School with Minister Weir to promote Road Safety Teaching Aid Calendar.	Belfast South

Date	Purpose	Constituency
21/09/2016	Ministerial Forum on Rathlin Island	North Antrim
22/09/2016	Visit to Short Strand Area to discuss residents concerns about new depot	Belfast East
23/09/2016	Visit to Blue Badge Unit, Castle Barracks Enniskillen	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
23/09/2016	Visit to Waterways Ireland, Sligo Road Enniskillen	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
23/09/2016	Visit to Flooding location, Derrylin Road, Fermanagh	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
23/09/2016	Ulster Canal Advisory Forum, Monaghan Ireland	n/a
06/10/2016	Opening of the A6/Magherafelt Bypass	Mid Ulster/South Antrim
06/10/2016	Visit to the Derry Transport Hub	Foyle
06/10/2016	Cross party event in Guildhall Derry to discuss current infrastructure issues in North West	Foyle
06/10/2016	Airporter Event in Bishops Gate Hotel Derry	Foyle
06/10/2016	NILGA Conference – Everglade Hotel Derry	Foyle

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures have been put in place to cope with winter gritting pressures in the Transport NI Southern Division.

(AQW 4011/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI Southern Division has arrangements in place to deliver its winter service operation. Throughout the Winter Season from mid October until the middle of April, additional staff will be on standby in Southern Division to cope with winter gritting pressures, helping drivers to deal with wintry conditions.

Salt stocks have been replenished and salt storage barns are filled to maximum capacity in Southern Division in order to facilitate gritting across the council areas of Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon, Newry, Mourne & Down and North Down & Ards.

Gritter lorries have been prepared and during periods of prolonged snow, all gritters can be fitted with snow ploughs and efforts directed to clearing snow from motorways and the trunk roads, before moving to other main roads and the busiest urban link roads.

In very deep snow, snow blowers will be used, the latest of which can shift 1,600 tonnes of snow an hour. To further improve resilience snow clearance contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to assist in clearing roads of snow.

My Department will, throughout the winter season, continue to provide salt bins and grit piles at strategic locations, for use on a self help basis to help prevent the formation of snow and ice on pavements and untreated roads – using best endeavours to continually replenish these during the winter.

In addition, my Department will endeavour to ensure that the motoring public are kept fully up to date with road conditions during the winter season. Information on salting activities is relayed electronically to the media to ensure the latest news on road conditions is available to motorists. This information is also relayed to the Transport NI public facing web site Traffic Watch NI (<http://www.trafficwatchni.com/site/default.asp>) to ensure the public are kept up to date with winter service operations.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure , pursuant to AQW 3339/16-21, what enforcement checks are being conducted by the Driver and Vehicle Agency to ensure Uber are and have been fully compliant with all relevant legislative requirements.

(AQW 4026/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: All licensed taxi operators are required to use properly licensed vehicles and drivers and comply with record keeping requirements as prescribed in the Taxi Operators Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency conducts roadside compliance checks on taxis to ensure that drivers, vehicles and operators comply with all licensing requirements and to assess whether vehicles satisfy roadworthiness standards. In addition, DVA is committed to carrying out a compliance visit to all commercial operating centres within 12 months of a Taxi Operator Licence being granted and a visit to Uber's operating centre has been scheduled in line with these arrangements.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what role does his Department have in relation to Waterways Ireland.

(AQW 4034/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Waterways Ireland is a North South Implementation Body responsible for the development, maintenance and promotion of the navigable waterways in Ireland. The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are joint sponsors of the organisation.

DfI is jointly responsible for approving Waterways Ireland's Corporate and Business Plans and ensuring that;

- they adhere to the guidance issued by the Finance Departments;
- the objectives are appropriate to the remit of the organisation as laid out in the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999;
- they reflect Ministerial Priorities in both the north and the south, and
- they contribute to the Programmes for Government in both the north and the south.

My Department is also jointly responsible for managing the governance arrangements for Waterways Ireland. This includes monitoring of performance against objectives and financial management within the organisation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding does Waterways Ireland receive through his Department. **(AQW 4036/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: The Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) jointly fund Waterways Ireland. The resource budget is funded in the agreed proportionality of DfI 15% and DAHRRGA 85%. All capital is funded by whichever Department is responsible in the jurisdiction in which the investment is made.

The financial year for Waterways Ireland is the calendar year.

The approved budget for Waterways Ireland for 2016, to be paid by the Department for Infrastructure, is £2.49 million resource and £1.075 million capital. The capital figure includes £1.04 million allocated in June Monitoring.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what action his Department has taken to ensure buses and trains are more user-friendly for people affected by poor eyesight or hearing.

(AQW 4050/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I recognise that safe, accessible public transport is important to the wellbeing, independence and day to day living of everyone including those affected by poor eyesight or hearing loss.

I have been addressing barriers to travel experienced by older people and people with a disability through the Accessible Transport Strategy. This Strategy has delivered improvements in public transport infrastructure; better training of transport staff; more accessible transport information; initiatives to assist independent travel and travel concessions.

I welcome the recent introduction of an Audio Visual information system on 258 Metro buses in Belfast designed to cater for people who may have either hearing or sight difficulties by providing audio and visual information about the next stop on their journey. A pilot to trial an App-based solution for audio visual real time information at all Metro bus stops is also taking place. The introduction of the Audio Visual system on Metro services complements the system already available on train services across the North.

I have supported Translink in undertaking a programme of accessibility improvements to all bus and train stations, and train halts. These have included measures to assist people with poor eyesight and hearing. Improvements have included:

- Increased coverage of the automated public announcements to the majority of railway halts;
- Redevelopments at Newry, Lisburn, Antrim and Portadown railway stations have included facilities for public announcements and improved information boards; and
- Updated video information boards are also being rolled out at 18 locations across the bus network.

I am pleased that Translink have adopted the RNIB Bus Charter which was developed to address the main problems raised by blind and partially sighted people when they try to use public transport. It sets out a series of simple principles that support independent travel for blind and partially sighted people.

I want to build on this progress when I publish a new Accessible Transport Strategy later this year which will include more station improvements schemes for the future including measures to assist people with hearing or sight difficulties.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much has been spent since May 2016 on legal fees relating to the A5 project.

(AQW 4107/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Since May 2016 invoices for legal fees associated with the A5 project have amounted to £27,450 and it is estimated that a similar amount is due to be paid but is not yet invoiced.

These costs are necessary to allow the Department to robustly defend its position at the scheme's Public Inquiry, which is ongoing, as well as the imminent hearing in relation to the Judicial Review application.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline why online applications for driving licences and provisional driving licences has not yet been introduced, and (ii) whether he intends to introduce this.

(AQW 4108/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver Licensing IT system that is currently used by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) is not capable of supporting online services.

The DVA is currently developing a new Driver Licensing IT system to be delivered later this year. This system will improve the customer experience, deliver service efficiencies and will enable the DVA to commence the roll out of online processing and other enhancements to the service. The first of these online services will be available early next year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of staff employed by Waterways Ireland.

(AQW 4134/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Waterways Ireland currently employs 289 permanent staff and a further 49 temporary/seasonal workers. Of these, 75 permanent staff and eight temporary/seasonal staff are based in the north.

In addition to this, Waterways Ireland also employs one agency worker and seven student placements, all in the north.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding allocated to Waterways Ireland by the Irish Government.

(AQW 4135/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) jointly fund Waterways Ireland. The resource budget is funded in the agreed proportionality of DfI 15% and DAHRRGA 85%. All capital is funded by whichever Department is responsible in the jurisdiction in which the investment is made.

The financial year for Waterways Ireland is the calendar year.

The approved budget for Waterways Ireland for 2016, to be paid by DAHRRGA in 2016, is €20.058 million resource and €6.206 million capital. The capital figure includes an in-year allocation of €3 million.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the funding streams or community grants provided by Waterways Ireland.

(AQW 4138/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Waterways Ireland offers two funding streams:

- Community Grants for heritage projects that are linked to local waterways and focus on raising awareness, gathering heritage data and heritage management.
- Sponsorship for festivals, fun/open days, “come and try” events and sporting events.

This year, Waterways Ireland offered sponsorship to 121 events, 28 of which were in the north. 19 Heritage Grants were awarded, four of which were in the north.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he can provide an assurance that his Department has been allocated or will seek an allocation of adequate funding to keep street lighting operational in West Tyrone for the remainder of this financial year.

(AQW 4154/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is currently providing a normal street lighting repair service in West Tyrone and in all areas across the north.

As the financial year progresses, I will continue to assess my Department’s financial needs and, through liaison with the Finance Minister and Executive Colleagues, I will seek to ensure that there is adequate funding to keep street lighting operational.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail an indicative cost for the adoption of currently unadopted (i) roads; (ii) water; (iii) sewerage and (iv) street lighting within the former Ministry of Defence housing associated with Shackleton Barracks in Ballykelly.

(AQW 4167/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The responsibility for these roads and services rests with the private house owners and the management company for the estates. Any proposed upgrade work in terms of design, construction works and associated costs to meet adoption standard would be their responsibility. The Department has previously provided advice to the management company on this issue but is unaware of the design details progressed and associated costs.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures have been put in place to cope with winter gritting pressures in the Transport NI Northern Division.

(AQW 4175/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to advise that my staff within TransportNI have completed planning for the delivery of winter service functions. Throughout the winter season from now until the middle of April 2017, there will be 78 staff on standby to salt main roads, helping drivers to cope with wintry conditions across Northern Division which encompasses the council areas of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim and Causeway Coast and Glens. Salt barns and Stockpiles are being filled to maximum capacity and when ice or snow is forecast, we have 38 gritters available in this area which can salt the main network in just over three hours, a massive logistical exercise that costs around £20,000 each time it takes place.

The operation will continue until all roads are cleared, but this may take some time, even with all resources deployed. In very deep snow, TransportNI will use its snow blowers, the latest of which can shift 1,600 tonnes of snow an hour.

TransportNI will continue to provide salt bins and grit piles at strategic locations, for use on a self help basis to help prevent the formation of snow and ice on pavements and untreated roads – using best endeavours to continually replenish these during the winter.

Arrangements will also be in place to enlist the help of contractors, including farmers, to clear blocked roads and TransportNI has introduced enhanced communication arrangements and priority secondary salting to rural schools that are most affected by wintry weather conditions.

TransportNI will try to ensure that motorists are kept fully up to date with road conditions at this time of year. Information on salting activities is relayed electronically to the media to ensure the latest news on road conditions is available to motorists. This information is also relayed to the TransportNI public facing web site Traffic Watch NI (<http://www.trafficwatchni.com/site/default.asp>) to ensure the public are kept up to date with winter service operations.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to develop 2+1 overtaking lanes on the Omagh to Dromore section of the A32.

(AQW 4204/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The A32 Omagh to Enniskillen Improvement Strategy was developed in 2007. The Omagh to Dromore section of the A32 is generally of a higher standard than the remainder of the A32 and the only scheme identified within the strategy relating to this section of the route was the Shanaragh realignment project which was delivered in 2013 at a cost of £7m.

There are currently no plans to undertake any further major improvement works including 2+1 overtaking lanes on this section of the road network.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Lagan Canal revitalisation scheme.

(AQW 4233/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The reopening of the Lagan Navigation between Belfast and Lough Neagh is the primary objective of the Lagan Navigation Trust. In 2015, the Trust put forward a strategic outline case (SOC) for the reopening of the Canal and recommended the development of a full Business Case for the Lagan Canal restoration project.

Given that the £100 million funding identified in the SOC for the full re-opening of the navigation was unlikely to be made available in the short to medium term, there was no value in proceeding to a full business at that time.

However, my Department is considering the incorporation of the route of the Lagan Canal into the Strategic Plan for Greenways.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are plans to extend street lighting from Riverside Retail Park, Coleraine to Castleroe.

(AQW 4268/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: This is a short stretch of rural road between Coleraine and Castleroe which is approximately 350 metres in length. It has a footway along its length and is also served by a Council path which runs parallel to the main road. There are no plans to provide street lighting as this does not meet the policy for street lighting provision on rural roads.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will consider allowing electric cars to use bus lanes; or provide incentives to drive electric cars.

(AQW 4296/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department does not have any immediate plans to allow electric vehicles to have access to bus lanes. However, consideration may be given in the future to allow a small number of heavily branded pure electric car pool vehicles to use bus lanes in a continued drive to encourage employers to switch to using electric vehicles for business purposes. This intervention would be designed to increase visibility of electric vehicles carrying out day to day business activity, promote use and encourage new users.

The Department is currently working with the Office for Low Emission Vehicles to develop an Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy which will further inform how and when any such measures should be introduced.

Incentives to purchase electric vehicles are already in place and are currently as follows:

- 35% of the cost of a car, up to a maximum of either £2,500 or £4,500 depending on the model;

- 20% of the cost of a van, up to a maximum of £8,000; and
- Up to a maximum of £500 (including VAT) per eligible electric vehicle towards the installation of a domestic charge point at a residential address.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A5 road scheme.
(AQO 387/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following the public consultation into the draft Orders and Environmental Statement for the scheme my Department appointed the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) as the independent Inspector to administer a Public Inquiry. This Inquiry is scheduled to open today (4 October 2016) and the Inspector's Report is expected around May 2017.

My Department will consider the recommendations of the Report in detail before I make a decision on whether to proceed with the scheme and make the necessary statutory Orders (Direction Order, Vesting Order and Stopping-Up Order).

The budget allocation of £229m will enable construction of Phase 1A (Newbuildings and Strabane) to commence in late 2017 with an estimated completion date of late 2019. It would also suggest that construction of the section from south of Omagh to Ballygawley (Phase 1B) could commence in the latter part of the five year budget period. This however would require a commitment to significant expenditure beyond 2020/21.

In late August 2016, the Alternative A5 Alliance (AA5A) applied for leave for a Judicial Review on two matters relating to the scheme. The Department is opposing the application for leave and is seeking an early resolution on the matter through the Courts.

Subject to the successful completion of all the statutory procedures and a satisfactory outcome from the Inspector's Report, it is anticipated that construction can commence in late 2017 on Phase 1A in line with the 'A Fresh Start' Agreement.
Electric Car Charge Points

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure in reference to the transfer of ownership of the electric car charging infrastructure; (i) to detail what role his Department now plays with regards to further development of the charging network; and (ii) whether his department has any strategy or plans in place to ensure that the number of electric car charge points and in particular rapid charge points is increased to facilitate growth in eCar ownership.
(AQW 4384/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following the successful commercialisation of the public network of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the North of Ireland, the former Department for Regional Development's ecar unit administered a grant to allow for the installation of 54 new individually owned charge points in the Public Sector Estate. The Department for Infrastructure has also recently completed a tendering exercise for a new two year Charge Point Management System to support these new charge points.

The ecar team continues to liaise with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) on operational aspects of network availability. The current provision of 336 charge points across the North (320 22kw Fast Chargers and 16 50kw Rapid Chargers), it is estimated, will provide the necessary infrastructure to meet growth in the market until at least 2019. While it is for ESB to decide on a commercial basis what infrastructure is required to meet current and future demand, should funding become available for the installation of additional infrastructure, the Department for Infrastructure will liaise closely with ESB and other partners such as the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV), to ensure that the charging infrastructure remains fit for purpose.

Grants of up to £500 remain available for the installation of home chargers, which is where the majority of ecar drivers charge their vehicles. The public charging network is used primarily for opportunity charging and range extension.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the progress on the development of greenways as part of the Active Travel Strategy.
(AQO 390/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: On taking up my appointment as Minister for Infrastructure in May, I set out my support for improving infrastructure for active travel, for promoting it through all our transport interventions and for providing support to Councils for the development of greenways across the north.

I am particularly interested in developing greenways and work on producing a Strategic Plan is coming to a conclusion. The Member will be interested to know that I intend to publish my Strategic Plan for Greenways later this month. This plan will provide a framework to assist both central and local government in developing local schemes as part of a greenway network for the entire region. Officials from my Department recently briefed the Committee for Infrastructure about this work.

The Strategic Plan is not just about words and intentions. Alongside this I will shortly announce the results of Stage 1 of the 'Small Grants Programme for Greenways'. This three stage competition aims to provide councils with access to funding to help them draw up feasibility studies and detailed designs for greenway schemes.

My Department received 27 'Expressions of Interest' at Stage 1 of the competition and I will announce the successful applications which will proceed to Stage 2. Councils will receive a grant of up to £8,000 to develop a feasibility study for each of the successful schemes.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the environmental impact study for the proposal to build a compressed air energy storage plant in Islandmagee.

(AQW 4469/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A planning application accompanied by an Environmental Statement for a Compressed Air Energy Storage (CAES) project was received on 23 December 2015. Following consideration of the proposal, the Department requested Further Environmental Information. This was received on 4 October 2016 and will be subject to the requirements of Regulation 20 of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2015 in terms of consultations and advertisements.

This information will assist officials when making a recommendation on the application for my consideration.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the progress of the Armagh East Link and the Armagh North and West Link.

(AQO 388/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following feedback received at a Public Information event for the proposed Armagh East Link held in June 2014 the Preferred Option was reviewed.

The review included consideration of the link road emerging further out the A28 Markethill Road and has identified viable alternative options which are now subject to detailed assessment before a preferred option can be confirmed. It is anticipated that this work will be complete in Autumn 2016.

Following identification of the Preferred Option, the next stage of development work, involves completing a 'specimen design' which will be subject to further comprehensive environmental, economic and engineering assessments.

The formal statutory procedures will then follow with the publication of an Environmental Statement together with a notice of intention to make a Direction Order and a notice of intention to make a Vesting Order. It is likely a Public Inquiry will be required to determine if the proposal should go ahead as planned.

In relation to the North and West Link it would not be appropriate to make a decision on the preferred route based on the 'out of town' corridor at this time, pending development of proposals for the Mullinure Area highlighted in the Armagh City Centre Masterplan 2030.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on current legislation in relation to road safety measures adjacent to schools.

(AQO 389/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There is no specific legislation relating to road safety measures at schools, however existing legislation to set speed limits and to control waiting and parking is used to enhance safety in the vicinity of schools.

My Department treats the safety of school children as one of its highest priorities and over many years has invested significantly in measures to reduce vehicle speeds and improve road safety for children.

In the last three years, road safety improvements have been provided at 73 schools as part of the School Travel and Safety Projects initiative.

A recent innovation has been the development of part-time 20 mph speed limits at schools, especially at those on roads where the national speed limit applies and I have asked my officials to consider further refinements of this measure that would facilitate an increased provision.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many times Transport NI plans to cut roadside grass in 2017/18.

(AQO 391/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's objective in cutting grass on its lands is to prevent overgrowth onto footway and carriageway surfaces and the obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs. Therefore grass cutting operations are carried out by my Department for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes.

Under normal circumstances TransportNI aims for two grass cuts per year in rural areas and five cuts in urban areas. However, budgetary pressures on my Department initially restricted the grass cutting operations in 2016/17 to one cut across all areas between April and October, with sightlines at bends and junctions being cut more frequently as required to ensure public safety was not compromised.

I am pleased to say that following June monitoring, my Department was successful in receiving an additional £5m for the delivery of an enhanced routine maintenance service. A portion of this funding is being directed towards a second grass cut.

I regret that I am not in a position at this time to confirm the 2017/18 grass cutting programme as budgets have not yet been fixed. However, I can assure the member that I will continue to discuss with Executive colleagues, through the budget 2016 exercise, the requirement for additional baseline resource funding for routine maintenance activities including grass cutting.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the consideration given to the financial impact on local businesses of the roadworks required on Kings Road and Old Dundonald Road as part of the project to upgrade electricity supplies to the Ulster Hospital.

(AQO 392/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you may be aware the works on Kings Road are being carried out by NIE to provide a new power supply to the Ulster Hospital. As such your question is a matter for them.

My Department is responsible for managing traffic on the road network. I can advise that the NIE works were particularly difficult as it involved open cut excavation. The main part of the works were carried out during the months of July and August allow the opportunity to work long hours in daylight conditions with reduced traffic levels. This maximises output while minimising the disruption both during the day and during the peak traffic flow periods.

Access to all businesses was maintained at all times throughout the scheme, and the road works were completed on the 9 September 2016.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on proposals for a tidal urban clearway on Antrim Road, Belfast.
(AQO 393/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A proposal to amend the existing clearway is currently under active consideration and my Department's TransportNI has undertaken a number of surveys to gauge the impact of any potential changes.

Whilst it is accepted that a tidal Urban Clearway would assist local traders it should be noted, however, that full urban clearways provide better facilities for public transport and are more beneficial for cyclists than tidal urban clearway arrangements.

A report on the benefits and disbenefits of a tidal clearway has been compiled and I would hope to be in a position to confirm my intentions later in the Autumn of this year.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many roads in North Antrim will be included in the recently announced scheme to resurface rural roads.

(AQO 394/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department holds the information requested on a Council by Council basis and not by MLA Constituency. Therefore I can advise that at present 42 roads within the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area and 35 roads within the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council are included within the rural roads initiative resurfacing programme.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to list the Prison Service Change Managers objectives on appointment; and which objectives were (i) achieved; and (ii) not achieved.

(AQW 3944/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): The Change Managers were appointed to plan and deliver the recommendations from the Prison Review Report published in October 2011. The Programme for Government 2011-2016 set the objective of implementing 90% of the recommendations by the end of the Assembly mandate.

As part of the work to implement the 40 recommendations, an Oversight Group was established to provide strategic direction, offer advice and to robustly challenge the work of the Reform Programme. When the Reform Programme was brought to a close in March 2016, 36 of the 40 recommendations had been signed off by the Oversight Group.

The following recommendations were signed off by the Oversight Group:

- PRT 01 – Supervised activity orders
- PRT 02 – Statutory time limits
- PRT 04 – Maintain and publish routine data
- PRT 05 – Reconfiguration of Maghaberry
- PRT 06 – Future direction of Magilligan
- PRT 07 – Halfway House/Step-down facility
- PRT 08 – Full-body searching alternatives
- PRT 09 – Random review of SPAR
- PRT 10 – Equality and diversity reports
- PRT 11 – Support to foreign nationals
- PRT 12 – Joint governance arrangements
- PRT 14 – Health data collection and monitoring
- PRT 15 – Transfer of staff to South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- PRT 16 – Pathways for primary care and mental health
- PRT 18 – Substance misuse needs assessment
- PRT 19 – Substance misuse partnership working
- PRT 20 – Substance misuse clinical audit
- PRT 21 – Integrated discharge and care planning
- PRT 22 – Change Management Team
- PRT 23 – Ministerial Oversight Group
- PRT 25 – SEE Programme integration
- PRT 24 – New operating model for staff
- PRT 27 – New code of ethics/discipline & new appraisal system

- PRT 28 – Awards scheme
- PRT 29 – Data to support planning and commissioning
- PRT 30 – Personalised custody/sentence planning
- PRT 31 – Integration of service delivery with PBNI
- PRT 32 – New Director post (rehabilitation)
- PRT 33 – Desistance strategy
- PRT 34 – Safer society strategy
- PRT 35 – Roll out of Inspire for women
- PRT 36 – New custodial facility for women
- PRT 37 – Community based pilot
- PRT 38 – Under 18s moved from Hydebank Wood
- PRT 39 – Rebuilding programme at Hydebank Wood
- PRT 40 – Secure college

Four recommendations had not been signed off:

- PRT 03 – Effective community sentences
- PRT 13 – Joint health and justice strategy
- PRT 17 – Joint working arrangements between DHSSPS and NIPS
- PRT 26 – Developing & refreshing staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of the Prison Service Change Managers' (i) collective salaries; (ii) travel expenses; (iii) accommodation; and (iv) other expenditure, for each year of their tenure.

(AQW 4041/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The amounts paid for this post in respect of "salary, flights, accommodation and other expenses" cannot be broken down as it would be in breach of Data Protection Act legislation.

Information on the remuneration of NIPS Management Board members is, however, published each year in NIPS Annual Report and Accounts, copies of which can be accessed at: <https://www.dojni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide, or place in the Assembly library, a copy of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Governor's Order Lone Working Policy.

(AQW 4114/16-21)

Ms Sugden: A draft policy has been prepared and is the subject of consultation with Trade Union Side.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether on duty prison officers have the powers of a constable.

(AQW 4115/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I can confirm that Section 8 (Powers of prison officers) of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 provides that "Every officer of a prison shall while acting as such have all the powers, authority, protection and privileges of a constable." Case law on the Prison Act 1952 (the equivalent GB legislation) is clear. It indicates that prison officers, while on duty, have the same powers of arrest as police officers, but the words "while acting as such" limit the effect of section 8 to the actual discharge of a prison officer's duties. These duties, set out in Rule 110 of the Prison and Young Offenders Centres Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995, are not the same as the duties of a police constable.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to extend the remit of Part 5 the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 to allow local government officers to confiscate alcohol from people involved in on-street drinking.

(AQW 4125/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Part 5 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 was created by the Department of Justice on behalf of the then Department of Social Development to address challenges in the existing bye-laws and I am aware of the challenges surrounding the implementation of Part 5 of the Order.

My Department is represented on several groups to strategically address anti-social behaviour and its associated issues, including on-street drinking. The outworking of which has led me to ask my officials to scope out, in association with relevant stakeholders, how a holistic review of anti-social behaviour can be taken forward.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to review legislation to close legal loopholes to prevent people with mental health problems going to prison.

(AQW 4191/16-21)

Ms Sugden: At present, Part 3 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 contains provisions which allow courts to remand people to hospital rather than prison in certain circumstances. The Order also allows courts to make disposals that result in admission to hospital and facilitates the transfer of mentally disordered prisoners for in-patient care. These provisions were reviewed recently and Part 10 of the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 contains replacement provisions which will be commenced in due course.

I do not intend on further reviewing the legislation.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2342/16-21, whether she wishes to revise her answer given these matters are proceeding on indictment.

(AQW 4280/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The criteria for a Serious Case Review is based on the specific offence type meeting the serious harm threshold not on whether an offence, or offences, are being proceeded with summarily or on indictment.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2795/16-21 and in relation to point (iii), to provide, or place in the Assembly library, the report with the relevant areas of concern redacted.

(AQW 4282/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Probation Board for Northern Ireland do not publish Serious Further Offence Reviews even in redacted form as it may still be possible to identify individuals from the non-sensitive data. In any case, it would be inappropriate to act in any way which might impact on the ongoing police investigation into this matter.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to build on the work of the Women's Aid funded criminal justice workers that provide onsite support to victims of domestic abuse.

(AQW 4322/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have identified Domestic Violence and Abuse as one of my key priorities and my Department is responsible for delivering the 'Protection and Justice' strand of the 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse' Strategy.

I recognise that not all victims of domestic violence feel able to come forward and report abuse and thereby wish to acknowledge the valuable role of Women's Aid criminal justice workers in PSNI stations. As the PSNI is the first point of contact for many victims of domestic violence, I appreciate the importance of ensuring victims are appropriately supported at this critical time.

As part of the action plans associated with the Strategy, I will therefore be considering how best to provide advocacy and support to all victims of domestic abuse.

This will provide the opportunity to examine existing support measures such as Women's Aid funded criminal justice workers in PSNI stations to inform consideration of what initiatives might suitably be replicated across Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department has given consideration to the introduction of cameras in court rooms.

(AQW 4337/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department has not given consideration to the introduction of cameras in courtrooms in Northern Ireland.

Televising courts is prohibited by legislation and any proposal for filming court proceedings would require consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and other stakeholders.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline to whom are the Probation Board for Northern Ireland accountable.

(AQW 4368/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As a non departmental public body the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) has operational autonomy. However, PBNI is accountable to me as Justice Minister. I, in turn, account to the Assembly for the activities and performance of PBNI.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether prisoners under the Supporting Prisoners at Risk scheme and observation will receive mental health treatment concurrently.

(AQW 4369/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) is responsible for the provision of mental health support in prisons.

Whenever Prison Service staff believe a prisoner under the Supporting Prisoners at Risk scheme is in need of mental health support, a referral will be made to the SEHSCT staff within the prison.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of departmental officials that have been based in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) North Antrim, as of 1 September for each of the last 4 years.

(AQW 4378/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The number of departmental officials based in Ballymena, Ballymoney and North Antrim, as of 1 September for each of the last 4 years is set out in the table below.

	1 September 2013	1 September 2014	1 September 2015	1 September 2016
(i) Ballymena	32	35	32	28

	1 September 2013	1 September 2014	1 September 2015	1 September 2016
(ii) Ballymoney				
(iii) North Antrim*	32	35	32	28

* North Antrim Constituency (which includes Ballymena)

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of officials in the Public Prosecution Service that have been based in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) North Antrim, as of 1 September for each of the last 4 years.

(AQW 4379/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As a non-ministerial government department, the Public Prosecution Service is directly responsible for its own staffing and the associated information. My Department does not hold any information in respect of this organisation. You may wish, therefore, to direct your query to the Public Prosecution Service.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2342/16-21, why there are no grounds to suggest that there was a significant failure in the risk management of James White's case by statutory agencies.

(AQW 4390/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am aware that the PSNI, who were responsible for Mr White's risk management in the community, made strenuous and sustained efforts to locate him across the period of his absence from his approved address. They utilised all available means and technologies at their disposal to locate him as well as alerting relevant authorities with whom he may come into contact both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That response does not signify to me that there was a significant failure by his risk managers to do all that could be expected of them in such circumstances and indeed those efforts have now culminated in his arrest and his actions being properly brought before the Courts.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many staff are employed in her Department's Information Service; and (ii) the annual cost of this service.

(AQW 4417/16-21)

Ms Sugden: At 1 October 2016 there were five members of staff employed in the Department's Press Office, all of whom are on loan from the Executive Information Service.

The five staff members provide a range of information services common to all departments. The annual cost of this service staff is estimated to be £294,481 based on 2015/16 expenditure.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3585/16-21, how many of her Department's staff have availed of the Assembly Questions course in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4491/16-21)

Ms Sugden: 48 of my Department's staff availed of the Assembly Questions course over the last 3 years broken down as follows:

From April 2013 - March 14	1 person
From April 14 - March 15	39 people
From April 16 - September 16	8 people

The course is provided by the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL), the key provider of training to staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3585/16-21, can she specify who delivers the Assembly Questions course.

(AQW 4492/16-21)

Ms Sugden: 48 of my Department's staff availed of the Assembly Questions course over the last 3 years broken down as follows:

From April 2013 - March 14	1 person
From April 14 - March 15	39 people
From April 16 - September 16	8 people

The course is provided by the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL), the key provider of training to staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of convictions for waste offences in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 4537/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to waste may be prosecuted under a range of legislation, including the Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 2007, the Waste & Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. Information in relation to convictions handed down at court in the period 2011 – 2015, the latest five year period for which information is available, where at least one offence was related to waste, has been provided in the following table.

Convictions at courts for waste related offences by court division, 2011 - 2015

Court Division	Convictions				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	4	5	19	4	12
Ards	7	5	12	2	6
Armagh and South Down	7	12	6	9	7
Belfast	5	7	16	13	7
Craigavon	3	6	8	1	5
Fermanagh and Tyrone	5	0	6	3	5
Londonderry	7	4	7	2	6
Total	38	39	74	34	48

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures include prosecutions brought by PPS on behalf of PSNI and other bodies.
- 5 Data for 2014 - 2015 have been sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset while data for 2011 - 2013 have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice what action the Rural Crime Partnership is taking to deal with rural crime.
(AQW 4538/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department's Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017 contains a commitment to making rural communities safer by reducing opportunities to commit crime. It also highlights my Department's commitment to supporting the outcomes of the Executive's Rural White Paper and Action Plan, led by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), to support and sustain rural communities and to deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that will contribute to safer rural communities.

The Rural Crime Partnership (RCP), which consists of representatives from my Department, the PSNI, NFU Mutual, the Ulster Farmers' Union and DAERA, delivers actions taken forward at a strategic level to support safer rural communities. The primary focus of the RCP has been on developing a collaborative response to crime which is specific to rural areas – agricultural crime. In conjunction with PSNI intelligence a number of initiatives have been specifically developed and delivered in support of rural crime in identified hotspot areas such as regional subsidies to fit crime prevention equipment and crime awareness raising among rural and agricultural communities.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships have delivered a wide range of initiatives to address crimes in their local areas, and my Department will continue to work with key partners in addressing rural crime for e.g. in the members own area, PCSP led activities include property marking for asset protection, crime alerts and community wide crime prevention schemes.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) all compensation payments made by her Department under the terms of the Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2002, broken down for each month in the last five years; and (ii) the amount of each individual payment made.
(AQW 4556/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Annex A provides a breakdown by calendar month and year, for all individual payments made in the last 5 years under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2002.

Annex A

January

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£8,500.00	£5,500.00	£25,575.00	£172,868.69	£8,500.00
£40,450.00	£8,783.64	£5,500.00	£15,000.00	£310,450.00
£4,500.00	£8,500.00	£22,500.00	£31,950.00	£8,500.00
£5,950.00	£15,750.00	£2,000.00	£8,825.00	£20,525.85
£4,100.00	£6,500.00	£22,500.00	£30,000.00	£14,025.00
£73,032.91	£3,400.00	£1,500.00		
£4,500.00	£9,250.00	£2,650.00		
£1,750.00	£775.00	£1,500.00		
£1,500.00	£4,500.00	£5,500.00		
£2,000.00	£1,500.00			
£1,000.00	£22,500.00			
£13,950.00	£4,500.00			
£36,900.00	£7,550.00			
£2,000.00	£8,862.75			
£450.00	£1,000.00			
£25,500.00	£5,500.00			
£2,000.00	£2,500.00			
£4,000.00	£31,950.00			
£85,117.30				
£30,000.00				
£5,025.00				
£6,500.00				
£7,250.00				
£8,500.00				
£1,500.00				
£1,593.75				
£2,100.00				
£1,250.00				
£8,500.00				
£2,980.00				
£392,398.96	£148,821.39	£89,225.00	£258,643.69	£362,000.85

February

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£30,000.00	£437.50	£8,500.00	£4,000.00	£31,950.00
£5,500.00	£2,500.00	£6,500.00	£1,200.00	£240,365.39
£14,625.00	£22,860.00	£300.00	£1,300.00	£22,500.00
£46,912.50	£13,950.00	£2,500.00	£1,500.00	
£800.00	£5,000.00	£24,675.00	£150.00	
£4,537.50	£591.91	£5,950.00	£4,500.00	

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£2,215.77	£12,000.00			
£7,500.00	£22,575.00			
£3,500.00	£24,450.00			
£5,037.50	£2,500.00			
£2,237.50	£3,500.00			
£3,825.00	£3,100.00			
£22,500.00	£8,500.00			
£8,500.00	£19,950.00			
£6,375.00	£22,500.00			
£8,500.00	£5,050.00			
£4,400.00	£8,450.00			
£4,500.00	£1,500.00			
£202,159.39	£8,500.00			
£8,500.00	£15,600.00			
£8,500.00	£1,250.00			
£10,450.00	£2,500.00			
£8,500.00	£24,450.00			
£8,500.00	£8,400.00			
£6,825.00				
£4,000.00				
£6,204.10				
£1,000.00				
£4,250.00				
£450,354.26	£240,114.41	£48,425.00	£12,650.00	£294,815.39

March

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£1,800.00	£30,000.00	£18,000.00	£30,000.00	£30,000.00
£21,397.50	£33,600.00	£30,000.00	£1,000.00	
£22,500.00	£5,500.00	£1,500.00	£6,950.00	
£8,500.00	£11,050.00	£22,500.00	£6,600.00	
£2,000.00	£14,175.00	£30,450.00	£1,200.00	
£17,500.00	£1,500.00	£3,550.00		
£2,000.00	£45,400.00	£8,500.00		
£3,400.00	£2,744.93	£8,500.00		
£4,060.00	£45,400.00	£2,250.00		
£5,500.00	£8,500.00			
£3,500.00	£2,000.00			
£5,100.00	£22,500.00			
£33,600.00	£10,000.00			
£12,000.00	£3,800.00			

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£4,125.00	£7,675.00			
£4,250.00	£8,500.00			
£8,500.00				
£8,500.00				
£10,150.00				
£8,500.00				
£2,500.00				
£54,239.00				
£2,500.00				
£30,450.00				
£2,125.00				
£20,475.00				
£4,500.00				
£1,000.00				
£6,800.00				
£2,300.00				
£12,825.00				
£17,800.00				
£7,000.00				
£2,500.00				
£8,450.00				
£8,500.00				
£6,701.20				
£22,491.89				
£8,375.00				
£8,500.00				
£8,500.00				
£425,414.59	£252,344.93	£125,250.00	£45,750.00	£30,000.00

April

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£2,200.00	£8,500.00	£6,860.00	£22,500.00	£4,170.45
£22,500.00	£6,700.00	£3,360.00	£3,500.00	
£30,000.00	£2,500.00	£3,850.00	£6,509.77	
£8,675.00	£9,150.00	£14,325.00	£25,425.00	
£2,600.00	£5,800.00	£6,500.00	£4,000.00	
£2,000.00	£1,500.00	£46,375.00	£1,500.00	
£2,834.00	£2,000.00	£16,575.00		
£3,500.00	£5,075.00	£5,500.00		
£5,400.00	£18,000.00			
£8,535.00	£5,950.00			

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£5,500.00				
£6,800.00				
£3,000.00				
£1,500.00				
£6,425.00				
£1,200.00				
£114,984.01				
£7,850.00				
£42,875.00				
£278,378.01	£65,175.00	£103,345.00	£63,434.77	£4,170.45

May

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£4,900.00	£1,250.00	£34,725.00	£5,500.00	£34,575.00
£4,500.00	£8,450.00	£42,475.00	£12,254.37	£15,000.00
£8,500.00	£2,500.00	£30,000.00	£15,000.00	£1,500.00
£8,500.00	£8,850.00	£28,755.00	£600.00	£6,500.00
£22,500.00	£7,700.00	£3,100.00		£3,040.00
£1,300.00	£1,000.00	£5,500.00		
£5,860.00	£22,500.00	£24,825.00		
£6,375.00	£15,000.00	£24,150.00		
£3,100.00	£21,336.36			
£2,050.00	£8,500.00			
£4,800.00	£4,500.00			
£8,343.75	£6,500.00			
£8,500.00	£4,500.00			
£1,500.00	£12,000.00			
£2,500.00	£25,425.00			
£6,500.00	£2,500.00			
£5,000.00	£8,500.00			
£2,000.00	£3,299.44			
£2,000.00				
£7,750.00				
£8,500.00				
£11,450.00				
£6,375.00				
£2,125.00				
£15,943.75				
£5,500.00				
£4,000.00				
£1,250.00				

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£737.50				
£4,500.00				
£4,550.00				
£5,850.00				
£187,260.00	£164,310.80	£193,530.00	£33,354.37	£60,615.00

June

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£4,500.00	£8,500.00	£7,612.50	£30,000.00	£8,150.00
£4,050.00	£6,500.00	£4,577.29	£18,000.00	£8,375.00
£4,050.00	£8,500.00	£2,500.00	£5,500.00	£13,830.00
£10,625.00	£4,500.00	£1,500.00	£85,900.00	£7,605.00
£2,500.00	£26,100.00		£5,500.00	£7,250.00
£12,450.00	£30,750.00		£22,500.00	£28,675.00
£2,300.00	£8,500.00		£3,000.00	£8,500.00
£30,510.00	£5,950.00			
£29,750.00	£40,000.00			
£2,000.00	£2,000.80			
£8,500.00	£1,000.05			
£6,500.00	£2,000.00			
£1,000.00	£8,500.00			
£12,750.00	£5,800.00			
£2,500.00	£31,950.00			
£30,000.00	£12,300.00			
£5,446.00	£4,000.20			
£4,200.00				
£8,500.00				
£9,000.00				
£2,000.00				
£1,250.00				
£6,050.00				
£4,000.00				
£1,870.00				
£5,550.00				
£61,575.00				
£1,500.00				
£2,210.28				
£8,500.00				
£1,000.00				
£286,636.28	£206,851.05	£16,189.79	£170,400.00	£82,385.00

July

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£2,325.00	£4,500.00	£12,575.00	£14,175.00	£22,500.00
£475.18	£6,500.00	£30,000.00	£6,500.00	£14,325.00
£284,425.00	£6,250.00		£8,675.00	£32,325.00
£32,925.00	£32,062.50		£6,500.00	£5,950.00
£30,000.00	£7,085.00		£150.00	
£5,000.00	£8,675.00			
£2,500.00	£12,200.00			
£36,673.00	£3,320.75			
£20,000.00	£2,000.00			
£31,049.50	£3,000.00			
£24,450.00				
£2,300.00				
£8,500.00				
£5,500.00				
£25,931.25				
£6,500.00				
£3,000.00				
£30,000.00				
£22,500.00				
£4,500.00				
£214,192.00				
£1,875.00				
£2,750.00				
£9,740.00				
£9,100.00				
£8,500.00				
£6,500.00				
£8,500.00				
£5,950.00				
£845,660.93	£85,593.25	£42,575.00	£36,000.00	£75,100.00

August

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£8,500.00	£6,500.00	£24,825.00	£27,500.00	£16,725.00
£5,850.00	£18,500.00	£30,000.00	£13,950.00	£4,950.00
£2,000.00	£30,000.00	£30,240.00		
£17,800.00	£8,500.00	£33,600.00		
£3,375.00	£6,500.00	£31,950.00		
£1,725.00	£2,000.00	£44,575.00		
£4,400.00	£12,000.00	£4,500.00		
£4,500.00	£86,977.00			

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£30,000.00	£4,500.00			
£5,950.00				
£8,500.00				
£4,325.00				
£6,037.50				
£31,950.00				
£8,500.00				
£8,500.00				
£26,400.00				
£2,800.00				
£2,500.00				
£8,375.00				
£8,150.00				
£200,137.50	£175,477.00	£199,690.00	£41,450.00	£21,675

September

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£4,125.00	£31,465.48	£7,250.00	£3,625.00	£3,500.00
£1,500.00	£4,050.00	£1,250.00	£1,000.00	
£2,600.00	£30,000.00	£6,500.00		
£4,250.00	£4,000.00			
£11,059.69	£33,600.00			
£3,137.50	£8,675.00			
£4,000.00	£6,500.00			
£6,850.00	£16,474.83			
£3,000.00				
£3,500.00				
£2,500.00				
£5,500.00				
£3,600.00				
£4,250.00				
£1,200.00				
£2,250.00				
£1,829.91				
£8,500.00				
£22,500.00				
£4,500.00				
£6,500.00				
£4,293.48				
£30,000.00				
£5,500.00				
£146,945.58	£134,765.31	£15,000.00	£4,625.00	£3,500.00

October

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£2,500.00	£22,500.00	£628,479.00	£20,475.00	Figure not yet available.
£30,000.00	£8,500.00	£31,920.00	£8,500.00	
£12,000.00	£2,000.00	£12,050.00		
£2,125.00	£3,325.00			
£31,950.00	£8,675.00			
£5,500.00	£18,000.00			
£6,625.00	£10,375.00			
£12,000.00	£22,500.00			
£8,500.00	£22,500.00			
£12,750.00	£7,500.00			
£22,500.00	£2,125.00			
£2,250.00	£5,500.00			
£35,400.00	£2,750.00			
£8,500.00	£4,500.00			
£2,625.00	£4,000.00			
£1,375.00	£1,200.00			
£5,500.00	£32,756.91			
£12,000.00				
£8,500.00				
£5,100.00				
£166,677.50				
£4,500.00				
£33,600.00				
£30,000.00				
£462,477.50	£178,706.91	£672,449.00	£28,975.00	£0

November

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£17,472.70	£6,500.00	£30,000.00	£45,400.00	
£1,500.00	£8,500.00	£29,580.00	£6,500.00	
£8,500.00	£30,000.00		£8,500.00	
£6,500.00	£5,425.00		£3,500.00	
£8,500.00	£9,100.00		£13,950.00	
£31,950.00	£123,675.50		£17,100.00	
£9,850.00	£11,050.00		£23,489.00	
£4,500.00	£23,490.00		£30,000.00	
£9,018.75	£8,500.00		£53,141.73	
£6,417.00	£2,000.00			
£61,350.00	£245,100.00			
£22,500.00	£13,950.00			
£1,325.00	£13,950.00			

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£4,500.00	£2,000.00			
£2,200.00				
£11,748.58				
£22,500.00				
£30,000.00				
£4,500.00				
£2,500.00				
£24,450.00				
£1,500.00				
£293,282.03	£503,240.50	£59,580.00	£201,580.73	£0

December

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
£47,437.50	£6,500.00	£25,690.43	£31,050.00	
£8,500.00	£5,500.00	£8,500.00	£5,850.00	
£7,725.00	£12,000.00	£30,000.00	£36,725.00	
£4,500.00	£15,625.00	£1,500.00	£36,725.00	
£3,250.00	£5,212.50	£6,187.92	£6,500.00	
£4,500.00	£13,950.00	£4,250.00		
£6,550.00	£32,925.00			
£2,500.00	£1,500.00			
£8,500.00	£5,480.00			
£6,950.00	£64,825.00			
£10,575.00	£142,904.94			
£32,925.00	£25,075.00			
£4,000.00				
£1,500.00				
£2,000.00				
£5,350.00				
£2,250.00				
£1,500.00				
£30,000.00				
£30,000.00				
£30,000.00				
£33,600.00				
£284,112.50	£331,497.44	£76,128.35	£116,850.00	£0

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Justice to outline the changes in prison regulations or procedure that have been made following the report of the Prisoner Ombudsman on the case of Sean Lynch.

(AQW 4598/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Prisoner Ombudsman's report made 63 recommendations for improvement which the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and particular Maghaberry Prison, is currently addressing through an action plan. This action plan will be monitored and scrutinised by senior managers within the prison.

In particular there will be a training needs analysis completed of several areas, with identified training delivered to relevant staff. There have been a number of changes in regards to the management of prisoners within Observation Cells which have already been implemented.

Significantly there is a service wide review being conducted on the Supporting Prisoners at Risk document and procedures. This will ensure the process becomes more robust and effective.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been rescued and had their needs addressed following raids on brothels or other establishments where forced labour is suspected.

(AQW 4616/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Between 1 April and 11 October 2016 15 potential victims of trafficking have been identified following raids on brothels or other establishments where forced labour was suspected and have agreed to be referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). These individuals have subsequently received assistance and support in line with their entitlements under legislation and under the 2011 EU Directive. A breakdown of these referrals is set out below:

- Adult male - 5
 - 5 - forced labour exploitation
- Adult female - 9
 - 6 - sexual exploitation in 'brothel' establishments;
 - 1 – forced labour exploitation;
 - 1 – criminal exploitation;
 - 1 exploitation type not established (UKBA case)
- Children - 1
 - 1 male domestic servitude

In addition, between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 the PSNI Human Trafficking Unit (HTU) conducted 252 screening assessments in connection with suspected modern slavery offences. As a result of this process, 59 potential victims of human trafficking were recovered in Northern Ireland and referred to the NRM where they are able to access support and assistance.

The 59 recovered victims included 35 males and 24 females. 11 of the 59 referrals were children. The majority of these were rescued from forced and compulsory labour exploitation (33 victims) with the remaining rescued from sexual exploitation and securing services exploitation.

The Department of Justice funds the support service to potential adult victims of Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland (PVoTs). This service is delivered via a contract, which was awarded following a public tendering exercise. The contract is managed by Migrant Help in partnership with Women's Aid Northern Ireland.

The numbers of potential victims of human trafficking who have been supported during this current contract period (commencing February 2014) to date are set out in the table below:

Year	Total	Male	Female
13/14	1	1	0
14/15	32	21	11
15/16	49	27	22
16/17	14	2	12
Total	96	51	45

These are figures for adult potential victims only.

Where a child has been recovered, they must be referred to a Health and Social Care Trust who will respond in compliance with the Children (NI) Order 1995 (the Children Order). The child will be considered to be a child in need of care and protection under the Children Order and the Trust has a responsibility to accommodate such children and work to safeguard and protect their welfare.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to outline the actions being taken to prevent drug dealing in prisons.

(AQW 4747/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The supply of illegal substances is a significant problem faced by society in general and the criminal justice system throughout Northern Ireland is not immune from its effects. The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) continues to work closely with colleagues in other agencies including the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to minimise the misuse of drugs and to educate and support those prisoners who have addiction issues.

A range of measures are in place to prevent illicit drugs coming into prison, these include the use of passive drugs dogs, visitor and staff searches.

NIPS continue to work closely with Police colleagues to identify individuals involved in the supply of illicit substances. Recently the Prison Service has placed increased emphasis on intelligence led searching and the evidence is that this approach is targeting the right people and that drugs are being detected. Additionally Maghaberry management have introduced staff patrols in communal areas to reduce the opportunity for this type of activity to take place.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the outcome of the recent drugs amnesty within HMP Maghaberry. (AQW 4748/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The amnesty was one of several measures to address a set of immediate concerns. A small amount of suspected cannabis was handed in.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Justice when she was first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister. (AQW 4757/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I was first made aware of the report when it was recently publicised by the media.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's plans to implement the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. (AQW 4809/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I welcome the introduction of this statutory duty to co-operate across all of the Executive Departments in Northern Ireland, and the positive intentions underpinning the legislation aimed at improving the well-being of children and young people. My Department has consistently stated that in attempting to improve outcomes for those in contact with the justice system, we cannot operate in isolation and that co-operation is needed – particularly in the early years – if we are to make lasting improvements in the lives of children.

The Executive is embracing this joint approach and the new Programme for Government will contain agreed outcomes which can only be achieved by significant co-operation. My Department will play a full part in this as we look to collaborate with others to implement a range of report recommendations, policies and legislative changes across a diverse justice landscape. This will include work to deliver on the proposals arising from, amongst other things, the Scoping Study on children in the justice system; the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland; and those reports aimed at improving children's access to, and outcomes from, both civil and criminal justice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4418/16-21, (i) apart from safeguarding, will public protection services continue as normal; and (ii) what departmental discussions have been held with senior police in respect of the Critical Incident to devise a strategy to alleviate same. (AQW 4836/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Staffing levels within PSNI districts are a matter for the Chief Constable. PSNI have placed staff in post enabling public protection service delivery to be maintained. I am advised that PSNI has not declared resourcing in this area as a Critical Incident and, with Departmental Agencies continuing to operate public protection arrangements normally there have been no grounds for discussion.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Robinson asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW3012/16-21, to outline (i) whether the Occupational Sick Pay scheme applies to MLA staff; (ii) when this provision came into force; (iii) the MLA staff representatives that were part of the consultation; (iv) whether secretariat staff members are automatically notified of the OSP scheme when starting sick absence; and (v) the number of secretariat staff that have received OSP since 5 May 2016. (AQW 4249/16-21)

Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The reply to AQW 3012/16-21 related solely to the occupational sick pay scheme that the Assembly Commission maintains in respect of its staff. Staff that are employed by Members are not employed by the Assembly Commission so none of the terms and conditions of employment that cover Assembly Commission staff, including the occupational sick pay scheme, apply to an employee of a Member.

The items shown below refer to the items used in your Question.

- i The Commission's occupational sick pay scheme does not apply to staff employed by a Member;
- ii. The occupational sick pay scheme (and previous versions along broadly similar lines) have been in force since the inception of the Commission under the Northern Ireland Act 1998;

- iii. There has been no recent consultation with Commission staff relating to the occupational sick pay scheme. As the occupational sick pay scheme does not apply to staff employed by Members, these staff would not form part of any consultation on the scheme;
- iv. Assembly Secretariat staff are subject to a defined policy in relation to attendance at work. The occupational sick pay scheme is contained in that policy which forms part of the Staff Handbook for Secretariat staff. Secretariat staff would be already aware of the policy (including the occupational sick pay element) before commencing a period of sick absence; and
- v. There have been 91 members of Secretariat staff who have received occupational sick pay since 5 May 2016.

Mr Chambers asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to 3087/16-21, whether (i) both the availability and location of defibrillators has been fully communicated to all users of Parliament Buildings; (ii) it been physically confirmed that a defibrillator can reach all parts of the building within two minutes to ensure maximum effectiveness; and to detail how often the equipment is subject to maintenance checks.

(AQW 4477/16-21)

Mr Hussey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The location of the 5 defibrillators in Parliament Buildings, along with the names of all staff trained in their use, is held on Assist and noted on all the notice boards in the building.

The defibrillators are located in the Control Room and Blue Flax Restaurant in the Basement, at Front Reception on the Ground Floor, outside the Long Gallery on the First Floor and on the Fourth Floor South corridor.

Although we have not specifically checked to determine whether all areas of the building can be accessed within 2 minutes from these locations, the defibrillators have been located in these areas, having been assessed as the most suitable locations to ensure a swift response to any incident in the building.

The defibrillators are checked weekly by Health and Safety Branch staff during their routine inspection of the building. The branch also holds a record of the expiry dates for batteries and defibrillator pads and these are always renewed in advance of their expiry.

If you have any specific concerns relating to the defibrillators in Parliament Buildings, staff in Health & Safety Branch would be happy to meet with you to discuss them.

Mr Beggs asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQO 8500/11-15 and AQW 32851/11-15, whether the issue of voting procedures will be reconsidered, including electronic voting in plenary meetings of the Assembly, between now and May 2021.

(AQW 5096/16-21)

Mr Dickson (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): As explained in detail in responses to AQO 8500/11-15 and AQW 32851/11-15 the issue of voting procedures, including electronic voting in plenary meetings, is a matter for the Committee on Procedures.

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

Friday 7 October 2016

Revised Written Answer

Department of Justice

In this Bound Volume, page WA 239, replace the answer given for AQW 4123/16-21 with:

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to provide power of dispersal to the PSNI.
(AQW 4123/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): Building safer communities by preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing the harm that it causes is a key priority for my Department.

The Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 was introduced prior to the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Executive. The then Minister of State, Paul Goggins MP, did not introduce Dispersal Orders at that time.

During the public consultation for the current Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017, respondents to the consultation endorsed a preventive approach to anti-social behaviour, with enforcement seen as a last resort. There were no compelling arguments in support of Dispersal Orders.

My Department is, however, represented on several groups to strategically address anti-social behaviour and its associated issues. The outworking of which has led me to ask my officials to scope out, in association with relevant stakeholders, how a holistic review of anti-social behaviour can be taken forward.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 14 October 2016

Revised Written Answers

Department for Communities

In this Bound Volume, page WA 283, replace the answer given for AQW 429/16-21 with:

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities how he plans to engage with faith-based organisations during the development of his Department's new Social Strategy.

(AQO 429/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): As part of the development of the draft Programme for Government and the draft Social Strategy there was engagement with stakeholders representing all Section 75 groups, including faith-based organisations.

I plan to bring a draft Social Strategy to the Executive in the coming weeks with the intention of having it issued, subject to Executive approval, as part of the new approach to the Programme for Government.

Faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland have an important and distinctive place and reach in society and their community work plays a vital role in communities where they deliver many interventions on various themes.

The important role and contribution that many faith-based organisations and communities play across society is recognised within the proposed new Social Strategy.

During the public consultation period, we propose to engage with people across society. We would like faith-based organisations to be a part of these discussions.

I plan to build on the ongoing faith-based engagement work in my Department and to take forward the development of a Faith Covenant modelled on the principles of the Concordat between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector, facilitating a valued and effective faith-based contribution to policy development and service delivery across Government.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 284, replace the answer given for AQW 431/16-21 with:

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Communities, when formulating his Department's anti-poverty strategy, whether he will take account of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' report entitled Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies.

(AQO 431/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am aware of the Report the member refers to and, indeed, agree with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights when she says that 'yet another feature of the Human Rights approach is that poverty reduction becomes a shared responsibility.'

The definition of 'overall poverty' adopted by the UN includes social discrimination and exclusion.

This is precisely why we have incorporated our work to tackle poverty in a much wider social strategy looking at all these inter-related issues.

Our draft Social Strategy will recognise that measuring poverty on the basis of income alone will not show the full picture.

The human rights approach set out in the Report 'underlines the multidimensional nature of poverty, describing poverty in terms of a range of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, and drawing attention to the stigma, discrimination, insecurity and social exclusion associated with poverty'.

The draft Executive Social Strategy will seek to promote opportunity for everyone and tackle poverty and social exclusion.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 30 September 2016

Revised Written Answers

Department for Communities

In this Bound Volume, page WA 17, replace the answer given for AQW 2816/16-21 with:

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the range of assistance available to improve, renovate or replace private sector housing aimed at addressing housing unfitness; (ii) the sources of financial help available to owners for the purpose of removing asbestos and (iii) the eligibility criteria for such support.
(AQW 2816/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): The Housing Executive has advised that the range of assistance available to improve, renovate or replace private sector housing aimed at addressing housing unfitness includes, the Renovation Grant, Replacement Grant and Home Repairs Assistance Grants. These grants are currently available only in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances are deemed to exist where there is an imminent and significant risk to the occupier. Such a risk may exist, for example, where there is a dangerous electrical wiring system or where a roof is leaking into the electrical system. These grants are only available for the house being occupied, or intended to be occupied, as the only or main residence

The Repairs Grant can also be made available when the Environmental Health Officer from the local District Council has served a Statutory Notice on a dwelling.

They have further advised that the discretionary Renovation Grant may be considered as a source of financial help available to home owners for the purpose of removing asbestos. This would only be available in exceptional circumstances.

In terms of the eligibility criteria for such support, this varies from grant to grant, however in general an applicant must be aged 18 years or over, the property to be assisted may be occupied or vacant but must be a primary or sole dwelling, and access to grants is means tested. The nature of the works may also be used to define eligibility.

If you require further information or detail I would be happy to put you in touch with one of my officials or an appropriate member of the Housing Executive.

Department of Finance

In this Bound Volume, page WA 61, replace the answer given for AQW 3801/16-21 with:

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance how much revenue is raised by (i) the domestic regional rate; and (ii) the non-domestic regional rate.
(AQW 3801/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The amount of revenue raised by the Regional Rate during 2015/16 is summarised in the table below. The figures quoted include the gross value of all of the rating assessments raised during 2015/16 before rate reliefs, discharges and write-offs are applied.

The table below splits the revenue raised from domestic, non-domestic and mixed properties.

	Revenue Raised* £'000
Domestic Properties	375,023
Non-Domestic Properties	392,231
Mixed Properties	6,757
Total	774,011

* note that figures are subject to change pending finalisation of the annual audit

Department of Health

In Bound Volume 117, page WA 269, replace the answer given for AQW 2366/16-21 with:

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) allocated budget; and (ii) the budget spent on adult learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2366/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): The information requested is provided in the Table below.

	2011/12 (£'000)	2012/13 (£'000)	2013/14 (£'000)	2014/15 (£'000)	2015/16 (£'000)
Allocated Budget	23,146	24,762	26,106	25,788	30,363
Budget Expenditure	23,947	25,094	27,703	28,678	30,725

In Bound Volume 117, page WA 269, replace the answer given for AQW 2372/16-21 with:

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of cancelled operations in each Health and Social Care Trust, broken down by hospital.

(AQW 2372/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information collected on the total number of elective operations cancelled for both non-clinical and other reasons from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 has been provided in the table below.

Non-clinical reasons for cancellation include: list over-run; emergencies/trauma; equipment failure/unavailable, etc. Other reasons include patient cancellation, and patient clinically unsuitable to undergo procedure, though these lists are not exhaustive.

Elective operations cancelled* for non-clinical and other reasons by HSC Trust and Hospital: April 2015 to March 2016

HSC Trust	Hospital	Operations Cancelled for non-clinical reasons	Operations Cancelled for other reasons
Belfast	Belfast City	894	1,412
	Mater	246	445
	Musgrave Park	310	1,025
	Royal Group	1,561	1,693
Northern	Antrim	401	755
	Causeway	385	636
	Mid Ulster	100	467
	Whiteabbey	100	427
South Eastern	Ulster	281	840
	Ards	34	651
	Lagan Valley	65	786
	Downe	33	617
Southern	Craigavon	306	533
	Daisy Hill	110	331
	South Tyrone	91	490
Western	Altnagelvin	506	1,489
	South West Acute	157	377
	Tyrone County	0	1,163

Source: P9 Cancelled Operations Return

* Includes only elective operations which were cancelled on the day of, or up to two days prior to the planned operation.

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 September 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – Campaign against the harsh introduction of equal state pension requirements

Mr Colin McGrath was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding the Campaign against the harsh introduction of equal state pension requirements.

3. Opposition Business

3.1 Motion: Public Confidence after NAMA Revelations

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations made during the recent BBC Northern Ireland Spotlight broadcast on events surrounding the sale of National Asset Management Agency properties; supports the investigations and inquiries being undertaken by the National Crime Agency, the Republic of Ireland and other international bodies; further notes the ongoing damage being done to Northern Ireland's international reputation, not least by the continuing failure of institutions here to examine the issue effectively; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement before the Assembly to restore the public confidence in these institutions and the inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance.

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr R Swann

Mr P Smith

3.2 Motion: Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'properties;' and insert:

"supports the criminal investigations being undertaken by law enforcement agencies; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement emphasising their support, and that of the Executive, for all efforts to uncover the truth around the sale of the Project Eagle portfolio and committing to full co-operation with all ongoing investigations."

Mr J O'Dowd

Ms C Ruane

Mr C Murphy

3.3 Motion: Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'effectively;' and insert:

"recommends consideration of the creation of a joint investigation team of the National Crime Agency and An Garda Síochána into allegations of criminal conduct in relation to the National Assets Management Agency; calls for full co-operation in the production of papers and attendance of persons at parliamentary inquiries or commissions of investigation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland around the work of the National Assets Management Agency; and further calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement before the Assembly to restore the public confidence in these institutions and the inquiry that should be undertaken by the Committee for Finance."

Ms C Hanna
Mr C Eastwood
Mr G Mullan
Mr A Attwood

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Communities

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan.

4.2 Economy

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Economy, Mr Simon Hamilton.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

5. Opposition Business (cont'd)

5.1 Motion: Public Confidence after NAMA Revelations (cont'd)

The Question being put, Amendment 1 was **made** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion: Rural Bank Closures

Proposed:

That this Assembly is extremely concerned at the number of bank branches that are being closed in rural areas; is alarmed that large rural areas are without access to a local bank branch; recognises the limitations of many of the alternatives, such as mobile and internet banking, and the Post Office; believes that the provision of accessible banking is an integral part of social inclusion, with a particular impact on the elderly; notes the negative economic impact bank closures have on small businesses and on future investment opportunities; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to intervene meaningfully and encourage the banking sector to maintain a strong network of rural bank branches and to safeguard the existing bank branches within these communities from closure.

Mr R McPhillips
Mr P McGlone
Mr D McCrossan
Mr C McGrath

5.3 Motion: Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Office' and insert:

“, particularly given the limitations of broadband and mobile internet provision in rural areas; believes that the provision of accessible banking is an integral part of social inclusion, with a particular impact on the elderly; notes the negative economic impact bank closures have on small businesses and on future investment opportunities; calls on the Minister for the Economy to intervene meaningfully and encourage the banking sector to maintain a strong network of rural bank branches and to safeguard the existing bank branches within these communities from closure; and further calls on the Minister to commit to investing in identifying and addressing the problem of rural areas where no, or no worthwhile, broadband and mobile provision can be received.”

Ms C Archibald

Ms L Dillon

Mr D McAleer

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 2).

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

5.4 Motion – Impact on Women of Changes to the State Pension

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign; recognises its call for fair transitional state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s who have been negatively impacted by changes made to the state pension age under the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011; accepts that the changes were poorly communicated; appreciates the impact of the changes on post-retirement planning; and calls on the United Kingdom Government to re-examine its position and bring forward fair transitional arrangements for the women affected.

Mr A Allen

Mrs R Barton

Mrs J Dobson

Mrs J Palmer

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.21pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

26 September 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

26 September 2016

Division 1

Motion – Public Confidence after NAMA Revelations (Amendment 1)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'properties;' and insert:

“supports the criminal investigations being undertaken by law enforcement agencies; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement emphasising their support, and that of the Executive, for all efforts to uncover the truth around the sale of the Project Eagle portfolio and committing to full co-operation with all ongoing investigations.”

Mr J O'Dowd

Ms C Ruane

Mr C Murphy

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 59

Noes: 35

AYES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Maskey, Mr O'Dowd.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken, Mr Chambers.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

26 September 2016

Division 2

Motion – Rural Bank Closures (Amendment)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Office' and insert:

“, particularly given the limitations of broadband and mobile internet provision in rural areas; believes that the provision of accessible banking is an integral part of social inclusion, with a particular impact on the elderly; notes the negative economic impact bank closures have on small businesses and on future investment opportunities; calls on the Minister for the Economy to intervene meaningfully and encourage the banking sector to maintain a strong network of rural bank branches and to safeguard the existing bank branches within these communities from closure; and further calls on the Minister to commit to investing in identifying and addressing the problem of rural areas where no, or no worthwhile, broadband and mobile provision can be received.”

Ms C Archibald

Ms L Dillon

Mr D McAleer

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 22

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Carroll, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Kearney, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Archibald, Mr McAleer.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hanna, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McGrath, Mr Mullan.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 21 September 2016 - 26 September 2016

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
 - Resolve Restorative Justice Scheme – A pre-accreditation inspection report (DoJ).
 - Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2015/16 (DoH).
5. Assembly Reports
 - Fourth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (NIA 8/16-21) (ESR).
 - Report on the Cultural Property (Armed Conflict) Bill: Legislative Consent Memorandum (NIA 6/16-21) (Committee for Communities).
6. Statutory Rules
 - SR 2016/345 The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).
 - SR 2016/329 The Local Government Pension Scheme (Nursery Assistants) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).
 - For Information Only**
 - SR 2016/330 The Pensions (2005 Order) (Code of Practice) (Governance and Administration of Occupational Trust-based Schemes Providing Money Purchase Benefits) (Appointed Day) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Consultation on the Designation of Lagan Meadows as a Quiet Area (DAERA).
9. Departmental Publications
 - Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2015/2016 (DoF).
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 September 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 **Second Stage: Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21)**

Minister for Communities

The Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan, moved the Second Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21).

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 12.58pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 **Education**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir.

3.2 **Finance**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 **Second Stage: Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21) (cont'd)**

Debate resumed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21) passed Second Stage without division.

4.2 **Motion – Draft BBC Charter and Framework Agreement**

Proposed:

That this Assembly takes note of the content of the draft BBC Charter and Framework Agreement.

Minister for Communities

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Ms Claire Hanna spoke to her topic regarding the Irregular Flying of Flags in South Belfast.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.44pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

27 September 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 27 September 2016

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

SR 2016/346 The Carlingford Area (Definition of the Mouth of the Clanrye River) Regulations 2016 (DAERA).

SR 2016/353 The Pensions (2015 Act) (Consequential Amendments) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

For Information Only

SR 2016/341 The Parking Places on Roads (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/342 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

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 27 September 2016

2016-2021 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
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16						

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-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

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 3 October 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Ardoyne/Twaddell Resolution

Mr Gerry Kelly made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Ardoyne/Twaddell Resolution. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council in Education Sectoral Format

The Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir, made a statement regarding the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Education Sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 21 September 2016, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion: Scrambler and Quad Bikes

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to review the current legislation governing scrambler and quad bikes; and further calls on the PSNI and other responsible agencies to ensure that the current legislation governing these machines is enforced in a robust way.

*Ms J McCann
Mr P Sheehan
Mr D Kearney*

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 The Executive Office

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, the Rt Hon Arlene Foster. The junior Minister, Mr Alastair Ross, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Miss Michelle McIlveen.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion: Scrambler and Quad Bikes (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.2 Motion: Epilepsy Service Provision

Proposed:

That this Assembly commends the work of the Assembly All Party Group on Epilepsy and the Northern Ireland Advisory Council of Epilepsy Action; and calls on the Minister of Health to establish a patient-led approach to epilepsy service provision, with particular emphasis on the protection and extension of epilepsy nurse specialists, and the creation of a database which will enable service provision to be directed towards the most used service areas for the benefit of the 20,000 people in Northern Ireland who live with epilepsy and their families, and to ensure the best use of resources.

Mr G Robinson

Ms P Bradley

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.37pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

3 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 28 September 2016 – 3 October 2016

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

Intertrade Ireland: Annual Report and Accounts 2015 (DfE).

Driving Change – Enforcement of Road Traffic Legislation in Northern Ireland (DoJ).

Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland – Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DAERA).

Public Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoF).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

SR 2016/343 The Passenger and Goods Vehicles (Tachographs) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/344 The Public Service Vehicles (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/359 The Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoF).

SR 2016/366 The Making Available on the Market and Supervision of Transfers of Explosives Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

For Information Only

(C.23) SR 2016/327 The Special Educational Needs and Disability (2016 Act) (Commencement No. 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DE).

SR 2016/347 The Bus Lanes (Andersonstown Road and Stewartstown Road Belfast - between Finaghy Road North and Michael Ferguson Roundabout) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/348 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Ballymena) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/349 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/350 The Motor Hackney Carriages (Bangor) Bye-Laws (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/351 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Bangor) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/352 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/356 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/357 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Dungannon) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/358 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Carrickfergus) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/360 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Londonderry) (Amendment No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/361 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment No. 4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/362 The Waiting Restrictions (Dundonald) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/363 The Prohibition of U-Turn (A23 Lisnevenagh Road, Kells) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Consultation on the Exemption Under Article 85(8) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 for Listed Places of Worship from the Requirement to Obtain Listed Building Consent (DfC).

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 October 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Environment Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Miss Michelle McIlveen, made a statement regarding the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council Environment Sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 14 September 2016, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

2.2 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Aquaculture & Marine Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Miss Michelle McIlveen, made a statement regarding the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 14 September 2016, following which she replied to questions.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion – Amend Standing Order 3

Proposed:

Leave out Standing Order 3 and insert –

- (1) At the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, members having met at the place and time appointed for that meeting -
 - (a) the Clerk shall read the notice sent under Standing Order 2(2) convening the meeting; and
 - (b) the outgoing Speaker shall take the chair.
- (2) If, for any reason, the outgoing Speaker cannot take the chair, it shall be taken by an Acting Speaker, who shall be the oldest member present at the meeting.
- (3) Members shall then take their seats in accordance with paragraph (7).
- (4) All members shall have the opportunity to take their seats before any other formal business is conducted in the Assembly.
- (5) A member shall not participate in Assembly proceedings or have title to the privileges of office until the member has taken his or her seat.
- (6) The decision of the Speaker or Acting Speaker as to whether a member has taken his or her seat shall be final.
- (7) A member shall take his or her seat by -
 - (a) giving the undertaking set out in section 40A(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and
 - (b) after the member has given that undertaking, by signing the Roll of Membership.
- (8) A member shall give the undertaking by signing a document provided for that purpose.

- (9) At the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, the document referred to in paragraph (8) and the Roll of Membership shall be located in the Chamber.
- (10) Where a member does not take his or her seat at the first meeting of an Assembly after dissolution, he or she may do so thereafter by arrangement with the Speaker and in accordance with paragraph (7).
- (11) After signing the Roll a member may enter in the Roll a designation of identity, being "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other".
- (12) A member who does not enter in the Roll a designation of identity shall be deemed to be designated "Other" for the purposes of these Standing Orders and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- (13) A member may change his or her designation of identity only if –
 - (a) (being a member of a political party) he or she becomes a member of a different political party or he or she ceases to be a member of any political party;
 - (b) (not being a member of any political party) he or she becomes a member of a political party.
 Any such change takes effect immediately after notification in writing is submitted to the Speaker.
- (14) The Clerk shall draw up a list of the party affiliations of the members. Each member shall have the opportunity to confirm or correct his or her affiliation as stated in that list.
- (15) A member may change his or her party affiliation at any time. Any such change takes effect seven days after notification in writing is submitted to the Speaker.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

3.2 Motion – Amend Standing Order 23(3)

Proposed:

Leave out Standing Order 23(3) and insert –

- “(3) Any papers or accounts not subject to a requirement to be laid or presented to the Assembly which are deposited in the Assembly Library shall be published in accordance with law.”

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

3.3 Motion – Amend Standing Order 30

Proposed:

After Standing Order 30(3) insert –

- ‘(3A) Where the Speaker is of the opinion that a Bill is a Hybrid Bill, the Speaker shall direct that the Bill be referred for Preliminary Scrutiny in accordance with Standing Order 101.’

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

3.4 Motion – Amend Standing Orders

Proposed:

After Standing Order 99 insert –

‘100. Stages of Hybrid Bills

- (1) Subject to Standing Order 106, the Assembly stages of a Hybrid Bill are –
 - (a) Preliminary Scrutiny Stage: consideration as to whether the Bill satisfies the conditions at Standing Order 101;
 - (b) Introduction and First Stage: introduction of the Bill to the Assembly;
 - (c) Investigation Stage: initial investigation by a Hybrid Bill committee into the principles of the Bill, and the period during which objections must be lodged;
 - (d) Second Stage: general debate on the Bill with an opportunity for members to vote on its general principles;
 - (e) Committee Stage: detailed investigation by the Hybrid Bill committee and opportunity to propose amendments to the Bill, followed by report to the Assembly;
 - (f) Consideration Stage: consideration of and an opportunity for the Assembly to vote on the details of the Bill, including amendments proposed to the Bill;
 - (g) Further Consideration Stage: opportunity for members to consider and vote on amendments proposed to

- the Bill; and
(h) Final Stage: passing or rejection of the Bill without further amendment.

101. Preliminary Scrutiny Stage

- (1) A Hybrid Bill shall not be introduced in the Assembly unless the standard conditions and any applicable information conditions are met.
- (2) The standard conditions are that –
 - (a) there is proof of need for the Bill;
 - (b) no suitable alternative to the matter proceeding by way of a Hybrid Bill is demonstrated;
 - (c) there has been sufficient consultation with those who may be affected by the Bill;
 - (d) the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly; and
 - (e) the Bill would not impose any charge on the Consolidated Fund.
- (3) The Speaker may direct that one or more of the information conditions apply to the Bill.
- (4) The information conditions are that –
 - (a) The Bill is accompanied by an explanatory and financial memorandum;
 - (b) The Bill is accompanied by a statement in writing signed by the Promoter, to the effect that, in the Promoter's view, the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly;
 - (c) The Bill is accompanied by an environmental statement; and
 - (d) The Bill is accompanied by such other documents as the Speaker may require.
- (5) The explanatory and financial memorandum must be in such form as the Speaker may direct and must set out –
 - (a) the issue the Bill is intended to address;
 - (b) the consultation undertaken;
 - (c) the options considered;
 - (d) the option selected and the reason therefore; and
 - (e) the cost implications of the proposal.
- (6) Paragraphs 6 to 8 of Standing Order 30 shall apply to Hybrid Bills as they apply to Public Bills.

102. Introduction and First Stage

- (1) When the Speaker has signified to the Promoter that a Hybrid Bill may be introduced, notice of introduction on a sitting day may be given by the Promoter.
- (2) The Bill shall be accompanied on introduction by –
 - (a) the statement of legislative competence;
 - (b) the explanatory and financial memorandum, setting out the matters at Standing Order 101(5); and
 - (c) such other documents as the Speaker may require.
- (3) On introduction, the Bill's title shall be read to the Assembly, and this shall constitute the Bill's First Stage.
- (4) After the Bill's First Stage, the Bill shall be ordered to be printed and the Bill shall stand referred to a Hybrid Bill committee for its Investigation Stage.

103. Investigation Stage

- (1) Investigation Stage shall commence when the Bill is referred to a Hybrid Bill committee.
- (2) Investigation Stage shall last at least 60 working days.
- (3) The committee shall carry out an initial investigation into the general principles of the Bill and report its opinion on the Bill to the Assembly.
- (4) Investigation Stage is concluded when the committee reports to the Assembly.
- (5) On the report being made to the Assembly by the committee, the Bill shall be set down in the list of pending future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

104. Objections

- (1) Any objections to a Hybrid Bill must be lodged within 42 working days, beginning with the day on which the Bill is referred to the Hybrid Bill committee for Investigation Stage.
- (2) An objection to a Hybrid Bill received outside the objection period may be lodged only if that objection is approved by resolution of the Assembly, and may not in any case be lodged after the Investigation Stage is concluded.

- (3) The Hybrid Bill committee shall consider an objection lodged in accordance with this order and admit it if –
 - (a) the Objector has shown that his or her property or interests are directly and specially affected by the Bill;
 - (b) the objection is in such form and accompanied by such information as may be required by the committee; and
 - (c) the objection is accompanied by such fee as the Assembly Commission may determine.
- (4) An Objector may take no further part in committee proceedings unless the objection is admitted.
- (5) An Objector cannot subsequently raise any issue not contained in the initial objection.

105. **Second Stage**

Standing Order 32 shall apply to Hybrid Bills as it applies to Public Bills.

106. **Treatment as a Public Bill**

Where no objection is received or admitted to a Hybrid Bill during Investigation Stage, the Bill shall be treated as a Public Bill and shall proceed in accordance with Standing Orders 33-42.

107. **Treatment as a Hybrid Bill**

Where an objection to a Hybrid Bill is received and admitted during Investigation Stage, Standing Orders 88 to 95 and Standing Order 97 shall apply to that Bill as they apply to a Private Bill; and Standing Order 37A shall apply to that Bill as it applies to a Public Bill.

108. **Hybrid Bill Committees**

- (1) The Assembly shall establish a Hybrid Bill committee in respect of each Hybrid Bill proposed to be introduced in the Assembly.
- (2) Each committee will discharge the functions conferred on it by Standing Order 103, and, where applicable, the functions conferred on it by Standing Orders 88 and 90.
- (3) A member with a personal or constituency interest in the Bill shall not be eligible to sit on the committee.
- (4) The committee shall consist of five members, and have a chairperson and deputy chairperson elected by the committee.
- (5) The quorum of the committee shall be three. Members linked by a video-conferencing facility shall not count towards the quorum.
- (6) All questions at the committee shall be decided by a simple majority. Voting shall be by a show of hands unless otherwise requested by a member of the committee. The chairperson shall have a casting vote.
- (7) Members of the committee shall normally attend all meetings of the committee and may be absent from a meeting of the committee only in exceptional circumstances.
- (8) A Hybrid Bill committee may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- (9) A Hybrid Bill committee may permit the Promoter or an Objector to cross-examine any witness giving evidence to it.

109. **Interpretation**

- (1) In these Standing Orders, "**Hybrid Bill**" means a Bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interest of other persons or bodies of the same category or class.
- (2) In Standing Orders 100 to 108 –
 - "**Objector**" means a person objecting to a Hybrid Bill;
 - "**Objection period**" means the period of 42 working days following the referral of a Bill to a Hybrid Bill committee;
 - "**Hybrid Bill committee**" means a committee established in accordance with Standing Order 108;
 - "**Promoter**" means the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce a Hybrid Bill.
 - "**Statement of legislative competence**" means a statement in writing signed by the member of the Assembly who proposes to introduce the Bill, which states that in the view of the member, the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

A single debate ensued on all four motions.

The Question being put, the Motion to Amend Standing Order 3, was **carried** with cross-community support (No dissenting voices).

The Question being put, the Motion to Amend Standing Order 23(3), was **carried** with cross-community support (No dissenting voices).

The Question being put, the Motion to Amend Standing Order 30, was **carried** with cross-community support (No dissenting voices).

The Question being put, the Motion to the Amend Standing Orders, was **carried** with cross-community support (No dissenting voices).

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion: Openness and Transparency from the Executive

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at ongoing problems with openness and transparency from the Executive and the implications for public trust and confidence.

Dr S Farry

Mr D Ford

Mrs N Long

Mr S Dickson

4.2 Motion: Amendment 1

Proposed:

At end insert:

“; and calls for the creation of a standards commissioner for the Executive to investigate alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code.”

Mr S Agnew

Mr A Attwood

Ms C Hanna

Mr J Allister

4.3 Motion: Amendment 2

Proposed:

At end insert:

“; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to acknowledge these concerns and to outline to the Assembly how they will ensure, in the future, that the mandate of the Assembly is respected.”

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr D Kennedy

Mr A Attwood

Ms C Hanna

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Infrastructure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Infrastructure, Mr Chris Hazzard.

5.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden.

The Speaker took the Chair.

6. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

6.1 Breast Cancer: Urgent Referral Waiting Times

The Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Mark Durkan.

7. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

7.1 Motion: Openness and Transparency from the Executive (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, Amendment 2 **fell** (Division 2).

The Question being put, the motion **fell** (Division 3).

The Principal Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Mr Keith Buchanan spoke to his topic regarding Roads Infrastructure in Mid Ulster.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.44pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

4 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 October 2016

Division 1

Motion – Openness and Transparency from the Executive (Amendment 1)

Proposed:

At end insert:

“; and calls for the creation of a standards commissioner for the Executive to investigate alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code.”

Mr S Agnew

Mr A Attwood

Ms C Hanna

Mr J Allister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 35

Noes: 58

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hussey, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew, Mr Durkan.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan, Mr Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 October 2016

Division 2

Motion – Openness and Transparency from the Executive (Amendment 2)

Proposed:

At end insert:

“; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to acknowledge these concerns and to outline to the Assembly how they will ensure, in the future, that the mandate of the Assembly is respected.”

*Mr M Nesbitt
Mr D Kennedy
Mr A Attwood
Ms C Hanna*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 35

Noes: 58

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hussey, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms S Bradley, Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan, Mr Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 October 2016

Division 3

Motion – Openness and Transparency from the Executive

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at ongoing problems with openness and transparency from the Executive and the implications for public trust and confidence.

Dr S Farry
Mr D Ford
Mrs N Long
Mr S Dickson

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 34

Noes: 58

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Armstrong, Dr Farry.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan, Mr Robinson.

The Motion **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 4 October 2016

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
SR 2016/364 The Gas (Designation of Pipelines) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfE).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
The Draft Local Government (Payment to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).
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 4 October 2016

2016-2021 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
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16	15/11/16					

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-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

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 10 October 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Aleppo

Mr Alex Attwood made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Aleppo. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Public Petition

3.1 Public Petition – Survival of General Practice in Northern Ireland

Ms Paula Bradley was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding the Survival of General Practice in Northern Ireland.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Legislative Consent Motion: Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill.

Minister for Communities

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion: Reclassification of Housing Associations

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the likelihood that the Office for National Statistics will reclassify Northern Ireland's twenty-two housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies; that this may limit their ability to access private finance to build new homes; that the £1 billion of private debt already on their books could be added to the Executive's balance sheet, taking the Executive's total borrowing to levels which would reduce drastically its ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities to prepare to bring forward urgent legislation to reverse the reclassification of Northern Ireland housing associations so that they can remain classified as independent social businesses.

*Mr A Allen
Mrs J Palmer
Mr P Smith*

5.2 Motion: Amendment**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'notes' and insert:

'the decision by the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Northern Ireland's twenty-two housing associations from independent social businesses to public bodies; recognises that this will have a significant impact on housing associations and their ability to provide new social and shared ownership homes; further notes that this decision will add nearly £1 billion of housing association debt to the Northern Ireland Executive's balance sheet, seriously impacting on the Executive's ability to borrow money for other initiatives across the Executive Departments; and calls on the Minister for Communities and Minister of Finance to expedite the steps necessary to reverse this reclassification; and agree quickly an interim derogation arrangement with HM Treasury to enable the sector to continue to function normally, to engage closely with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to agree a joined-up approach, and to outline a clear and detailed timeline for specific action, including bringing forward legislation, within the timeframe that any HM Treasury derogation allows, to ensure Northern Ireland's housing associations can remain classified as independent social businesses.'

Mr C Eastwood

Ms N Mallon

Mr A Allen

Mr P Smith

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

6. Question Time**6.1 Health**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6.2 Communities

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan.

7. Private Members' Business (cont'd)**7.1 Motion: Reclassification of Housing Associations (cont'd)**

Debate resumed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7.2 Motion: Growing Northern Ireland Exports**Proposed:**

That this Assembly welcomes the recent Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' export data for Northern Ireland which records a growth rate of 9.5 per cent; notes the Executive's commitment to increase the competitiveness of the economy; recognises the opportunities that the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union presents to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.

Mr G Lyons

Mr T Buchanan

Mr M Storey

Mr G Dunne

7.3 Motion: Amendment 1**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'economy,' and insert:

'recognises the importance of Northern Ireland continuing to participate within the European Single Market to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.'

Dr S Farry

Mrs N Long

Mr D Ford

Mr S Dickson

7.4 Motion: Amendment 2**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'economy,' and insert:

'recognises that the result of the referendum on membership of the European Union has significant implications for businesses; calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of an economic strategy to achieve long term, sustainable and socially balanced economic growth; and further calls on the Minister, in recognising the unique circumstances on this island, to work with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure cross border trade and freedom of movement continue uninhibited.'

Ms C Archibald

Mr J O'Dowd

Mr C Murphy

Mr A Maskey

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 was **made** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 2).

8. Adjournment**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.02pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

10 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

10 October 2016

Division 1

Motion – Growing Northern Ireland Exports (Amendment 1)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'economy,' and insert:

'recognises the importance of Northern Ireland continuing to participate within the European Single Market to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.'

Dr S Farry

Mrs N Long

Mr D Ford

Mr S Dickson

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 46

Noes: 30

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mrs Dobson, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Kearney, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McKee, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Sheehan, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Armstrong, Mr Dickson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lyons, Mr Robinson.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

10 October 2016

Division 2

Motion – Growing Northern Ireland Exports (as amended)

Proposed:

That this Assembly welcomes the recent Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' export data for Northern Ireland which records a growth rate of 9.5 per cent; notes the Executive's commitment to increase the competitiveness of the economy; recognises the importance of Northern Ireland continuing to participate within the European Single Market to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 46

Noes: 30

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mrs Dobson, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Kearney, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McKee, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Sheehan, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Armstrong, Mr Dickson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lyons, Mr Robinson.

The motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 5 October 2016 – 10 October 2016

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

Human Rights Guidance for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Public Prosecution Service and Forensic Science Northern Ireland on Human Rights Standards Relevant to Co-operation and Operational Independence by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (DoJ).

Planning and Water Appeals Commissions: Annual Report of the Chief Commissioner 2015-16 (DoJ).

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2015-2016 (TEO).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

SR 2016/354 The Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfE).

SR 2016/365 The Remuneration of the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/369 The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfE).

SR 2016/370 The Derriaghy Road, Lisburn (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/371 The A1 Hillsborough Road (between Hillsborough Roundabout and Pantridge Link), Hillsborough (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/372 The Route F1403 Footpath between Ashdene Park, Taghnevan and Tullygally East Road, Craigavon (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/000 Draft The Food Hygiene Rating (Fees and Fixed Penalty Amount) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/000 Draft The Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfE).

SR 2016/000 The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

For Information Only

(C.27) SR 2016/355 The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (2003 Order) (Commencement No.6 and Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/367 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Mossley) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/368 The Bus Lanes (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Planning Statistics 2016/17: First Quarterly Bulletin (Provisional) (DfI).

Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020 Annual Statistical Report 2016 (DfI).

Travel Survey for Northern Ireland In-depth Report 2013-15 (DfI).

Northern Ireland Transport Statistics 2015-16 (DfI).

The Northern Ireland Public Sector Voluntary Exit Schemes (NIAO).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 October 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion – Racial Equality Strategy

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the positive contribution that ethnic minorities make to our society; notes with concern an increase of 87 per cent in hate-related crime in the last four years; and calls on all Ministers to continue to give priority to implementing the Racial Equality Strategy and the Together: Building a United Community Strategy, and to providing the financial support to ensure that both of these strategies are supported and implemented.

*Mr S Lynch
Ms C Archibald
Mr C Boylan
Mr P McGuigan*

2.2 Motion – Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'four years;' and insert:

'further notes the concerns of bodies representing ethnic minorities that gaps exist in our racial discrimination laws; and calls on the Executive to fulfil their responsibility to implement the Racial Equality Strategy effectively by putting in place an action plan, timetable and key priorities, and to ensure that the Programme for Government reflects this obligation.'

Mr D Beattie

Mr M Nesbitt

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

2.3 Motion – Healthier Lifestyles for Children

Proposed:

That this Assembly encourages school children to live a healthier lifestyle; acknowledges that following the introduction of a levy on drinks with a high sugar content, an estimated £18 million will be allocated from the Treasury to the Executive's budget in 2018; and calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the Health Service.

*Ms C Lockhart
Mr P Logan
Ms P Bradley*

2.4 Motion – Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out from '2018;' and insert:

'notes with concern that only approximately six percent of pupils in each primary year are accessing two or more hours physical education per week; calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the Health Service; and further calls on the Minister of Education to improve the monitoring and reporting of physical education hours per week accessed by primary pupils and to issue a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory obligation on schools to facilitate an appropriate minimum amount of physical education hours per week for primary school pupils.'

Mr C Lyttle
Ms P Bradshaw
Mr S Dickson

The sitting was suspended at 12.58pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Economy

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Economy, Mr Simon Hamilton.

3.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

4. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

4.1 Motion: Healthier Lifestyles for Children (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 2).

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 3).

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Ms Jenifer McCann spoke to her topic regarding Education Services in West Belfast.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.37pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

11 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

11 October 2016

Division 1

Motion – Racial Equality Strategy (Amendment)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'four years;' and insert:

'further notes the concerns of bodies representing ethnic minorities that gaps exist in our racial discrimination laws; and calls on the Executive to fulfil their responsibility to implement the Racial Equality Strategy effectively by putting in place an action plan, timetable and key priorities, and to ensure that the Programme for Government reflects this obligation.'

Mr D Beattie

Mr M Nesbitt

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 30

Noes: 42

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beattie, Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan, Mr McGuigan.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

11 October 2016

Division 2

Motion – Healthier Lifestyles for Children (Amendment)

Proposed:

Leave out from '2018;' and insert:

'notes with concern that only approximately six percent of pupils in each primary year are accessing two or more hours physical education per week; calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the Health Service; and further calls on the Minister of Education to improve the monitoring and reporting of physical education hours per week accessed by primary pupils and to issue a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory obligation on schools to facilitate an appropriate minimum amount of physical education hours per week for primary school pupils.'

Mr C Lyttle

Ms P Bradshaw

Mr S Dickson

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 61

Noes: 22

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Ms Hanna, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mrs Long, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCausland, Mr McGrath, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Mr McQuillan, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Bradshaw, Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Dillon, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Archibald, Ms J McCann.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

11 October 2016

Division 3

Motion – Healthier Lifestyles for Children (as amended)

Proposed:

That this this Assembly encourages school children to live a healthier lifestyle; acknowledges that following the introduction of a levy on drinks with a high sugar content, an estimated £18 million will be allocated from the Treasury to the Executive's budget in 2018; notes with concern that only approximately six percent of pupils in each primary year are accessing two or more hours physical education per week; calls on the Minister of Finance to ring-fence this money to fund an educational awareness and physical education programme in schools to benefit the long-term health of our children and to ease pressure on the Health Service; and further calls on the Minister of Education to improve the monitoring and reporting of physical education hours per week accessed by primary pupils and to issue a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory obligation on schools to facilitate an appropriate minimum amount of physical education hours per week for primary school pupils.'

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 58

Noes: 23

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Ms Hanna, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mrs Long, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCausland, Mr McGrath, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Mr McQuillan, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Smith, Mr Stafford, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Bradshaw, Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Dillon, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Archibald, Ms J McCann.

The motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
11 October 2016**

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
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 11 October 2016

2016-2021 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
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16	15/11/16					

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-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

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

